

Civil Society



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Dravyavati River Project

47.5 kilometres of Beauty, Cleanliness & Joy!



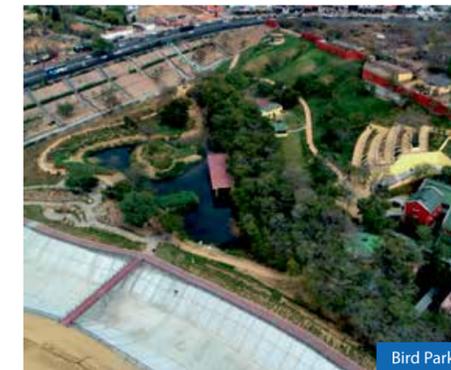
DRAVYAVATI RIVER PROJECT

DRAVYAVATI RIVER REJUVENATION PROJECT IMPROVES LIVES OF JAIPUR'S CITIZENS

Dravyavati River Rejuvenation Project - Jaipur, executed by Tata Projects Ltd has transformed a 47.5 km long cesspool into a beautiful river through treatment of 170 MLD of polluted water. This project encompasses a green belt which includes about 17000 trees on the river banks and 100000 plants in three different parks. As a matter of fact, the citizens of Jaipur have started using the facilities & space for various activities such as yoga, walking and jogging.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROJECT

- River Length - 47.5 Kms
- Capacity of STPs - 170 MLD
- No of Check Dams - 103 Nos
- Three Major Gardens - 10 Hectares
- Walkway / Cycle Track - 30 Kms
- Plantation - 17000 Nos



Bird Park



Botanical Garden



Pump house Museum & café



STP - Capacity of 170 MLD

THE SCOPE OF WORK

- Course correction /Strengthening
- Sewerage Interception, Treatment and Disposal
- Improving Water Quality Standards in the River
- Improving Water Availability in the areas surrounding the River
- Master Development Plan along the River
- Develop Open Green Areas where feasible



The Experience Centre



Tree Plantation Under Green Thumb Initiative



IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Healing touch

Thanks for your cover story, 'Doctors out there: Why small, remote hospitals matter.' The government should request Dr Ismavel and Dr Joseph to teach students in medical colleges and sensitize young medical graduates to the vast opportunities in healthcare in rural India.

Rajeswara Rao

A very well-researched article. I know Dr Vijay Ismavel and admire the outstanding work that he and his wife, Dr Ann, have accomplished in their lifetime. It was great to know about the good work other doctors are also doing in our country.

Priyanka Kadam

I am writing to express my appreciation for your magazine for bringing to public notice the excellent work people are doing. Like Vijay Anand Ismavel, my advice is to find

people who can carry on your work. And think big. Why not a TV channel on the lines of the magazine?

Giovanni Gnanadurai

I knew Dr Ann when she was doing her MBBS in Madurai. She had a missionary zeal even in her student days and served the poor and neglected along with her family. May the Lord continue to bless them.

Jane Samraj

I salute the doctors, nurses and support staff of Makunda Hospital who have devoted the best years of their professional lives to serving the underprivileged. Each one of them is an unsung hero. Thank you for this article. It helps raise awareness about their work and commitment. After

COVID-19, I hope the government sets up a partnership that includes rural-based mission hospitals as vital members of a national health service. These hospitals need to be recognized and supported.

Evita Fernandez

Migration focus

I read your interview with Chinmay Tumble, 'Interstate migration council is the need of the hour.' It was very interesting to know the actual status of interstate migration and the reasons for it. Tumble also provides solutions which are so well researched. It would be good for government policymakers to study this article and take heed of his suggestions seriously.

Tara Kini

The actual lacuna here is that there is no real data on interstate migrants. The 2011 Census data has been placed in the public domain recently. By measuring migration using railway data or railway tickets, we would really miss out a lot. How do we get data which is up to date?

Tijo George

Minimum wages linked to the consumer index should be fixed for all categories of labour and revised every six months. Group insurance and old age pension for the unorganized sector should be introduced. The Public Distribution System is simply a source of corruption and exploitation.

Nirmal Singh

We can create a system by which each state registers migrants from other states along with their Aadhaar details. This can create real-time data about how many migrants are there in each state.

Prakash D. Narayana Pai

Weak state

Your headline for Sanjaya Baru's column, 'Strong leader, weak state,' was appropriate. But I prefer the reverse: strong state and weak leader.

Murleedharan Pillai

Narendra Modi has clear ideas on governance. The problem is implementation. He wants to satisfy powerful sections like the OBCs, Dalits and regional interests. The experienced opposition finds politics in his every action.

Jayaram Shetty

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com



COVER STORY

MIGRANTS IN THE MIRROR

Millions of migrant workers fleeing cities and industrial clusters for their villages have forced fellow Indians to look at the pitiable wages they get and the conditions in which they live.

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One more issue under lockdown

THIS is the third issue of *Civil Society* brought out in lockdown conditions. It means we can't print and distribute, but a PDF of the issue reaches your inbox and the stories are on our website. We have been functioning in a limited way from our office and mostly from home. We also haven't been able to travel. In such circumstances, it is not particularly easy but we have tried to bring together for this issue interesting stories from all over the country.

What we now know about migrant workers should tell us a lot about ourselves. If they hadn't burst on to the scene, as they have in recent weeks because of the coronavirus, it is certain that their exploitation would continue without remorse amid claims of economic growth and declining poverty.

The picture now is very different. It is clear and for all to see that the majority of the workforce in India actually has no rights or benefits to speak of. They turn up in cities to escape rural distress, but their hopes and aspirations aren't realized here. They merely end up as cheap labour. Laws exist, but are inadequate and not enforced. No one seems accountable. The responsibility for this state of affairs cuts across parties and governments.

In this magazine we have covered unorganized labour from time to time. But with this cover story we take a comprehensive look at the issues relating to migrant workers. We have three honest voices in Chinmay Tumble, Shyam Sundar and Rajiv Khandelwal. Speaking with them has helped us understand the legal, economic and social aspects better.

Will things improve? It is worrisome that laws protective of workers in some states are being dismantled in the name of economic reforms. If this were to become a larger trend it would have disastrous consequences. But perhaps in a higgledy-piggledy way things might also get better. Some employers may choose to be more humane in their treatment of workers and there are states waking up to the reality that they need migrants and should treat them well. What is clearly needed is a national initiative to envision improvements in workplaces, wages and terms of employment.

Is distance learning through the internet and television adding up to anything or is it just driving everyone crazy? We spoke to students, parents and teachers and the story we have is that it is not going to be easy. Such are the disparities, both social and economic, that not everyone can cope with distance learning. Teachers too need to reorient themselves and make the shift from classrooms to Zoom or whatever. It seems there is no viable substitute for school, as we know it.

Many NGOs have been working tirelessly through these difficult days. They have done much better than political parties. The government should be appreciative of their efforts. Some of them work in remote locations under adverse circumstances. The Action Northeast Trust or Ant, led by Dr Sunil Kaul, is an example with its mental health camps in rural Assam.

Shrey Gupta

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‘Green approvals given online are a mockery of the system’

Learn from the pandemic, says Ravi Chellam

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE future of the human race depends on the health of the planet. This is the lesson from the coronavirus pandemic. But even in the midst of lockdowns and deaths, the environment continues to get short shrift.

In India, mere video-conferences have become enough for clearing projects, even in ecologically sensitive areas — jettisoned is the rigour of independent public hearings and detailed consultations among experts.

On April 7, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife had examined as many as 31 proposals online. The fate of 15 tiger reserves, notified eco-sensitive zones, deemed eco-sensitive zones on the fringes of protected areas and designated wildlife corridors is at stake here.

So great is the concern over the implications of such seemingly superficial decision-making that several environmentalists have jointly written a letter to Prakash Javadekar, Union minister of environment, forests and climate change.

The pandemic should not become an excuse for taking short-cuts in deciding the future of important natural assets, they have said in their letter. The approvals can wait, they feel, till the situation improves and the guidelines of the Supreme Court for clearing projects can be followed.

Among the signatories to the letter is Ravi Chellam, who has spent many years in wildlife protection. He is currently CEO, Metastrang Foundation, and director of the Mission Secretariat, National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well Being.

“It’s not just about saving tigers,” says Chellam. “It’s about saving humanity. There are close links between the natural world and human well-being.”

Excerpts from *Civil Society’s* Zoom interview with Chellam in Bengaluru.

What are your concerns about the way environmental clearances are being handled during the coronavirus pandemic?

I think it is absolutely crucial that humanity learns the right lessons from this pandemic. It would be a huge mistake to revert to business as usual once the worst is over or a vaccine is developed. If we continue to destroy nature and pollute the environment without any compassion for our fellow human beings, such tragedies are bound to be repeated.

The past five to six decades have seen continual degradation and fragmentation of our natural ecosystems. We have reached a tipping point. Today

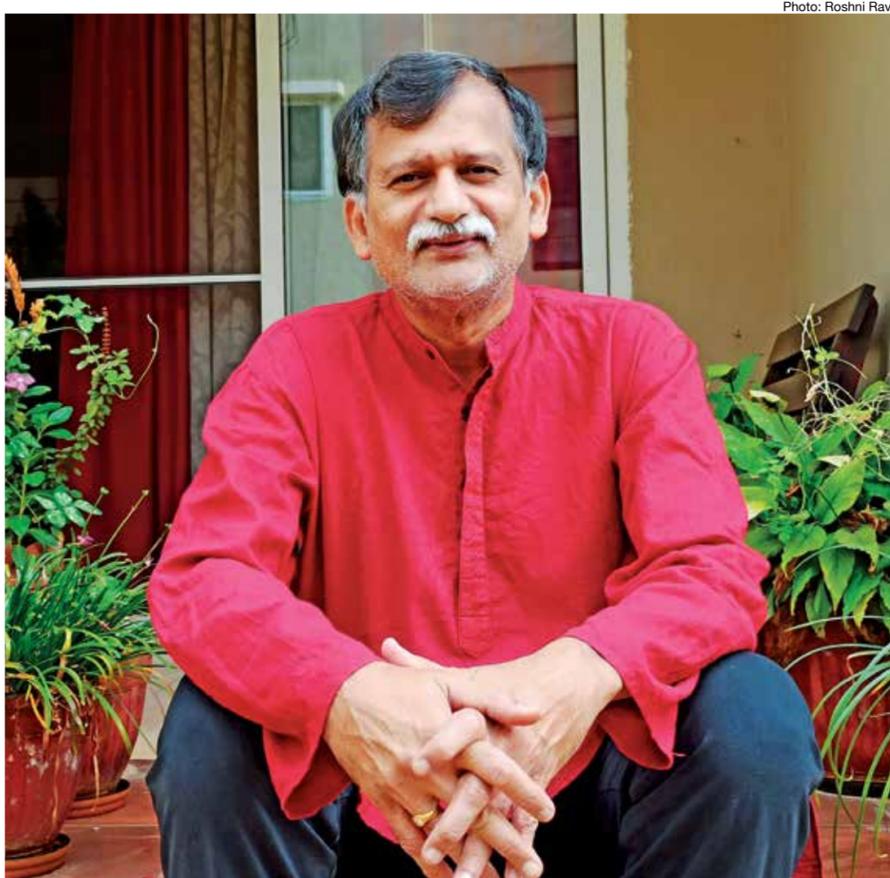


Photo: Roshni Ravi

Ravi Chellam: ‘There is a history of how project proponents constantly fudge, lie and cover up data’

loss of biodiversity, land degradation, pollution and climate change are acting synergistically. The pandemic is one of the many costs we will have to pay if we don’t learn to live with respect for nature.

There have to be limits to our consumption. You can’t have endless growth. First of all there is a problem with the way we define growth. We didn’t take SARS seriously or MERS. We were lucky to get away with those. Hopefully we will get over COVID-19. But the world has changed. This is a new normal and we better understand and learn to live with it.

The letter states projects are being discussed and cleared on video and this is a completely inadequate way of assessing them...

Well, site visits are not possible and neither are public consultations. The time allotted for the meeting is very short compared to the usual day-long meeting. Maps can’t be properly examined.

The online format doesn’t allow room for discussion by four or five people. You can mute other people. People involved feel cheated. Even those who attend these meetings tell us it’s not adequate.

What is the tearing hurry? We are still in a lockdown. The whole approach has been to dilute any kind of environmental control and make it easier for “developers”. Nature is seen by the government either as a resource to exploit or as an impediment for development and not as an asset, the essential foundation for human life to flourish.

What are these projects and what kind of impact would they have on the environment?

Typically these would be highways, pipelines, linear development projects or other infrastructure projects. Invariably, it would be something that requires natural habitats to be destroyed, degraded or fragmented. The reason such projects are placed

before the National Board for Wildlife is that these habitats have already been identified as ecologically vital parts of India’s landscape.

We shouldn’t restrict our view to the value these landscapes and waterscapes bring only from a wildlife or an environment perspective. We should see their links to human livelihoods and human well-being. It is not about tigers facing a problem. It is carbon sequestration being undermined. It is about closer contact between potential disease-causing organisms. It is about extreme climate events not being buffered by nature when you destroy and degrade it. So there are a host of other things we need to consider.

And these areas are all eco-sensitive?

The only reason such projects come to the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife is because the government has recognized and notified all of these habitats and landscapes as ecologically valuable. There is national recognition of their ecological value.

So you would like the government to suspend all clearances?

The job of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is to fight till its last breath for the environment. It is not called the Ministry of Environmental Clearances. What is its mandate? Its mandate is not to say okay, we’ll destroy forests here and we’ll make it up there as we have the knowledge and ability to reconstruct. The fact is, we don’t and unfortunately our track record in restoration is not at all good.

There is a history of how project proponents constantly fudge, lie and cover up data. Project proponents are primarily interested in the fastest, cheapest way to obtain environmental clearances. Ninety-nine percent of project proponents really have no interest in the environment. Their job is to make profits and report their quarterly results to their board.

That being the fact the ministry really shouldn’t be saying it’s okay to allow a road or a railway line, we are a poor country, we need to develop.

Who is developing? The pandemic has exposed the fact that millions of our people derive no benefit from this development. And I don’t think we can divorce ourselves from the plight of our fellow citizens and our environment. The environment offers enormous support, even if it just means accessing fuelwood and water for millions of people. Nobody has any business to undermine nature’s productivity.

But we have made some gains in conservation over the years.

I wouldn’t call them gains. Our metrics, the way we measure performance, is very limited. We primarily use populations of animals as the metric of performance. But that means you have to be transparent and accountable about the process of animal population estimation. You need to share the method, the data and the analysis. These exercises are done solely by the government, sometimes in cooperation with scientists and NGOs. These are never open for public audit. Why not? After all, such estimates are done with public money.

India’s population, its poor people and the bulk of

its economy are still land-based, bio-based and agriculture-based. Which means it’s almost in direct competition with other forms of life. Life needs space. We can build multistoried buildings for people. For birds and animals the only multistoried structures they see are in forests.

They cannot live beyond a certain density. Between 10 to 20 tigers or lions could live in 100 sq. km. If their population grows to 22 or 30 the extra animals cannot live in the 100 sq. km. They will have to find some other space. So, in the limited context of increased population numbers even if we were to believe official numbers — over which I have a healthy scepticism — large mammals in general have grown in number.

Rhinos, which nearly went extinct, came back. So have lions, tigers and crocodiles. The only large animal we have lost in the past 120 years is the cheetah in the 1950s.

So that way we have done very well. We know very little about smaller creatures, for example, insects. Not so long ago when we drove out at night a myriad of insects would hit our windscreens.

‘The job of the environment ministry is to fight for the environment. Its mandate is not to say okay, we’ll destroy forests here and we’ll make it up there as we have the knowledge and ability to reconstruct. The fact is we don’t and our track record in restoration is not good.’

Nowadays it’s a rarity. That tells me that the overall density and possibly diversity of insects has gone down. And that is something very few people are noticing. Insects drive our world. They pollinate, help break down organic matter, are predators of our plant pests and much else.

What can be done to ensure we don’t destroy our ecologically sensitive habitats?

Our success needs very strong management because our protected areas on an average are very small. They can’t hold our growing large mammal populations. Especially in the last 20 to 30 years, since our conservation policy began separating people from all our protected areas, especially tiger reserves, this creates a new challenge. Now, if a tiger walks into human-dominated areas the local people ask, why is it coming here, you have a tiger reserve, take it back.

This is not what I heard in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past 20 to 30 years there has been a strong pushback from people because they definitely feel alienated from forests and let down by the government.

The other problem is we are constantly fragmenting habitats and denotifying protected habitats. So, where is there room for wildlife?

And we are not totally honest with our data as raw data and the analysis are seldom shared with independent scientists. We claim plantations are forests. Strips of plantations along roads and railway lines and canals are classified as forests. Those are not functioning natural ecosystems. There is a huge difference.

How should the environment ministry be strengthened to take on these challenges?

That’s not an easy question to answer. I have been involved in the past couple of years with people looking at these questions. It’s not only about biodiversity conservation but its links with human well-being, education, health and much more.

This is a knowledge-based economy. We cannot any more use the narrow lens of the GDP to measure growth. It has failed us. What do we do when that system breaks? We somehow remove every rule which kept a check on how that old system operated.

In a free market why are we supporting failed businesses? We did that in 2008, and now that’s what is coming home to roost. Market forces are saying these businesses are not viable. Airlines probably need to drastically reduce their services.

If for most people it will take two days to travel from Delhi to Chennai then that’s what it takes. Why do we need to ensure flights which take only a couple of hours between Chennai and Delhi? How does it contribute to the well-being of the planet or humans? We need to ask these questions.

If current trends are any indicator the EIA is going to get weaker. What do you recommend?

I think more people should recognize the cost of what is happening and demand higher levels of transparency and accountability. I believe we are still living in a responsible democracy and it is going to require active citizenship.

The time for silence is over. We need to speak up now. Five years down the line if this is the rate of destruction and the model of development, it will be too late. Growth numbers will be thrown at us but when we step out of our homes we will see how the urban and rural environments have been degraded. And environments, once degraded, are very difficult to restore.

Don’t get taken in by how the Yamuna is cleaner and fish have come back. Most of it is bunkum. The gains of conservation take a long time to acquire but with just one government decision, 20 years of sincere work in conservation can disappear in a few months.

The current model of growth is based on consumption, as if there is no tomorrow. Invariably project proponents hike up the benefits of their projects and lower the costs so that the rate of investment to returns ratio is far better than it actually is.

I don’t know of a single project where the environmental clearance conditions have been complied with sincerely. That is the job of the environment ministry — not to turn a blind eye but to hold these developers accountable. Our job as citizens is to be vigilant, ask questions, file RTIs and be active soldiers for our environment. ■

Can Himachal apples survive the big fall?

Young growers set new standards

Raj Machhan
Shimla

FIVE years ago young apple growers, many of whom had given up jobs to return to family orchards, came together and formed the Progressive Growers' Association (PGA) to improve the quality of apples produced in Himachal Pradesh through the use of better agricultural practices and robust saplings.

They were all poised to reap the benefits of these innovations when the coronavirus pandemic laid low their hopes. Export possibilities have all but dried up and to compound their problems Nepali labourers, on whom the apple growers depend, have gone back to Nepal.

A pall of gloom now hangs over the ₹3,000-crore apple growing business, a key source of farm incomes in Himachal Pradesh, particularly in the districts of Shimla, Kullu and Kinnaur.

Growers and members of the PGA are worried about what's in store for them. But they also believe that the foundations they have created for a more modern and competitive apple industry will finally pay off when some normalcy returns.

The PGA mostly comprises young, like-minded individuals open to change and willing to try out new and better ways of planting, maintenance, harvesting, and marketing of apples.

Lokinder Singh Bisht, president of PGA, says, "We now have a membership of over 250 medium and large apple growers." Over 70 percent of members left jobs in the corporate world to dedicate themselves full-time to horticulture.

"It made sense. The returns were more than what most of us were earning and the job is like a dream. Living close to nature and growing apples — what else does one want?" remarks Ashutosh Chauhan.

The PGA has set up a seven-member executive body to look after its day to day affairs. Major decisions involving investments and strategies are taken at an open general house where all members are invited. The members pay a one-time entry fee of ₹10,000, which goes into forming a corpus to sustain day to day activities.

The PGA has been changing the dynamics of growing apples. Thus far, apple varieties in Himachal have been dominated by the Royal Delicious type, which are big trees that take 12 to 15 years to come to fruition. The present seedling

method of planting trees is giving way to the root stock method, which takes three to five years for fruit bearing and the trees are resistant to diseases.

A top priority of the PGA is to introduce new, superior quality varieties, which could compete in international markets. "We have been looking at advanced apple growing countries in Europe and to the US for new varieties," says Bisht.

Members pool in money to travel to Europe and the US to source new varieties such as Scarlett, King Rot, Dark Baron Gala, Devil Gala, Memamescar, Granny Smith, and Gold Chief, among others. The group has been importing these varieties along with knowhow on acclimatizing them for plantation in Shimla, Kullu and Kinnaur.

The PGA regularly organizes seminars and workshops with foreign experts as key speakers, funded largely through their own collections and sponsorships from corporates of late. "The key takeaway from these meetings is the sharing of experiences and knowhow so that growers can successfully plant such varieties in their own climatic settings," says Ranvijay Singh, a member. The cooperative has signed MoUs with apple associates from Holland, Italy and the US. "We have been learning from them. Information on the latest technologies in disease management has been especially useful," says Bisht.

Improving the quality of produce and packaging are key focus areas of the group. For export, colour and size of apples determine price. Elongated apples, developed with standardized nutrients, fetch a premium in international markets.

"A 10-kg box of high quality apples sells for between ₹1,400 to ₹2,000, whereas a 28-kg box of our prevalent qualities fetches between ₹1,400 and ₹3,000," says Bisht. The group recently introduced a five-kg pack for high quality apples, which can be given as gifts during festivals and corporate events.

The PGA has set up an outlet of their own at Kharapathar, around 80 km from Shimla, to sell cartons, insecticides, pesticides, packaging material, and tools used in orchards. Since they buy in bulk, they sell these products at a price lower than market prices, making a small profit at the same time.

Remarkably, the PGA has not involved the state government in most of its activities. "It becomes too cumbersome. We do avail of subsidies but our policy is not to overly involve government departments. They take too much time," said a member.



Lokinder Singh Bisht at his apple orchard

The PGA plans to set up cold storages and processing units to buttress its marketing chain. "Though we will be tapping financial institutions for funds, we are trying to raise most of it from our group," said Karan Chauhan. It is also working to do away with the cartel of commission agents who usually cream away most of the profits.

The PGA has also plugged into a ₹1,200-crore World Bank project for enhancing post-harvesting techniques. "We cannot compete internationally right now, but we are moving towards it. At present only 10 to 20 percent of our total produce is of high quality. We plan to increase that to 50 to 60 percent. Along with standardization of grading and adaptation of universal cartons we are sure our B and C quality apples too will fetch a much higher price," says Bisht.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has cost us dearly. We have been hit on multiple fronts," said Ashutosh Chauhan, who is from Shimla's Rantnari belt. Orchard owners in the state's apple bowl are heavily dependent on Nepali labour, whose physique is uniquely suited to the tough mountainous terrain of an apple orchard. Nepalis are adept at horticulture operations such as preparing plant beds, spraying of insecticides, pruning, digging the soil and so on.

Over the years, the Nepalis have integrated with the local people, and become almost extensions of native family units. Some Nepali families have settled in the hills. They live in their own temporary houses, their children attend local government schools, and they till the land, growing vegetables and other cash crops provided by orchard owners. It is a unique symbiosis that has thrived over the years.

Every October, most Nepali workers travel to Nepal to visit their villages. They usually return with a large posse of temporary labour who work from May to June and do all the groundwork for the upcoming apple season.

But this year the Nepali worker is nowhere to be seen. Orchard owners are in touch with their usual

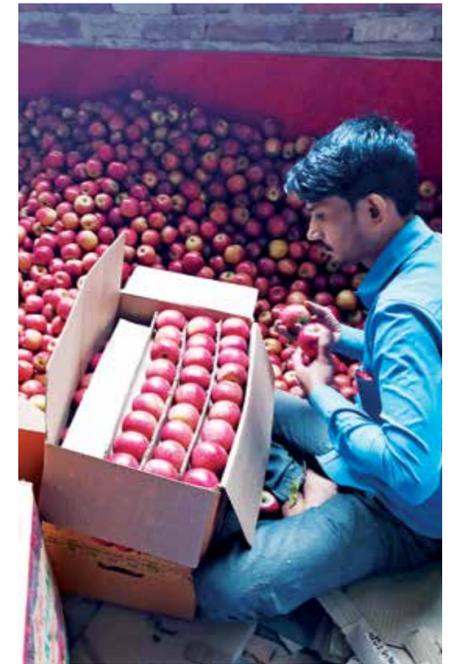
groups of labour on mobile phones, but so far the chances of them returning appear bleak due to the sealing of the Indo-Nepal border and imposition of curfew in Indian states.

"We are ready to come, but we are not allowed to cross over to India. There is even talk of visa requirement for those who want to come. Our families are in the grip of a fear psychosis and the general outlook is that staying put in our villages is the best strategy for the time being," said Ram Bahadur, a resident of Salian district.

Perhaps a precursor of things to come is the fate of early ripening fruits such as plums and other local vegetables grown in upper Himachal. Due to lack of labour and marketing, plums rotted on the trees and there is no demand for vegetables such as peas. Cauliflower is selling for ₹5 per kg in Rohru, and a half-kg box of cherries is selling for an all-time low of ₹30. Elsewhere, in places like Theog, the vegetable belt of the state, the produce is virtually rotting in the fields.



New apple varieties are being introduced



Global standards in packaging are followed

The growers were all poised to reap the benefits of their innovations when the coronavirus pandemic laid low their hopes. Export possibilities have all but dried up.

Dr K.C. Azad, former director of Himachal's Department of Horticulture, says, "Due to shortage of labour we are expecting as much as 50 percent of the apple crop to remain unplucked. There is going to be a huge amount of wastage."

Growers are also concerned about the non-availability of apple packing trays which are manufactured in plants located in the border industrial belts of Baddi and Parwanoo. "The production of trays started four months prior to the onset of the apple season in early to mid-July. But so far, we have not received any raw materials for them," said a manufacturer.

Dr Rajender Jhobta, a surgeon and a keen horticulturist, says, "This year has been one of the worst in history. We were in any case expecting a 50 to 60 percent drop in production. In addition we are now facing problems on all fronts — labour, transportation and packaging."

As a way out, Jhobta suggests the government encourage big business houses such as Adani, Reliance, Big Basket and Mother Dairy to directly source crops from farmers and sell at their outlets across the country. "But that too will depend on whether there is a demand for apples given the overall downturn in the economy," he said. ■



Samita's World

I HEARD THERE'S A PARALLEL UNIVERSE!

CAN WE MOVE THERE?



ANT CARRIES ITS LOCKDOWN LOAD IN ASSAM AREAS

Meds, advice for mental health

Civil Society News
Chirang/Gurugram

THE lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus comes with multiple challenges, but if you were a mental health patient in a remote village of Assam, what could you possibly do to find help?

Fortunately for a few thousand such patients, they have been able to turn to the Action Northeast Trust or Ant, the brilliant acronym it goes by.

Ant has been holding small camps for mental health patients in villages where it has been distributing medicines and providing medical advice. A big camp is held at the village of Rowmari in Chirang district, which is where Ant has its main office and a substantial campus.

It is now 20 years since Ant was founded when Dr Sunil Kaul, a general physician, formerly in the Army, decided to dedicate himself to development of these remote tribal parts of Assam.

The NGO undertakes several projects, including providing livelihoods through a weaving centre that now very successfully markets its products under the brand name Aagor.

But the mental health initiative is special among all the things Ant does. It began some 10 years ago and is unique in that it takes psychiatric care to the doorstep of patients, making it both accessible and affordable.

The camp at the Ant campus is held once a month and is a big draw. People turn up from nearby districts and there could be as many as 600 patients arriving from early morning. The camps held in villages serve as extensions to this camp and are, of course, smaller with 80 to 90 patients.

However, these numbers represent just the tip of the problem. Much larger numbers are in need of professional attention and mostly don't know how to make the trek to the urban centres in Assam and elsewhere in India for treatment. Ant meets a small part of this demand and is the only organization doing so.

Over time, Ant has developed a well-managed system for handling its patient load. But the lockdown has come with its own hurdles.

Immediately after the lockdown was declared, no camps could be held because all activity was prohibited. Dr Kaul was himself in quarantine for two weeks, having returned from Delhi, where he had stayed in his family home in Nizamuddin West.

Permissions from the district authorities weren't easy to come by. Initial requests were stonewalled. But then three patients died — two due to epilepsy medication not reaching them on time and a third from suicide.

Citing these tragic deaths, Dr Kaul was able to convince district officials that mental patients needed regular supervision. Those on medication had to have their medicine stocks replenished. It wouldn't do for the camps to be suddenly closed.

"I wrote to the Superintendent of Police and sent him pictures of how we were prepared for social distancing. I also told him that I would send him a WhatsApp message with our vehicle numbers and names of social workers every time they set out from our campus for villages," recalls Dr Kaul, who is lean and hyper-energetic, and speaks so fast that it sometimes becomes essential to ask him to slow down.

Permissions from the district authorities weren't easy to come by. Initial requests were stonewalled. But then three patients died.

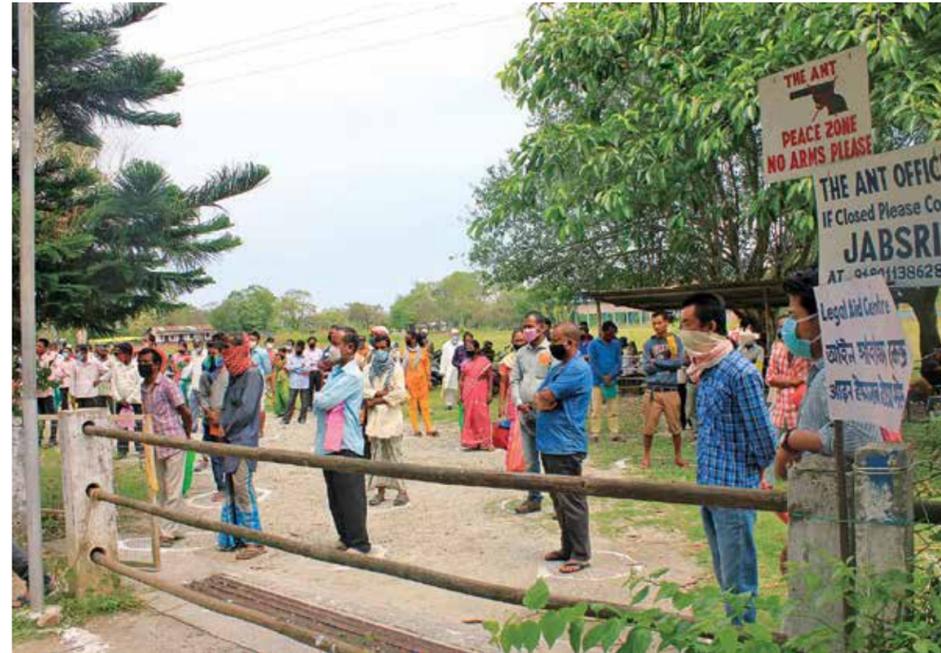
Permission from the authorities followed his persistent efforts and the mental health camps were resumed. But there were other problems.

Nilesh Mohite, the psychiatrist who works with Ant, couldn't make the journey from Tezpur because of the lockdown. So, he hasn't been attending the camps though he is available for consultation on video.

Similarly, Dr Kaul, while still in quarantine when the camps started, would speak to patients and issue prescriptions too on WhatsApp. That was for a while and he was soon out.

It has been Dr Mintumoni Sarma who has largely held the fort. Dr Sarma is a general physician and he has been braving tough odds to come to the Ant campus from his home in Guwahati.

Ant's mental health initiative follows a hub and spoke model. The campus is the base, which draws



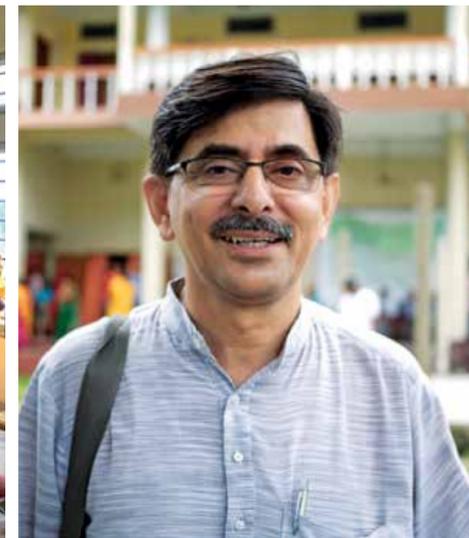
Patients and their families maintain social distance



Medicines being packed for patients



The hall at the Ant campus has been decongested



Dr Sunil Kaul, founder of Ant



Dr Mintumoni Sarma braved tough odds to get to the Ant campus

the largest number of patients. At the camp on April 24, around 350 patients turned up from all over neighbouring districts. In normal times, the number could be twice that. The village camps serve as extensions and are much smaller. They usually draw between 80 and 90 patients and these days the number is between 35 and 45.

Not every patient has to be examined by a doctor each time a camp is held. In fact, the majority just needs to replenish their medicines. A patient who needs a consultation is either one who is new or one who is registered but has a fresh complaint.

The Ant campus hall in which patients gather to pay to collect their medicines and meet the doctor is usually very crowded. To avoid a crowd now, a barrier has been created where patients who have only to collect their medicines are asked to show their prescriptions. The medicines are then brought and given to them. Circles have been drawn to

ensure that patients and those accompanying them don't stand too close to each other.

Ant charges patients just ₹300 per visit, which covers the cost of medicines and consultation. It is a piffling amount even in rural Assam. If a patient were to go instead to Tezpur or Guwahati, the big cities in the state, for treatment, the cost of travel and accommodation would be much more. Most patients need to be accompanied by relatives. Several days would be spent in going up and down.

Ant's is a different approach to mental health care. First of all it recognizes that mental health problems are widespread and the numbers of patients are huge in a population as large as India's.

These are also mostly patients with low income who remain underserved by qualified doctors. It is also unrealistic to expect them to visit psychiatrists for treatment. Many of them are unaware that they have mental health problems.

Ant has, therefore, reached out to them. It has created awareness among communities and spread the message that mental problems are treatable. It has also trained volunteers and social workers to administer medicines and counsel families.

Dr Mohite, who belongs to Maharashtra but has settled in Tezpur, says, "In the Indian context patients far outnumber psychiatrists. Innovations in approach are required. If the patient is doing well, a general physician is good enough to follow up on the patient. Motivating psychiatrists to treat people in rural areas is also important. A village-level camp can over time attract a psychiatrist from the nearest city."

Dr Kaul began holding the camp at the Ant campus at the urging of another NGO. Soon that NGO backed out, but seeing the demand and not having the heart to turn people away, Dr Kaul kept the camp running.

Over time it has grown and become the only initiative of its kind. As concerns over mental health multiply, and awareness spreads, perhaps it will be seen as a model for others to take up and governments to promote.

When *Civil Society* visited the Ant campus to witness a camp, people turned up in a ceaseless stream from 5 am. They came on cycles, two-wheelers, auto-rickshaws.

Ant has neatly kept records of cases. It sources medicines and keeps three months of stocks, which have come in handy during the lockdown. In the villages where Ant reaches, patients have no other facility to turn to. It is particularly so amidst the fears of the coronavirus and the trauma of a relentless lockdown.

Ant's work is a reminder that for healthcare to reach people it has to be friendly, accessible and affordable. ■

‘How can you run a school on TV and internet?’

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

THE teacher isn't in the classroom but a physics lesson on electricity is on in full swing. The difference between conductors and insulators is explained to one set of children. The teacher then addresses an older class. Symbols of a simple electric circuit are described and students are taught how to draw a circuit using those symbols. The lesson ends with an explanation of the science behind a series circuit and a parallel circuit.

The entire session is on television and listening to it are children from Telangana's social welfare schools which have begun virtual classes on television through the government's T-SAT channel. There are four lectures every day, which are structured to cater to all classes.

Across India schools are trying to teach children who aren't in school due to the coronavirus pandemic. A whole raft of strategies is being tried out with varying success. Schools are using WhatsApp, Zoom videos, learning apps, and more. Children from well-off homes are switching over with ease.

For children who don't have laptops and smartphones because they can't afford them, television, which has 67 percent penetration in India, is proving to be a useful tool.

"We are not going into a lot of detail, but trying to give a conceptual understanding to students. Obviously, it's virtually impossible to run a school through television and the internet," said Dr R.S. Praveen Kumar, secretary of the Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutional Society (TSWREIS) which has 268 residential schools for children from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities.

These TV lectures have turned out to be a viable solution. And students are happy with the classes. N. Snigdha, 13, studies in Class 9 in the Saroornagar social welfare school. "All the teachers who are teaching T-SAT classes are very well trained. The classes are very good," she said.

Telangana's social welfare schools are well known for being inclusive. Children from low-income and socially discriminated backgrounds are provided books, uniforms and hostel facilities for free. The



A student learns from the T-SAT channel

Telangana's social welfare schools are a level playing field but remote learning relies on what a child can or can't afford.

schools admit everyone irrespective of the ability to pay. But although school is a level playing field, remote learning relies on what a family can or cannot afford.

About 60 to 65 percent of students have access to a smartphone and internet connectivity. The remaining 30 percent catch up on class via TV. But that still leaves out 15 percent who have no access to online classes in any form.

For B. Nikhita, who studies in Class 8, access to virtual classes is a struggle. Her father is a vegetable seller and cannot afford to buy a smartphone for her education. She borrows a smartphone from a different neighbour each day, whoever can spare their phone from 11 am to 4 pm when classes are aired on T-SAT. Still, internet connectivity in her village, Komreddipally, remains a problem.

There are many others like Nikhita whose families cannot afford smartphones, or, having lost their income, are unable to get their phones recharged.

Teachers do their best to help students access online classes. K. Salomi teaches science at the Medak social welfare school. "Sometimes I have to request parents or elder brothers of my students to let them borrow their phone so that they can study," she said.

In her class, there are 40 students, 10 of whom do not have smartphones or access to a TV. She asks them to stay in touch with other students in their area who can help them keep up with studies. "We don't want any child to sit idle," said Pramodha Kamidi, principal of the social welfare school in Saroornagar.

Virtual class isn't a substitute for real classrooms.



Apps are useful but a smartphone is needed



Students of social welfare schools are used to living in hostels and find life at home boring. "I miss my friends and my teachers. In the hostel, we laugh, we cry, we scold each other," said B. Bhargavi, a 15-year-old student at the Saroornagar social welfare school.

It isn't ideal, but students and teachers are taking it in their stride, unwilling to complain and find fault. When asked if it's difficult to concentrate at home, Bhargavi replied, "If I want to be a doctor, I should work hard."

The schools have also tied up with OAKS learning app which provides students with free access to hundreds of lessons on all subjects. Teachers have formed WhatsApp groups to circulate subject-related videos and worksheets for students to do.

At a public school in Vasant Vihar and at Shri Ram Centennial School in Dehradun, classes are conducted online via Zoom. This is feasible because all students have mobile phones or laptops through which they can easily attend classes.

Priya Sharma (name changed), a teacher at the public school in Vasant Vihar, said that seven

students in her class cannot join online classes on Zoom because of poor internet connectivity. These students left for their ancestral villages in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab before the lockdown was announced.

She plans to teach them through video calls on WhatsApp once the school breaks for the summer holidays when she has more time on her hands. Sharma teaches Class 2 students all subjects except Hindi, art and computers.

Teachers end up working round the clock to be available to students who might need help. "I don't want to switch off my phone or put it on silent anymore because I don't want to miss a call or message from a student," Sharma said.

Although technology has ensured that school doesn't come to a standstill, the online mode has thrown up challenges for both students and teachers. Some subjects don't lend themselves to remote learning, say students.

"Computer programming is the kind of subject that needs practicals. Just theory is not enough. Our teacher shares her screen on Zoom and we see the process, but we can't perform the actions ourselves," said 17-year-old Vanshika Sahni who is in Class 12 and attends the Saai Memorial Girls School in Geeta Colony in New Delhi.

Teachers too are learning to use Zoom and monitor students via a screen, for the first time. The results appear to be mixed.

"Just by walking around in the classroom, I could tell who needs help or who hasn't understood the concept," said 24-year-old Aruj Saklani who teaches Hindi to Classes 4 and 5 at Shri Ram Centennial School in Dehradun.

Students are more inclined to pay attention in a classroom, she feels. Visual aids such as blackboards help. When Saklani gives her students idioms or words to use in their sentences, they are written on the blackboard. Students can refer to them whenever they want. "So grammar exercises like these become difficult online," Saklani said.

"For me, scrolling on Zoom is like walking around in the class," said Sharma, who at 54 is a seasoned teacher. When she takes a class test on Zoom, she asks students to keep their audio on. She notices if her students look to their parents for help.

Reading facial expressions on a screen is just like reading expressions in a classroom, Sharma said. "An active teacher keeps an eye on all her students. It really depends on the teacher."

A week before they began to take classes on Zoom, Sharma and her colleagues conducted dummy classes among themselves. By simply practising, they learnt how to operate Zoom and use its features — how to invite people on a Zoom call, how to turn on their audio, how to share their laptop screen, and so on. At Saklani's school, a basic briefing was given to teachers. TSWREIS also trained their teachers remotely.

"If we stop because of small problems, we won't be able to go forward. And I think we have been able to achieve a lot through the digital medium," Sharma said.

Still, students, rich or underprivileged, miss goofing around with their pals and the cheerfulness of school. Online classes cannot replace the environment of a classroom and of a school. "You can't substitute a classroom, but when there is no option, you must adapt," agreed Kumar. ■

Which shops are open? In Punjab an app can tell you

Raj Machhan
Chandigarh

Adversity evokes different reactions from different people. For Jaskirat Singh of Ludhiana, it led to the creation of an online service that he offered free to make life a little easier for fellow citizens in Punjab amidst the doom and gloom of the coronavirus pandemic.

Jaskirat, who is an entrepreneur, created a web-based service that enables citizens in various cities and towns of Punjab to locate government-designated shops and outlets for buying essential items. This service, essentialservices.punjab.gov.in, was much in demand during the lockdown in Punjab because only designated shops were allowed to be open for a limited period.

"I was contacted by a friend who is an official in the Punjab government. We felt such a service was needed and that it would go a long way in helping people get essential goods," said Jaskirat.

The Punjab government first imposed curfew on March 22, becoming the second state after Rajasthan to do so. It was one of the strictest curfews imposed in recent years. Dissemination of information about which shops were open and what their timings were became a challenging task for the state government.

Jaskirat says that they first thought of creating an app which would do this. "But an app would have been too costly and taken longer to build. So me and my team of three decided to create a web-based service," he said.

As soon as the course of action was finalized, they began work on the app a few days before curfew was imposed. "It took us 12 days to come up with the complete product," he says.

They first collected data about the designated shops and outlets from government agencies in the state. The data was extrapolated onto Google Maps. The website is hosted on Punjab government servers.

The web service offers two or three ways of finding shops which have been permitted to open, near an individual's residence. In the first method of display, the information about such shops is presented in the form of a list along with an address and a telephone number. "The

person can give a call beforehand to ascertain whether the shop is open or not," said Singh.

In the second tab of display, the location of the shops, which include grocery outlets, fruit and vegetable sellers as well as chemists, are displayed on a Google Map and tell the user the distance from a place. "The use of Google Maps in any service requires a licence fee to be paid to the company. However, the company provides the service free for a limited number of users. We are not using the dynamic version

of the maps that provide street-level navigation. Instead, the distance is indicated as the crow flies," said Jaskirat.

Though the number of users has reduced after the curfew was somewhat relaxed, at its peak the web service attracted 10,000 hits per day. "It's not a commercial venture, but the very fact that people are using it is its own reward," said Jaskirat.

But there is more to it than that.

"During my childhood days, I was strongly influenced by my grandmother who often narrated stories of our

great Gurus and other great men," said Jaskirat, who is a devout Sikh.

The religion lays strong emphasis on the concept of *sewa* or selfless service, or doing service to others without expecting anything in return. During any natural calamity in any part of the world, the Sikhs have always stepped forward and made a substantial contribution in helping others. For example, in Delhi, the Bangla Sahib gurudwara has been organizing *langars* or community meals for thousands of people every day. In Punjab, at places, the gurudwaras have even opened their cash vaults to help the distressed and the needy. A gurudwara or house of the Guru is at the centre of any Sikh community.

Jaskirat, 42, is also a social activist who has been at the forefront of the cleaning of the Buddha Dariya movement. He is also a member of the Association for Democratic Reforms and believes strongly in transparency in governance.

"We must do something to help the others. There were other people who were doing other things. I thought of lending a helping hand by coming up with this service," says the engineering graduate from the Benaras Hindu University (BHU). ■



Jaskirat Singh

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Petpal is a friend to stray dogs

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

AFTER working for eight years at a job many would envy in Google Mountain View in California, Srivatsava Gorthy decided to quit. He took a year's break to recover from the stresses of a demanding job and to think about what he really wanted to do.

An ardent pet lover, he decided to set up Petpal (formerly Unikorn), an e-commerce platform that ships pet food, accessories, medicines and drugs to pet lovers across India from its office in Hyderabad. The company's product line includes plain leashes, cat and dog food and medicines for pets. It even connects customers to grooming and veterinary services for their pets.

During the lockdown Gorthy was worried about the plight of stray animals. Many strays can't find food and are bereft of the company of humans. Animal welfare groups are aware of their plight. They have come up with ideas like regular feeding times for strays and adoption. The government too issued an advisory to states to make medical aid and veterinary assistance an essential service during the lockdown so that animals don't suffer.

Gorthy ensured his company helped strays. "For stray dogs, we requested our delivery staff to carry treats and small food packets put together by us to feed any stray dogs that they came across while delivering supplies," says Gorthy.

The "pet parent" of three dogs, a labrador retriever, Steffi, a German shepherd, Tyson, and a Newfoundland, Leo, he understands that strays need respect and love. While he would like more people to come forward and adopt strays, he says more shelters for stray dogs are crucial.

"I would say controlled adoption is an answer. This would give strays food security and take animals off the streets to a safer space," says Gorthy.

"One of the biggest problems is that licensing and registration for animals is not mandatory in India. If someone gets a puppy and kills it after five days nobody will know what happened to the pet. So there should be a kind of count or registration to prevent animal cruelty," he says.

Gorthy's entry into the pet market has been timely. There aren't very many companies supplying services and products for pets. He also saw that Indians were more willing to turn pet parents. "I saw a shift in their mentality so I thought it was an appropriate time to enter that space," he says.

Gorthy set up Petpal in 2016. The company's monthly sales are in the range of ₹12-15 lakh. He is buzzing with ideas like the introduction of dog walking, dog sitting and dog day care. When, for instance, people go off on a business trip they can leave their pet in a safe environment and pick it up on their return.

Now Gorthy has drawn up more plans for the future. Petpal is in the process of building a platform to support crowdfunding for activists, NGOs and animal shelters. The company has tied up with over 50 NGOs so that they can run



Srivatsava Gorthy with his dogs

Petpal is building a platform to support crowdfunding for activists, NGOs and animal shelters. It has tied up with over 50 NGOs.

animal campaigns on Petpal's platform.

Among the NGOs with whom Petpal has forged ties is the We Love Animals Foundation. Then there are dedicated individuals like Dr Anju Bhattacharya who runs a shelter for 33 dogs and 60 cats at Kalamb village in Raigad district of Maharashtra. Bhattacharya feeds another 50 dogs and cats from a village in the vicinity and different parts of Mumbai. She also oversees vaccinations and sterilization of street dogs and cats, treatment of sick and injured animals and adoption of healthy pups and kittens. The monthly bill for the shelter works out to around ₹40,000-50,000 which covers food, medicines, shampoo, tick-flea powder, and overheads. The Petpal platform offers her just the right opportunity to worry less about the future.

Meanwhile, the We Love Animals Foundation runs programmes like feeding strays, fostering animals and providing medical aid, sterilization, vaccination, adoption and so on. The trust covers Mumbai with the hope it will eventually become a cruelty-free city. The foundation is in dire need of funds for expansion.

"Petpal has two priorities, compassion and education. I am at a very early stage now but tomorrow if I get funding, I want to reach out to many more strays," says Gorthy. ■

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A family on the long walk back to their village

Migrants in the mirror

Where do we go from here?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN migrant workers in millions swamped TV screens, becoming a story as big as the pandemic itself, there were many images to unsettle the conscience of fellow Indians. You could have your pick from desperate crowds at bus terminals; famished children with plastic bottles for shoes trudging along highways; people stuffed into trucks like slave labour; pregnant women walking hundreds of kilometres; people dying in road accidents and on railway tracks.

Post-reforms India, all caught up in preening itself, didn't seem so sophisticated and globalized any longer. Suddenly, also visible in the mirror now were very poor people who had no rights, no homes, no healthcare, no food and the bare minimum of clothing.

It has been a distressing sight. Where have they come from all at once? How is it that they have remained invisible in cities for so long?

"This is the reality. This is how people live. People working in cities have very little," says Somvati unemotionally. She works as a housemaid, but she used to be employed on construction sites. Her husband, who had a job in a garment factory in Gurugram, was run over by a speeding SUV some years ago.

One of her sons has learnt to cut hair and the other is a plumber. They have wives and children too. A third son lives in the village in Uttar Pradesh on the acre or so of tillable land that they own. The family seriously considered walking the 300 km to their village, but didn't because state borders were sealed.

Similarly, millions of workers have been desperately seeking the familiarity and relative security of their villages — their lives as migrants in cities and better-off rural areas having collapsed. They have been trying to get onto trains and buses, hitch rides or just walk hundreds of kilometres.

Migrant workers account for the majority of the Indian workforce. They are crucial to keeping the wheels of the economy moving, being employed in factories, construction sites, shops, offices, hotels, salons — and as agricultural labour as well in states where rural labour is hard to find.

But despite their importance, little is known about them or where they come from. There has been no serious effort to understand their hopes and aspirations and make them a formal part of a modern economy.

Inadequate laws govern their employment and these, too, are sketchily implemented, if at all. They remain, therefore, at the mercy of people who pay them and are compelled to accept wages and work conditions not dissimilar to being in bondage.

Incidents in the past two months have underlined their unequal status. They

have been stopped from going home, bundled into camps, denied their wages and allowed to starve. Those caught walking back have been brutally beaten by security forces. Some have been sprayed with chemicals in an effort to 'sanitize' them. By contrast Indians living abroad have been brought to India on special flights in a national effort sponsored by the Union government and widely advertised.

Such inequities have jolted India like never before. The exodus has resulted in surplus labour in rural areas to which the migrants have returned and a deficit in the cities. It is an unhappy imbalance because the main reason for migration is the lack of opportunities in villages.

Some workers have stayed back because employers have taken care of them. Others have wanted to collect pending wages and hold on to jobs. But the number of people leaving has been significant. A survey done in Gujarat showed that more than two million wanted to return — twice the number of migrant workers earlier estimated to be in the state.

Bringing them back to cities and industrial centres will now be the task of governments and employers. The sooner they return the better because manufacturing activities as also services will continue to languish in their absence.

On a bigger canvas, going beyond enticements to return, far-reaching reforms are required. The pandemic's disruptions should be the occasion for working out the modalities of social security and formalizing the role of migrant workers so that their rights are better protected.

There has to be a clearer understanding of the complexities of migration and the needs of people leaving rural areas. They deserve to be integrated into the processes of urbanization instead of merely being used for their labour.

WILL MIGRANTS RETURN?

Migrant workers go back to their villages for the sowing season each year in June. But this year the circumstances are different. They have left a month earlier and those who return will most likely delay the journey back.

"The different thing this time is the way the lockdown was done and the indignity heaped on migrant workers. I don't think any migrant worker ever thought that the Indian train would stop. This has been a huge shock. I mean, trains have never stopped in 150 years," says Professor Chinmay Tumbe of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad.

"In the past, there have been industry-specific slowdowns and recession, but transport was available so migrant workers would go back and return when things got better," explains Tumbe. "This time, what you see is a psychological shock. They would be scarred and a few must have made up their minds never to return. But the bulk of them will return. They could perhaps postpone their return. They would like to see whether it's safe to come back."

Despite the increase in funds for the rural employment guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) there isn't employment in rural areas to sustain the population that is going back to villages. The scheme envisages manual labour in digging ponds and making roads. A cook or a shop attendant or a factory hand is unsuited to such work. Payments under the scheme have always been a problem. On the other hand, labour scarcity in urban areas will push up wages. These two factors would combine to draw migrant workers back to urban areas.

Migration to newer areas is also a possibility, especially those where they feel they might be safer and better treated. States like Kerala and Telangana have already set better standards of their own, realizing that they cannot do without migrant workers. In Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party government was good to them, but the same can't be said of employers.

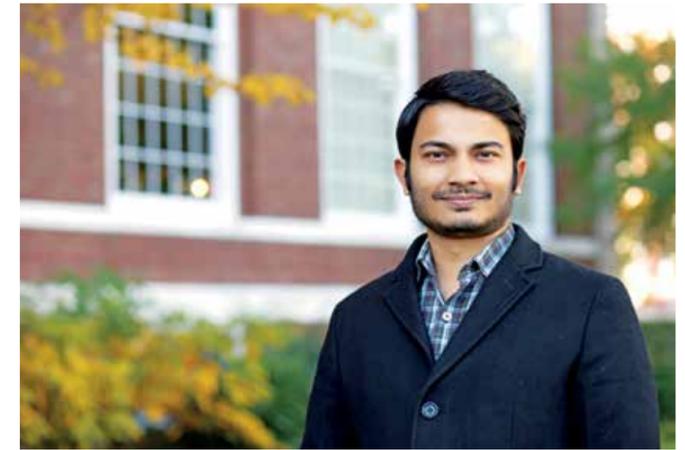
Says Tumbe: "What may change is that newer migration corridors could open up. Workers may say, Delhi has been cruel to me, let me try some other place. Typically, during shocks, migration corridors do change and new corridors often come up. Most workers will return, many of them might choose different destinations and maybe new migration networks will come up."

SOCIAL SECURITY

The need for social security was never more greatly felt than during recent months. With the lockdown coming on top of a weak economy, workers suddenly found themselves out of jobs with nothing to fall back on. It is almost certain now that the issue of social security will have to be addressed. It will have to be made accessible to people who are on the move.

It has already been decided to implement 'One Nation One Ration Card' but it is necessary to go beyond food to make healthcare, housing and education accessible anywhere in the country.

"I think one of the things we will see this year is a huge public movement for



'I think one of the things we will see this year is a huge public movement for social security. Ideas like universal basic income are going to get traction.'

Chinmay Tumbe, IIM Ahmedabad

social security. Ideas like universal basic income are going to get traction. I think everyone is on board on basic income. It is important that there is portability of social security because then you can access welfare services anywhere in India," says Tumbe.

Rajiv Khandelwal, co-founder and executive director of Aajeevika Bureau, an NGO, which has been a frontrunner in taking up the rights of migrant workers, says there can be no substitute for universalization of social benefits. Cities and industries should also be made responsible for ensuring these benefits are delivered.

"There should be universalization. That means that workers in cities, regardless of status, should have access to essential services, which include ration shops, healthcare, subsidized housing, water, education. All social protection must be universalized and not have domicile-based entry barriers, which is what is happening," says Khandelwal.

"Now a person with a ration card from Odisha will not get rations in Gurugram and will probably pay ₹32 per kg for wheat. Given the conditions in which workers live in cities, the appallingly low wages, it is essential that people are offered public provisioning and it should be universal in nature," he stresses.

"Public provisioning should not be seen as just a responsibility, which is optional. There should be liability for cities and industries to provide services. Pay them poorly if you will but subsidize their healthcare and food and ensure they live well. That's what I would like to emphasize," says Khandelwal.

Khandelwal believes it is important to secure wages. As has happened in the current lockdown, workers who aren't paid have nothing to fall back on and are completely helpless because employers have not kept commitments or the economy at large has failed.

Explains Khandelwal: "Loss of wages for people who are informally employed, who are daily-wagers, means loss of food for survival. So to secure wages is really critical and there are two ways of doing it. One, make sure that when wages get lost on account of cheating and fraud by contractors and businesses, people have access to justice so that they can claim their wages. Second, when people become unemployed, as in the case of this lockdown, then they have a basic income security that helps them stay afloat."

IMPROVING CITIES

A national effort is needed to improve cities. They should have better infrastructure and services with access that is more equal. Urbanization has fallen short if workers contributing to the economies of cities haven't been given their rights as citizens and absorbed with dignity.

"I would start by upgrading our cities to be inclusive. It is more easily done because cities have money and industries have money. It is the failure of urban

governance that is leading to this mass expulsion of people. They don't get counted in cities," says Khandelwal.

"Ahmedabad has five million workers. But there are another one million migrant workers (a recent estimate is two million) who have come from Rajasthan, MP, Bihar, UP and so on but they are not part of the five million. They are an uncared people that urban governance does not provide for. It doesn't give them shelter, water, transportation, it just kind of omits them in planning and allocation."

REGISTERING WORKERS

Before workers can be given their rights they have to be enumerated. Registering them is essential but a challenge for several reasons. Employers want cheap labour and give employment on terms that suit them. Workers obviously want a better deal, but also like flexibility because it allows them to keep the village as home and the city as the place they come to earn money and leave when they choose.

But, as the current crisis has shown, registration is important. The question which remains is how it should be done. Labour contractors and employers could be made responsible for registering workers. Perhaps self-registration by workers could be more effective and less daunting. Then again it may be better



'It should be self-registration. It means people should be asked to come forward and register themselves. It should be a more inclusive environment.'

Rajiv Khandelwal, co-founder Aajeevika Bureau

for home states to do the registration at the source itself.

At any rate it is important for states to identify their migrant workers and know where they are going to find employment. Some efforts in this direction have already been made in bilateral understandings between states such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha. But a national approach is required.

Khandelwal says: "It should not be forced registration. It should be self-registration. It means people should be asked to come forth and register themselves. It should be a more inclusive environment and not a statutory surveillance situation. Registration must be combined with a social security offering."

He prefers registration at the source so "there is some sense of how many people are migrating, where to, with whom, under what terms of remuneration and so on". A record at the destination state is also important, but since employers are unlikely to do it wholeheartedly, self-registration would work better.

Tumbe says registration would be "a great thing to have". But he cautions against trying to register each and every worker, saying putting together such a record would perhaps not be practical and there would be challenges in keeping it up to date. Giving workers benefits would be a better way."

"If you provide welfare services you will in any case get the data. You will



Migrant workers queue for buses out of Delhi

automatically get to know how many people interstate are using those welfare services. It will give you the flow and distribution of the number of migrant workers and you will get to know from where the workers are," says Tumbe.

"To register each and every one may not be the smartest thing. There is a compliance cost. In the construction sector they registered workers and after a few years they realized the registration was not up to date. It can also easily descend into a rent-seeking racket when you have to register to get access to certain services," says Tumbe.

Registration at the point of destination, says Tumbe, could result in "one more layer of bureaucracy" and could lead to the exploitation of workers, especially those who might be new to a city.

"A better way is to create knowledge and awareness that you can access health benefits, rations and insurance anywhere in India by maybe just using an Aadhaar card," he says.

INTERSTATE COUNCIL

There is little doubt that states need to coordinate and get better at sharing information. But for them to do so a viable mechanism has to be found. An interstate council on migration of workers could be the answer but there are question marks over how it could function successfully.

"I think more clarity will come over this with One Nation One Ration Card. It will be the primary task of this hypothetical interstate council. The council would have to work out the compensation to states. If receiving states are going to provide welfare services what should be the formula?" says Tumbe.

"If Biharis are going to move to Maharashtra then how much should Maharashtra pay and how much should Bihar pay for the welfare of Bihari workers in Maharashtra? You need a council for fiscal coordination. Once there is clarity on it 'one ration card' will be much more of a reality," he says.

Khandelwal believes for an interstate council to work it has to be mandated through federal legislation. That way it would be binding on the states to cooperate on sending and receiving workers.

"Because of political differences our states operate like countries. Look at how UP pushed back its own people. I think there is need for a broader legislative sanction for interstate cooperation. It cannot be discretionary. The Interstate

Migrant Workers Act's scope can be hugely widened to include the responsibilities of sending and receiving states," he says.

LAWS EXIST, BUT...

In the current situation, where migrant workers are losing employment and are being denied wages, there do not seem to be any laws to protect their rights. The reality is that they are covered under the Interstate Migrant Workmen's Act of 1979.

This law exists in conjunction with other laws such as the Bonded Labour Abolition Act, 1976, the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 and the Minimum Wages Act. There is also the Employees Compensation Act in the event of accidents and injuries.

Professor K.R. Shyam Sundar, who is an expert on labour and teaches at XLRI, the management school in Jamshedpur, says laws are not being implemented because migrant workers have no voice and they have no presence in the organized trade unions.

Shyam Sundar says: "Migrant workers are footloose and mobile in nature and, being in small batches, come under the control of the labour contractor. We have no data but it is safe to say that not even 10 percent of interstate migrant workers have been unionized. They may be unionized in the construction industry or the utilities sector or in manufacturing. But if you take interstate migrant workers as a category, union coverage is very small. I wouldn't be surprised if it's just five percent."

Construction workers as a category are better represented. Labour forums and luminaries like Justice Krishna Iyer have taken up their cause. The Building and Other Construction Workers Act seeks to protect their interests. But they too haven't been given their due. A cess collected for their benefit under the Act and running into perhaps ₹40,000 crore or more nationally hasn't been utilized.

"The Supreme Court has been hearing petitions since 2009 and has been asking states to constitute boards under the Building and Other Construction Workers Act and use the cess that's collected under this Act. But till 2019 it hasn't happened. Exasperated, the Supreme Court has given final orders to the Ministry of Labour asking for a status report," says Shyam Sundar.



'Employers and governments have been creating informal employment by outsourcing, Almost 40 percent of interstate migrant workers are actually working in government projects.'

K.R. Shyam Sundar, XLRI, Jamshedpur

"These workers would also have been covered under the Unorganised Social Security Act. It also provides for registration, issuance of smart cards, etc. Nothing has been done," he says.

The Interstate Migrant Workmen's Act has several flaws, but it also has several interesting protective provisions which haven't been implemented. For instance, it provides for equal pay for migrants and the employees of the principal employer. Such employees would be locals and it puts migrants on a par with them.

It provides for a displacement allowance of around 50 percent of the wages, which has to be paid by the contractor at the time of employment. The displacement allowance is non-refundable. It is also the responsibility of the contractor to ensure that wages are paid on time.

Says Shyam Sundar: "It also provides for suitable stay of the workers during the period of employment because most workers go to construction sites for maybe six to eight months. So those who work in public spaces are to be provided suitable and decent shelter. It enjoins upon the contractor to provide medical facilities, safety, equipment and so on."

Shyam Sundar explains with the importance of organized trade unions waning and labour departments lacking in authority, outsourcing of labour has grown. This has resulted in rights of migrant workers not being protected.

"Employers and governments have been creating informal employment in supply chains, by outsourcing, labour contracting and so on. Almost 40 percent of interstate migrant workers are actually working in government projects. So, on the one hand they advocate the welfare of unorganized workers and on the other hand they breed informality in the unorganized sector," says Shyam Sundar.

Khandelwal sees a design in such arrangements. Migration happens because of distress and rural areas have been allowed to sink so as to generate cheap labour which doesn't have the capacity to stand up for its rights.

"I think our industrialization, our urban story, needed cheap labour from rural areas. I say with conviction that a model of growth that is from cheap labour will encourage migration," says Khandelwal.

"It will create conditions in rural areas so that people are unable to stay there and the agrarian economy collapses. People have been pushed out and pulled in to provide cheap labour."

The coronavirus pandemic has put the plight of migrant workers in India in perspective like never before. Their departure from cities has dented the economy. Equally, the images of impoverished and abandoned workers and their families fleeing to their villages has hurt India's image in the global community. The time for much needed reform has arrived. ■



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Restaurants brace for change

Many ideas, but the sector needs help

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

IN 2018, Anusha Pinto and Vijay Giri started Fullyfilled, a small restaurant serving shawarmas and momos in Bengaluru's posh Indiranagar area. They invested their personal funds. Fullyfilled was doing well and it was close to breaking even. Then, on March 18, Pinto and Giri decided to temporarily shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

On video call from their home in Bengaluru, the couple explained that it made sense to close. "It's about economies of scale. It's difficult to make shawarmas in small batches. Buying chicken in small amounts is expensive," said Pinto. Their small restaurant can seat about 12 people.

Pinto, 33, is an independent consultant and works as a brand strategist. Giri, 38, is with Discovery Channel. They had been paying part of the restaurant's expenditure from their salaries and were hopeful that their fledgling enterprise would become financially viable soon. Now the wait will get longer.

Restaurants that chose to stay open during the lockdown for deliveries did some business but are still in the red. Deliveries have not made up for lost revenue. "People are sceptical about ordering food. And people are trying to spend less on eating out," said Bappaditya Malik who runs Culinaire, a Thai and Chinese restaurant with four branches in Delhi.

The restaurant business in India is struggling to survive. The industry adds value to India's economy. It creates a huge number of jobs and is an important customer for farmers because of the fruits, vegetables and meats that it buys.

"We employ 7.3 million people directly in restaurants. This number excludes delivery boys, security guards and housekeeping boys," said Anurag Katriar, president of the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI). Established in 1982, NRAI has over 500,000 member restaurants.

NRAI pegs the annual turnover of the industry at ₹4,25,000 crore.

"I think this sector will shrink by 40 percent at least," says Katriar. "As many as 30 to 40 percent of the workforce could lose jobs."

The ₹20 lakh crore economic stimulus package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman completely overlooked the restaurant industry. The only consolation is that since some restaurants qualify as MSMEs they can utilize the 20 percent top-up on existing loans to restart their businesses post the lockdown. But this provision



Fullyfilled, a small eatery in Bengaluru which had to close temporarily



Anusha Pinto and Vijay Giri, owners of Fullyfilled

applies to only those with existing loans.

In a virtual meeting with the finance minister on May 21, the NRAI put forth five requests. "First, declare the pandemic a *force majeure* so that our rent liabilities don't accumulate. Second, we want input tax credit on GST since that adds to our costs by 8-10 percent. We can't afford it. Third, we want a more equitable e-commerce policy

in food delivery," Katriar said.

Food aggregators, he said, offer platform driven discounts which are funded by restaurants. To deliver they take commissions as high as 25 percent of the bill and they do not share customer data with restaurants. The conflict with food aggregators is not specific to the lockdown, but it matters now more than ever when earnings are so low. Food aggregators should not make money at the expense of restaurants.

Restaurants are also covered under the Employees' State Insurance Scheme. Katriar said that they have requested the government access to that corpus to pay salaries of those covered under the ESIC Act. The final request of the restaurant industry is for working capital in the form of loans from banks and a little moratorium to repay that money.

The business of running restaurants is an unforgiving one. Profit margins are low. A mere five percent margin is considered healthy. Restaurants are lucky if they break even in a year or two. It takes longer to see a return on the capital investment.

A DESI BUSINESS: Small independent restaurants become local institutions where everyone knows everyone. Started with personal savings and passion by middle class entrepreneurs, they expand due to quality of food and service.

When Malik's father opened Culinaire in Greater

Kailash in 1996, it was just a delivery kitchen. Back then, there were only three or four restaurants serving Thai food and people would come all the way from West Delhi to Greater Kailash in South Delhi to eat from Culinaire in their cars.

As business grew, they rented a small shop in Greater Kailash that seats about 20-22 people. The branches in Kailash Colony, Rajouri Garden and Gurugram opened later. Culinaire runs a cloud kitchen in South Extension II also. But these days, the restaurant chain is doing just 10-15 percent of business. They get about 50-60 orders across all branches and just 18-20 at the Greater Kailash branch.

"Till the time you have business, it's fine. But when you don't, all you see are bills to pay," said Sanjiv Kalia, 49, who started Cakes N Stuff in Sector 8 in Chandigarh in 1999. His father had invested in the bakery. Their takeaway joint is a one-stop neighbourhood shop for cakes, breads, sandwiches and burgers.

Most of their revenue comes from cakes which people order for birthdays and parties, said Kalia. But since public gatherings are down to a bare minimum, they don't get many orders. During the lockdown, a good day sees 15 percent of the usual business. But on most days, it is just five to 10 percent.

Owners of restaurants acknowledge their commitment to their staff. Since Fullyfilled closed, Pinto and Giri paid their two chefs from their own salaries. "We are able to pay them because we have full-time jobs, but on a restaurant's profit margins, it would have been very difficult," Pinto said.

At Culinaire and Cakes N Stuff also, all chefs and waiting staff were paid full salaries for March and 70-80 percent of salaries for April. "We want to look after our staff. As of now, we haven't had to lay off anyone. But we will have to do it because we don't see any improvement. If I have to run the unit, I have to reduce my costs," admitted Malik, who employs 45 people.

There is rent to be paid and it's up to individual landlords to give concessions. Pinto and Giri have convinced their landlord to give them a 50 percent waiver for April. But Kalia has not been successful.

RADICAL MAKEOVER: For restaurants, nothing is the same anymore. New hygiene protocols have been put in place to make sure that the food is safe. At Culinaire, each chef's temperature is checked and noted before they enter the kitchen. Kitchen counters are sanitized every day with a mix of bleaching powder and water.

Cakes N Stuff has just three to four chefs instead of seven. Since restaurants are operating at 50 percent of their staff strength, kitchens have become less crowded and chefs are able to maintain a distance of six feet.

But supply chains have been disrupted and restaurants are unable to source all ingredients. Malik said that though fruits and vegetables have been readily available, there was a lot of confusion over whether poultry was an 'essential' item or not. Even now, lamb isn't available and if it is, it's not affordable. The poultry vendor for Fullyfilled also shut shop when the lockdown was announced.

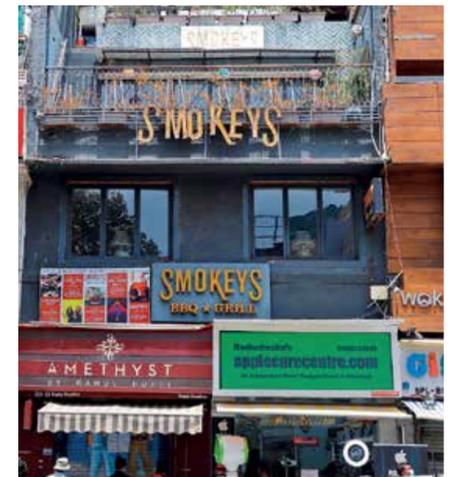
Restaurants, which are bulk consumers, are also buying less. "On an average, we buy 15 kg carrots per day. Now we buy just two to three kg," said Malik. That is likely to have a domino effect on producers.



Sanjiv Kalia's Cakes N Stuff is a family-run business



Anurag Katriar



Restaurants face bleak times for a while

Restaurants will opt for digital ordering so that people don't touch the menu. Masks and gloves are mandatory and temperature checks are the norm.

"The big difference between us and other industries is that we deal in perishables, so extras go down the drain. Clothes will not get spoiled, you can still sell them later. One company had 100,000 litres of beer in its inventory when the lockdown was announced. All of that went to waste," said Katriar.

Masks and gloves are now mandatory. Temperature checks for everyone have become the norm. Restaurants are likely to opt for digital ordering so that people don't have to touch the menu. They will have to test their employees for COVID-19 frequently and possibly put the information out in the public domain so that customers feel confident. If restaurants reduce

seating capacity to ensure physical distance, their table turnover will have to increase.

"We'll look for people who can multitask and do several things. We'll have to become a less people-centric business," said Katriar. He is also CEO and MD of DeGustibus Hospitality. The company has 27 small and large operations in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru. Their restaurants shut on March 18.

During the lockdown, NRAI leveraged its kitchens to serve as many as 55 lakh free meals in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Coimbatore. In the first week of May, NRAI started the R4R programme (Rise for Restaurants). Customers can buy vouchers for member restaurants and use them later when restaurants open. The money will be used to pay salaries.

Katriar said that the government might allow restaurants to open around the same time as schools. "Only when we arrive at that sense of safety, will people feel that things have improved," he said.

On May 6, Pinto and Giri said that they planned to open Fullyfilled for a few days to test the waters. Kalia also hoped that business would pick up soon. "It's very easy to say that we'll shut shop. I don't want to do that," said Malik. ■



**Healthy
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Spreading Happiness and Wellness!

Over the years, Himalaya has actively promoted the health and well-being of individuals across all age groups. Our campaign 'Healthy India, Happy India' focuses on healthcare by conducting comprehensive health camps in rural, semi-urban, and remote areas. Our recent camp in Mawphlang village, East Khasi Hills, in association with SYNJUK (Ka Synjuk Ki Hima Arliang Wah Umiam Mawphlang Welfare Society), gave the local community access to specialized healthcare services, such as Dental, Ophthalmology, Gynecology, Pediatrics, Orthopedics, and General screening. Awareness sessions were conducted on health and hygiene, and free medicines were distributed during the camp. Through this initiative, we reached out to over 1000 individuals. Similar camps have also been conducted in Rajasthan and in more than 378 schools in Bengaluru.

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

COVID and the communists



**DELHI
DARBAR**
SANJAYA BARU

HEALTH activists and concerned citizens have tried for a long time to place healthcare and public health on the national policy agenda of mainstream political parties, with little success. The only connection between health and politics in India has been the link between politicians in power and private medical colleges and hospitals. That is not a particularly elevating story to tell.

A decade ago the Manmohan Singh government launched the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) scheme as the first real national-level policy intervention in healthcare. Both programmes have had limited success. In New Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government set up Mohalla Clinics and thereby introduced one more innovation at a local level. Inspired by US President Barack Obama's Obamacare initiative, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched an insurance-based healthcare support programme, Ayushman Bharat, which is yet to make its mark in improving the health and medical care system.

Despite all these experiments, after COVID-19 hit India the entire world is talking about what everyone calls the 'Kerala Model'. From the *New York Times* to London's *Economist*, the Western media has suddenly discovered that Kerala has got something right! The 'Kerala Model' is many-sided and has been commented upon for a long time. The focus has mainly been on Kerala's investment in education and health and its credible performance on human development indicators. An important dimension to the success of the Kerala model in health is the decentralization of public health, with panchayats empowered to administer primary health centres (PHCs). Prime Minister Modi recently advocated something like 'gram swaraj' in health, with village-level self-reliance. Kerala has tried that at the primary level, though for tertiary care people still go to the cities.

The most exhaustive research on Kerala's development model has been done by researchers at

Thiruvananthapuram's Centre for Development Studies, and this goes back to the early 1970s. The downside of the Kerala model has always been the inability of the state economy to generate the jobs required to absorb the large pool of educated young women and men. However, this constraint was dealt with by Kerala exporting its human resources talent to the rest of the country and, in substantial numbers, to West Asia. Indeed, the annual inflow of dollar remittances from West Asia has helped Kerala by pumping purchasing power into the state. The development of tourism also helped Kerala sustain growth.

The upshot is that Kerala's human development-based growth was sustained by the monetization of

healthcare. Though both the erstwhile USSR and China regressed into wrong policies, they have both been associated with people-centred healthcare for a long time. China's experiment with Barefoot Doctors inspired global attention in the 1970s. However, while post-Mao China slid back into more privately funded healthcare, Cuba remained steadfast in its commitment to public healthcare.

In India, the private corporate sector has taken over not just medical care but also policy thinking on medical care. With almost Pavlovian instinct, the Indian media reached out to familiar faces from the world of private corporate healthcare to hold forth on Covid care when none of them had any experience. During the first few weeks of the Covid



Kerala's Minister of Health and Social Welfare, K.K. Shailaja, took the lead in battling COVID-19

lockdown the media was parading the likes of Medanta's Naresh Trehan, Manipal's Devi Shetty and doctors from Apollo, Max and other corporate hospitals as if they were the best informed on public health and a pandemic caused by an unknown virus. It took days before the likes of Dr Jayaprakash Muliyl of Vellore surfaced on national media.

From social media responses it seemed as if many educated Indians were discovering for the first time that when it comes to healthcare the communists had done something different, and better. Interestingly, though, while the US media has been

the state's investment in education and skill-building. Its relatively good healthcare record is both on account of public investment in primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare, as well as growing private investment, especially in tertiary care.

The interesting fact that this renewed focus on the Kerala model brings out is that it mirrors to an extent the experience of two communist states — Cuba and Vietnam. Cuba has been at the forefront of healthcare for a long time. Early in the Covid saga, Cuba welcomed a luxury liner full of Covid afflicted that was denied anchor along the United States coast. Cuba willingly treated all the inhabitants of that ship. Cuba went further. It sent its doctors to many African countries, being the only country apart from China to extend Covid cooperation beyond borders.

It is not a coincidence that all the three examples of relative success with Covid treatment — Cuba, Kerala and Vietnam — happen to have governments run by communist parties. The communists have for long been associated with a public focus in

willing to write about Kerala and Vietnam, it has remained largely quiet on Cuba, the neighbour with a better healthcare record. Too close for comfort?

The national media's ignorance till recently about Kerala's healthcare model is surprising given the fact that across the country most qualified nurses come from Kerala. Attending to the elders in my family at hospitals in Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai and Coimbatore I found my familiarity with Malayalam always took me a long way in getting immediate attention from harassed nurses. All I had to do was say "Naadu evidey?" (Where's home?) and there would be a smile, a reply and helpful attention.

Kerala has not just helped itself with its focus on healthcare, it has helped Indians across the country through the dedicated service of Malayalee nurses. No state that has been a trusted political base of the BJP has so far done anything on the healthcare front worth admiring and emulating. Not surprisingly, the only idea the BJP has been able to come up with was Ayushman Bharat! ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and Distinguished Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses in New Delhi.

Your post-COVID life



TECH TALES

KIRAN KARNIK

DESPITE the many divergences on issues related to the pandemic, there is one on which there is a consensus: the new after-Covid (AC) world will be rather different from the before-Covid (BC) days. Entertainment and partying will be mainly in homes; pubbing and dining out in restaurants will be rare. Few will go to cinema halls and theatres and popular sports events will take place amidst empty stands, without in-stadia spectators. Malls and shops will be bereft of crowds. Mass public transport will carry only a few at a time, and individual transportation will see a boom.

Work is already seeing a transformation, with work-from-home (WFH) and e-meetings (audio and video) now being part of the routine. This will only increase as organizations compute the possible saving on real estate (space) and overheads as a result of having fewer employees going to office. Increasing use of e-meetings, combined with fears of contracting infection during travel, will mean that out-station work trips will see a big decrease. Organizations will welcome this too, as another cost-saving measure.

Education, at all levels, will make much greater use of online courses and tools like virtual laboratories. Face to face interaction — both student-teacher and amongst students — will be limited. Coaching classes and training too will move to greater use of online methods. It is yet early to assess the impact of this in terms of learning outcomes and, given the varying extent of net reliability and speed in various circumstances, on equity and inclusion in education. Yet, there is general agreement that online will be a major means of delivery of education.

A larger, more intrusive role for government is likely, with surveillance and loss of privacy being accepted as a price to pay for ensuring good health. Thus, continuous tracking through location apps, contact mapping, and real-time monitoring of health parameters through one's mobile or a wearable device can be foreseen as the scenario AC. More powerful and more centralized governments are a likely outcome, around the world.

This general view about leisure, work, education and governance in the AC era is a widely held one.

As of now, it does seem the most likely scenario. Yet, technology and human nature may well up-end this. WFH is fine in the short term, but is it sustainable, given small homes with many occupants, endless distractions and interruptions — both physical and in e-connectivity? Will productivity suffer further without the unplanned, informal interaction so common in an office? Will learning among students be affected by the lack of peer contact and the human touch of a teacher's actual presence?

Will people just get used to the ever-present danger of Covid, as they are of TB or dengue or a host of other health threats? Will this make them rebel against tracking and surveillance? Will the social animal in humans overpower mental fears of the virus? If so, will we again see long queues at

themselves, even if it means some danger of death (by bullet or by virus).

In this "black swan" scenario, it is not just behavioural factors that will play a role, but also technology. For example, a simple non-intrusive test (based on, say, perspiration or even breath) for Covid symptoms — like the infra-red thermometer, but far more reliable — may give people the necessary reassurance to enter a crowded theatre or station. Or, we may all change our couture and begin to wear some simple, light and inexpensive version of today's PPE (personal protective equipment) used by medical and other frontline workers. This will enable us to go anywhere and mix with anyone without feeling endangered. Such tech innovations may help regain the social lives we had, as also revert to aggregation-based work and

education environments (offices and classrooms). Societal preferences will determine whether this is a regressive step or a return to happy times.

The bigger tech change, though, may be something more fundamental: the way the country is governed. WFH has demonstrated quite conclusively that a great deal (if not all) work done in offices — i.e., excluding manufacturing, agriculture, mining and the like — can be done remotely, without assembling people at one location. The government has functioned well (in fact, in over-drive) through e-meetings and e-connectivity. The prime minister, other ministers and officials have worked amongst themselves and with others mostly without assembling together. This has brought home more powerfully than ever the feasibility of a dispersed mode of functioning.

Simultaneously, the health challenges have indicated the need to decentralize government functions. Already, it is clear that decisions have to be based on a district-level assessment, and it is now obvious that even a district is too large an entity. Cities are in a vastly different position than rural areas in the same district, and within a city there may be safe and containment zones. This highlights the desirability of decentralization.

Technology enables dispersal and decentralization of work. This, accompanied by a conscious devolution of power to not just states, but to the third level of government (as defined in the Constitution — panchayats and municipal bodies) would revolutionize governance. Instead of the expected big, all-powerful, centralized government that most expect, will this black swan scenario be realized? This may well be the biggest fall-out of Covid and a feature of the AC world. ■

Kiran Karnik is an independent strategy and public policy analyst. His recent books include *Evolution: Decoding India's Disruptive Tech Story* (2018) and *Crooked Minds: Creating an Innovative Society* (2016).



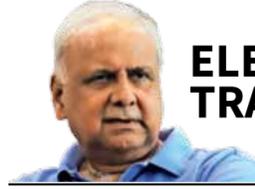
Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta
Masks, PPE and infra-red thermometers are now a familiar sight

A larger, more intrusive role for government is likely, with surveillance and loss of privacy being accepted as a price to pay for ensuring good health.

theatres, restaurants that are packed, and jostling crowds at airports and railway stations?

Across the world, the general view is that the State will be more dominant in our lives. Greater numbers of people now seem to support a bigger role for government in all aspects of our life. In this century, first privacy and many personal freedoms were traded for greater security (against terrorism); now, it seems that they will be further traded for health. Yet, who knows, here too there may be a reversal as people decide that they want a larger space for

Lives or livelihoods?



ELECTION TRACKER

JAGDEEP CHHOKAR

When a society laments the loss of an economy more than the loss of human life, it doesn't need a virus, it's already sick. — Anon.

AS the world continues to grapple with the coronavirus and lockdown fatigue sets in, how to end the lockdown is being widely discussed. In some countries, there appears to be considerable demand that people should "get to work" again. This opinion, however, is not uncontested.

India is no exception. The debate here has an interesting trajectory. As people started to come to terms with the shock of a complete lockdown with only four hours' notice, the enormity of its impact started sinking in. To begin with, hardly anyone thought of those living on the margins of the formal economy: the daily wagers, informal contract labourers (who actually don't have any contracts), part-time workers, those who buy and sell perishable goods every day, young men working in roadside food stalls (*dhabas*) on highways, migrant labour, construction workers, women workers, widows, low-income senior citizens, the disabled and the disadvantaged. As the lockdown got extended, those in the informal economy started feeling the pinch.

The lockdown was announced on March 24. This was followed by the announcement of a ₹1.7 lakh crore relief package "for the poor to help them fight the battle against the coronavirus," stated Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her press conference. "Today's measures are intended at reaching out to the poorest of the poor, with food and money in their hands, so that they do not face difficulties in buying essential supplies and meeting essential needs," she said.

The debate on the adequacy of the relief package started almost immediately. The package was computed to be between 0.6 to 0.8 percent of GDP. As expected, most conservative economists seemed to approve of the package whereas those of the opposite persuasion felt it was highly inadequate.

Some critics felt that the package had just "frontloaded expenditure which had already been planned" and therefore what seemed to be ₹1.7 lakh

crore was actually much less. One economist said, "This is just a very small first step, and it is clearly extremely inadequate given the magnitude of the problem." Someone called it "a step in the right direction, but inadequate" and said it gives "an exaggerated impression of what is being done".

A major concern stemmed from observations from the field that "a significant proportion of the affected population would not be able to avail of the facilities. Only those registered with the government's food welfare scheme would be able to secure benefits."

As this debate proceeded, positions started hardening. A former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India wrote unambiguously:

"... governments battling the coronavirus are having to make a gut-wrenching choice between saving lives and saving livelihoods. Stringent lockdowns restrain the spread of the disease but that comes at the cost of people losing livelihoods as



Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta
A closed mandi

economic activity shuts down. And if governments try to contain the loss of economic activity, they risk losing lives to the virus."

The novel coronavirus appears to be unique. Scientists and epidemiologists agree not enough is known about it. The uncertainty includes not knowing how the virus will behave in times to come and how long the pandemic will last. Which makes it almost impossible to draw up a definitive plan. This is what makes economists and policy analysts think of a trade-off.

The dilemma was described thus: "Managing the trade-off between lives and livelihoods in the face of this huge uncertainty must have weighed heavily on the government's mind as it decided to extend the lockdown until May 3. There are many issues to be decided and planned on the way forward."

The discussion has boiled down to the desirable level of the fiscal deficit. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003, suggests that keeping the fiscal deficit to about 3 percent is the ideal target. No government has been

able to achieve this target.

The arguments, for and against, have been clearly laid out by proponents of both positions.

One view is that "the government should err on the side of taking a fiscal risk without any preset fiscal deficit number. It should simply determine what needs to be done and borrow to that extent, acting as if there were no fiscal constraint at all. In other words, act as per the dictat of the now famous three words — 'whatever it takes'". It boils down to "Never mind if the step takes the fiscal deficit a notch higher due to muddled accounting."

The opposing view maintains that there "is a fine line between being aggressively proactive and being perceived as reckless" and therefore, "the government (should) fix an upper bound for fiscal deficit and operate within that".

The question, in stark terms, is this: Should the lives of people be saved here and now, or should livelihoods be saved for the future for those who survive this health and economic crisis? What is left unsaid in the latter part is that there is no need to worry about those who do not, or cannot, survive, or those who die.

This obviously sounds harsh, possibly crude, but this is what the "trade-off" actually means. It is not that this has not been articulated almost similarly. Commenting on the social policies in the country, it has been said that policies which care appropriately, or adequately, for the deprived sections of society "will not be forthcoming unless we, who make these policies, stopped viewing the poor as sub-human".

"Unless policymakers have the same conception of the poor as they have of themselves — persons with rich, varied and complex needs — they will not realise the grave consequences of the material deprivations endured by the poor or show the urgency to remove them. In short, policymakers need to realise that they deal with complete human beings. Unless they are able to vividly imagine the poor as fully human, they will never design proper policies to address even their material needs."

Despite all such rationalizations, it is not really possible to fathom why some people cannot understand that saving people from dying of hunger is preferable to keeping the fiscal deficit within limits — which, in any case, is decided by the powers-that-be. This takes us back to the anonymous saying quoted at the beginning, which says that there really is no trade-off, and no choice between "saving lives" and "saving livelihoods" for the simple reason that if there are no lives, of what use will livelihoods be. This is exactly what the prime minister said in Hindi: "*Jaan hai toh jahan hai.*" ■

Jagdeep S. Chhokar is a former Professor, Dean, and Director in-charge of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A), and a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Views are personal.

Virus taught us a lesson



VILLAGE VOICES

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

THE COVID-19 crisis has shown us that crises have no borders or boundaries. They can happen anytime, anywhere and to any organization—profit, not-for-profit, public or private. This crisis has shown how vulnerable humankind is and how frightening and uncertain the future could be. It has shown us the fragility of the global economy and its political realities. It has shown us how interconnected the consequences are — a crisis affecting one organization can, among other things, cause lay-offs and move another towards bankruptcy. It has also shown us how we can cope with and endure such disasters. It has shown how leadership can or cannot work.

The coronavirus pandemic is not just a wakeup call for our health systems, our lives' priorities or our economic model but a great opportunity to change the way things are and make this world a better place. And this can happen only if we are determined to learn from the crisis and not go back to business as usual once it subsides.

For several people, the lockdown has shown how the concept of time and managing it is truly relative.

Apart from enabling one to recalibrate relationships at several levels, it has also shown that physical distancing doesn't have to make one socially distant too. A friend, whose wife was in the hospital with Severe Acute Respiratory Infection, mentioned how stressful the two weeks were. Apart from fear of the disease and its outcome, the episode showed to him how alone he felt in dealing with it by himself. Thinking about it brought questions of life, death and one's own ability or inability to cope with illness and its aftermath.

We need to rethink our life choices and reassess what we have been treating as important till now. If money, power, prestige and social status were seen as important and necessary, the crisis taught us how none of these mattered when it came to the virus. It also brought out the innate goodness of humankind and ensured that thousands of vulnerable families were supported and taken care of during the crisis. It helped one understand the importance of work that we may have ignored earlier — that of the newspaper boy, the domestic help, the janitorial teams or the housekeeping personnel in our offices.

It showed us how dependable our health personnel, police and other frontline workers are.

Apart from the larger question of how consumption patterns and lifestyle choices have shaped society, one heard anecdotes about how the Himalayas were visible from hundreds of kilometres away and how a pollution-free city felt or how roads suddenly appeared wider than one thought. It was also strange to hear the chirping of the birds and see clear blue skies in several large metropolises. What was evident was how 'fear' shaped our existence for several weeks and how the graded lifting of the lockdown brought out our civic indifference once again. Earlier one saw motorcyclists driving around with their helmets hanging from the handle bars. Now, one can see them going around with their face masks loosely draped around their necks with no

dependent the system is on the bureaucracy and its preparedness to deal with such a crisis. It showed how political leadership can be inspirational in a few states. It also demonstrated how the myopic thinking of a few chief ministers can be ruinous. It has also showed us how the State perceives its own citizens and its differential response depending on whether you're migrant labour or an NRI.

It is sad that the response till date has been based on seeing the problem as an urban one with our cities being regarded as economic centres. The system's focus on our formal economy and stimulating it with bailouts and packages stands in stark contrast to how the rural economy is seen and dealt with. While thousands of our worker class were treated as mere recipients of welfare during the crisis, it is saddening to note how they are seen as

mere cogs in the wheel of an elitist economy. It is indeed shameful that several states are more concerned with kick-starting the economy rather than assuring the labourers a sense of dignity, security and freedom of choice.

Apart from several lessons at different levels, what is evident is the way our lifestyle and consumption decisions have affected the planet. Whether it is our eating habits exposing us to more zoonotic illnesses or levels of pollution correlating to higher death rates in the cities, this is the time for us to recalibrate and shift the narrative to how we are dealing with nature, the environment and climate. We need to appreciate that science and technology are not just tools to hasten our monopoly over other species but to be used wisely in ensuring the survival of all.

It is time for us to recognize that we have no exclusive right over the planet and we need to respectfully share it with all other living organisms. As we begin to refashion our future, we need to pay attention to the fact that several millions are outside the boundaries of a digital economy and 'work from home' is still an urban-centric solution. Future solutions should revolve around reducing inequities — whether social, economic, or related to health, education or technology — and could be a great leveller if used appropriately and sensitively.

While the world awaits the discovery of a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, we need to keep our focus on ensuring a long-term, systems-driven, inclusive solution framework incorporating the planet, profits and all living organisms including people. This crisis does give hope that change is possible and it can happen fast too. What we now need to show is that the change can be reasonably permanent. And people and nations collectively can truly make this world a better place. ■

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Social distancing has come to stay

Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta

LIVING

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The Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, from November 13 to 29, is going ahead and accepting submissions

Gap year for film festivals?

Online is a temporary measure, say organizers

SAIBAL CHATTERJEE

THE COVID-19 crisis has felled the world's premier film festival, the one that draws thousands of people to the French Riviera every May and takes the celebration of the art and business of cinema to a frenzied pitch. The Croisette has fallen silent this year although Marche du Film, the Cannes Film Festival's dynamic film market, has lined up an online version in late June for the benefit of global film producers, sales agents and distributors.

The cancellation of the 73rd Cannes Film Festival — which was to run from May 12 to 23 — is a manifestation of the impact that the pandemic has had on cinema as a whole. Movie production has ground to a halt, theatres are shuttered, the release calendar of big-ticket films has gone for a toss and fans have turned to the streaming platforms for their daily fix of entertainment. Against this backdrop it is hardly surprising that film festivals are falling like nine pins or scrambling to reinvent themselves.

The Red Sea International Film Festival, which would have been Saudi Arabia's first ever such cinema showcase had it been held on schedule from March 12 to 21, pushed the launch to 2021. The Doha Film Institute's Qumra, a mentorship

programme for new independent film projects from Qatar and other parts of the world, had to be called off.

In the US, the Tribeca Film Festival in New York and the South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival were cancelled too. Also on the list of festivals that are not taking place this year is the 73rd edition of one of Europe's finest, the Locarno Film Festival.

"For independent filmmakers like me," says Pan Nalin (*Samsara, Angry Indian Goddesses*), "this scenario is really scary. You feel very lonely because the platforms that you depend upon are being hit. All the films that I've done so far have travelled around the world because of festival selections."

For Nalin's new film, *Last Film Show*, his fifth narrative feature, the writer-director mortgaged his Mumbai home. Orange Studios, a major French entity, picked up the Gujarati film and bolstered its chances of surfacing in Cannes this year. *Last Film Show*, set in a small town, is now in post-production. With cinema halls unlikely to reopen any time soon

Continued on page 32

Jean-Michel Frodon warns against embracing digital methods in a panic reaction. 'We need to be careful about this talk of a big shift in the way cinema will be watched in future.'

Continued from page 31

and the festival circuit in disarray, the producers of Nalin's film will be under pressure to release it on a streaming platform.

But French film critic and scholar Jean-Michel Frodon warns against jumping the gun and embracing digital methods in a panic reaction. "We need to be careful about this talk of a big shift in the way cinema will be watched in the future. Let us not dismiss and abandon what we really care for — cinema as we know it," he says. "We should think of digital not in terms of something that will substitute what we have, but in terms of a means to reorganize



The famed Cannes Film Festival stands cancelled



21 major festivals can be viewed at an online event this year

elements from the pre-digital era with elements that have emerged in recent times."

The organizers of the Locarno Film Festival seem to be on the same page as Frodon. Instead of going online, they have initiated Locarno 2020 — For the Future of Films to support directors whose films are stuck as a result of the pandemic. An even more ambitious digital event, We Are One: A Global Film Festival, initiated by Tribeca Enterprises, is bringing together 21 major festivals from around the world, including India's Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival, for an event that will run from May 29 to June 7. Cannes, Toronto, Berlin, Sundance, Sarajevo, Karlovy Vary and Venice are all part of the festival that will, in association with YouTube, showcase curated films for free over 10 days.

Why is this show of solidarity so important for the world's major festivals? Frodon says: "A film festival creates an ecosystem that sustains independent cinema. It is connected to film criticism and also, to a certain extent, to teaching of cinema. Film festivals keep cinema alive as an entity that isn't just market-driven. That is in danger."

Several major festivals scheduled for late 2020, events coming up in Tallinn, San Sebastian and Zurich, are going ahead with their plans and are receiving submissions. Says Tiina Lakk, director of

the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (November 13 to 29): "We are preparing for our festival as if nothing has happened. While we are optimistic, we know it is still rather tricky because we do not know what is going to happen to the festivals scheduled in September in Venice, Toronto and San Sebastian."

Lakk says that people have begun to joke that Black Nights will be "the second festival of the year after Berlinale (which was held earlier in the year) instead of being the last one in the year as it usually is". She adds: "When we opened entries in March, we got a lot of films. Then the flow stopped completely. But now it has picked up again."

The 16th Zurich Film Festival, scheduled from September 24 to October 4, is still on course. On the festival's website, ZFF artistic director Christian Jungen says: "It is important that following months of online streaming people rediscover and learn to love cinema again. The aim of ZFF this autumn is to support the comeback of the seventh art to the big screen."

A 1,000-person rule, imposed by the federal government, is in place in Switzerland until August-end. The seating capacity of ZFF's partner theatres ranges from 80 to 720, which is well within the prescribed limit for large gatherings.

Similar sentiments are behind the current plans of the San Sebastian International Film Festival (September 18 to 26). Says festival director Jose Luis Rebordinos: "If the festival can be held under normal circumstances... we want this edition to serve as an opportunity for films that have not been able to be seen at the festivals for which they were originally selected to be shown to an audience of buyers and distributors..." To this end, Zurich and San Sebastian are hosting film markets in conjunction with each.

That would be music to Frodon's ears. He is a votary of traditional methods of projecting and watching cinema. "I personally do not believe all this is vanishing as a result of the closedown of theatres and the impact of the pandemic on film festivals," he says. "Things will change for sure, but cinema in the form that we have known it since its inception will definitely survive."

All the major festivals are working towards shielding the future of cinema. Thierry Fremaux, the general delegate of the Cannes Film Festival, told an American trade daily recently: "We have decided to take this difficult situation, which is hitting everyone, as an opportunity to think of the future."

He said: "A 'festival' is a collective party, a spectacle that brings together an audience in a given location, in this case on the Croisette, in the presence of thousands of people.... Everyone understands that's impossible this year. Under the circumstances... we'll have to do something different."

One thing, says Frodon, that the current situation has driven home is that "we are all missing the film festivals". The COVID-19 outbreak, he adds, has reinforced the belief that we need film festivals in the physical world. "Nothing can replace real events attended by real people adding up to a real gathering," he asserts. ■

Comedians readily go online with a laugh

SIDIKA SEHGAL

YOU can't shut up a stand-up comedian. Faced with cancelled shows and a grim future, this creative tribe has found a way to reinvent itself during the lockdown. Without much fanfare they resurfaced on the digital medium.

Zoom is their chosen platform and they are doing what they do best — making people laugh. The themes are contemporary. There are jokes on what it's like to be home during lockdown and on WhatsApp groups that advise gentle home remedies to take on the deadly coronavirus.

After all, who doesn't want to laugh. Especially during corona times when the world outside looks bleak. Recession, job losses and a circumscribed lifestyle are staring us in the face. A bit of irrepressible humour mitigates anxiety, for a while.

Besides, comedians too have bills to pay. They are finding new ways to get around that by monetizing online comedy shows. They are finding audiences online willing to pay tickets worth ₹200-300 each for a show on a digital platform. And some of them have even got together to raise funds for NGOs who are helping vulnerable people most affected by the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Two weeks into the lockdown Anshu Mor, a 47-year-old stand-up comedian in Gurugram, did his first successful online show. He followed it up by doing over a dozen paid shows including "Just a Bad Guy" and "Mor the Merrier".

"There is a breed of artistes who are very excited right now," he says.

Comedy in digital mode is completely different. A comedian measures success by gauging his audience's reaction. Live feedback is crucial. Silence can be disconcerting. When Mor does an online show, he asks his audience to keep their sound and video on.

"I too need to hear people laugh," explains Sahil Shah. Twenty-nine-year-old Shah is a founding member of the East India Comedy collective. Keeping the sound on does mean there is background noise which could disturb the performer. Someone's child could be crying or someone could be called for dinner.

The stand-up performer also has to speak slowly during an online show since there could be a lag. "In the club, the general rule you follow is that when the crowd is laughing, you don't talk. Online, you have to wait for the last person to stop laughing because everyone on call is at the same volume," Mor explained.

But once the performer gets used to the online medium, there are benefits. They can reach wider audiences — people who always requested them to come to their city for live shows can now watch them perform. There is opportunity in such volumes, Mor says.

Plus you don't really need to step out of your house for the show or worry about logistics. "Every person who didn't get the opportunity to do a live show because a venue wasn't available, will do it



Anshu Mor, a stand-up comedian, found an interactive audience online



Kaneez Surka



Sahil Shah

A comedian measures success by his audience's reaction. Live feedback is crucial.

now because it's so easy to set it up. The digital space will get crowded," says Shah who performed his show, "Be Curfew!", online.

There is some consensus that online shows are more intimate than live shows. Shah was once doing an interactive show, talking to people and improvising jokes. When someone switched off their video, Shah speculated that it was probably to use the bathroom and cracked a few jokes around that.

"The stage makes you a celebrity. There are lights, you walk into a soundtrack. People are literally looking up to you. Online is so personal. I've had people eating dinner during online shows. It gives a completely different flavour to comedy," Mor remarked.

The downside is that people in the audience can record an online show and put it up on YouTube. Sometimes, people buy one ticket and the whole

family watches the show for the price of a ticket.

At the moment, a lot of comedians are taking recourse to jokes they had written before the coronavirus pandemic. But they agree they don't have to look far for content. "It's all around you. Take this whole thing with the alcohol shops opening and the lines outside. Jokes are being written for you," Shah said.

Comedians are used to working from home. But the stimulation from going out and observing mundane things is missing. "Comedians are also normal human beings. A human response to the outside world comes before an artiste's response," says well-known screenwriter and comedian Varun Grover.

Though Grover has not been doing online shows, he posted a few videos on Instagram to spread awareness about the coronavirus. With a straight face, Grover mocked those who bragged that

Indians had a stronger immune system. He joked that the coronavirus is not the same as eating "roadside *golgappas*" and that immunity alone isn't enough.

Shah feels people won't pay as enthusiastically for online shows as they do for live shows. "People will pay if you give them a professional show. They've been paying so far," Mor said. He has relocated lamps in his house to create a spotlight effect and he has audio equipment so that his voice sounds clear.

Mor also does shows for companies. He expects that number to increase because large corporates will want to invest in employee satisfaction and bring them together for a laugh.

Going forward, a suitable revenue model will determine who can continue doing comedy and who cannot. Mor and Shah were supposed to be on tour in May with their solo specials.

Comedians who have a large following may be able to tide over this period, but those who just started out might have a rough time. "We can't do live shows, in my opinion, for the next six months. Maybe even eight months," Kaneez Surka said.

But people want to laugh. "People are looking for happy things. Right now, I'm watching all the Disney movies. I'm looking for light and happy content, the kind of stuff that'll make me laugh. Comedy can be a relief in these times," Surka said.

Some comedians with a large fan following decided to contribute and help those hit by the lockdown. They organized online fundraisers and collected small and large sums.

Surka, Tanmay Bhat and an entertainment lawyer, Amshula Prakash, organized a two-day livestream show, "Stay Home for India" with over 80 comedians and influencers. Surka, 36, made 90-odd calls in a day and got popular comedians like Kanan Gill, Biswa Kalyan Rath and Sumukhi Suresh together for a show.

Many comedians had been playing online games so Surka and Bhat thought they could stream it and raise money. Over a two-day 'streamathon' on April 11 and 12, they raised nearly ₹17 lakh. People continued to contribute for the next few days and the final amount came to ₹25 lakh.

The proceeds went to Covid India, which is procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers, and Kashtakari Panchayat, which is supporting waste-pickers by giving them PPE and ration kits.

Prakash had identified the two charities. "Covid India was a big organization but Amshula was also looking for obscure NGOs that don't get much publicity. Kashtakari Panchayat was the one we zeroed in on," Surka said.

Shah has also done ticketed online shows to raise funds. "We raised ₹12,000 from two shows. There is a limitation to how much we can raise in a ticketed show. But no amount is big or small. What you raise is what you raise," he said over the phone, while setting himself up for an online show at his home in Mumbai. The proceeds went to Khaana Chahiye, a Mumbai-based NGO. ■



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Detox yourself

THE indiscriminate use of industrial chemicals, pesticides, heavy metals and radioactive elements is known to have a deleterious effect on the environment and on our health. We also know that toxins undergo bioaccumulation through the food chain. There are chances of synergistic effects that can occur in the long term. Combinations of toxins can be more potent than the sum of individual toxins.

Our body strives hard to detoxify us day in and day out through various excretory functions. But it is to be noted that toxins are not equally distributed through our bodies. Different toxins tend to accumulate in different tissues. This constant accumulation over the years may become detrimental to health. The body needs a helping hand to enable its ability to detoxify naturally.

Despite technological advances, it is quite difficult to determine a person's toxic load and its clinical significance. However, the concept of detoxification has a long history. It is interesting to note that Ayurveda and naturopathy describe cleansing and purification processes as an aid to the body's physiological process of detoxification.

According to Ayurveda, due to the effect of the overall environment — weather, improper diet and lifestyle habits — various toxins tend to accumulate in the body. These toxins can be exogenous (entering from outside) or endogenous (generated by our body). When these toxins are minimal, our body manages to excrete them through regular physiological processes. But when these toxins start accumulating, purification measures (panchakarma) must be adopted by

consulting an Ayurveda physician.

PREVENTION: An individual's health depends on following a disciplined lifestyle regarding food, sleep and exercise. Ayurveda advises adhering to prescribed daily and seasonal regimens (Dinacharya and Ritucharya) pertaining to your routine.

If the following measures are adopted, chances of toxin accumulation are reduced:

FOOD: • Opt for organic farm products whether staples, dairy, fresh fruits or vegetables.

• Always eat freshly cooked food. Avoid leftovers and packaged, canned or frozen foods. Never overeat.

• Drink adequate water.

• Periodical fasting (langhana), according to your capability, is always helpful.

• Avoid toxins entering your body. Try to reduce consumption of alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes, refined sugars and saturated fats.

SLEEP: Sound, undisturbed sleep at night for six to eight hours will provide your body daily rejuvenation. If you wake up fresh every morning, then you've had your optimum quota of sleep!

EXERCISE: • Regular physical exercise tends to improve the physiological functions of various organs, thereby helping them to function optimally in the process of natural detoxification.

• Stress usually triggers the release of stress hormones. Practise stress management by adopting yoga and meditation techniques to strengthen detox.

• Practise pranayama (controlled breathing). Breathe consciously and deeply for about 15 minutes, twice daily.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS: • Regular emphasis on 'positive emotions' is helpful.

• Regular body massage with oil (gingelly,

mustard or coconut) will nourish and strengthen the body. For best results focus should be on head, ears and feet.

• Minimize use of chemical-based household cleaners and personal health care products. Use natural alternatives.

REMEDIES: Antioxidant-rich Amalaki (amla, Indian gooseberry) — either in the form of fresh fruits or tablets (1 tablet, twice daily), Chyavanaprasha (1 teaspoon, twice daily) will aid in detoxification. You can also include green tea and ginger-pepper tea.

Despite following such measures, if you find that any of the following organs aren't functioning optimally, some remedial measures can be adopted:

• Skin which is exposed to regular environmental pollution needs supplements.

• For acne or pigmentation: Regular face wash and intake of neem and manjishta (1 tablet, twice daily) is helpful.

• For allergic rashes take Haridra (1 tablet, twice daily).

LIVER: The liver is the body's most important organ, functioning as a live filter to cleanse the system of toxins. It metabolizes proteins, controls the hormonal balance and produces immune-boosting factors and antioxidant enzymes. Liv.52 (1 tablet, twice daily) and Triphala (1 tablet, twice daily) as regular supplements will be beneficial.

KIDNEYS: Punarnava (1 tablet, twice daily) will aid in proper functioning of the kidneys which are the key excretory organs that push out a lot of toxins from our body.

Respiratory system — A half-teaspoon of tulsi (basil) juice extracted from fresh leaves with a teaspoon of honey can be taken twice daily to aid your lungs or 1 tablet of tulsi, twice daily. ■

Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 19 years. He is currently National Manager, Scientific Services, at The Himalaya Drug Company

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There are surprises inside — a lovely wooden slide for your incense stick, a cute stand for your incense cone and a profile of the lady who made it.

Phool is part of HelpUsGreen, a social enterprise founded by Ankit Agarwal with his friend, Karan Rastogi, in 2015. The idea struck Agarwal while sitting on the ghats of the Ganga in Kanpur, watching the river flow, laden with wasted flowers. He wondered how he could spare the Ganga this load of pesticide-laced flowers.

Agarwal works with a team of research scientists. Apart from incense sticks, HelpUsGreen makes compost from flowers and flora foam, an alternative to styro foam. It is also pioneering biodegrading packaging and bio leather. In 2018, HelpUsGreen received the UN Climate Action Award. ■

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