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IT HAS BEEN almost a year now since I last sat at the head of the table at THE WEEK's weekly review meeting. Since then, the pandemic has necessitated a change in the style of reviewing; the weekly review is now an email sent to all staff members. I do miss the banter, the compliments shared across the table for a nice headline or a memorable turn of phrase, the grudging appreciation for a rival publication's work and so on. While I miss all that, I am grateful that providence has kept us and you, my dear reader, safe and healthy.

While the immediate crisis ushered in by the lockdown has vanished for many of us, it is not so for many others. Berjom Bamda Pahadiya's story illustrates this fact. The 54-year-old from a village in Jharkhand's Sahibganj district walked 1,200km from Delhi to reach his home on March 13. He says that his employer in Delhi not only refused to pay him, but also took his belongings and the little money he had saved. It took him over seven months as he walked along the railway tracks towards his village, working, begging and starving his way home. As he speaks only Santhali, he had limited means of communicating with the people he

met on the way. His ordeal ended only when he reached Dhanbad, where someone understood what he was saying and guided him to Roti Bank, an NGO. The staff there helped him get home. I cannot even begin to imagine the relief his family must be feeling now.

What would have happened to Pahadiya if he had not met that unknown angel who guided him to Roti Bank? He would have reached home in time, of course. But when? In another month? Maybe. And only if providence remained as kind to him as it did for seven months. We often owe our lives to angels, don't we? People who walk into our lives and change it... some with a kind word and some with a cup of tea, some with a single rupee and some others with a signature at the bottom of a page. Sometimes, we never meet them ever again. But we never forget them. Ever.

This issue of your favourite newsweekly is a tribute to the many heroes who touched lives during the pandemic. They come in all sizes and shapes, from all religions and regions, from different professions and with various educational backgrounds. They remind us that even when some people pull out knives and slash at things that hold us together, there is a togetherness that binds us, a shared soul that refuses to die.

Long back, before there was an app for anything and everything, Bina and I were in Johannesburg for a conference. We had been warned about street crime, but we thought it was restricted to certain localities. One night, after dinner, we took a walk and found the roads mostly deserted. It never occurred to us why, until a man passed us on the road and then turned back to greet us. "Good evening," he said. "Are you headed anywhere?" Pleasantly surprised, we told him we were just out for a stroll. Thunderstruck, he insisted that we return to our hotel immediately, and stood there until we turned back.

What could have happened that night? Maybe nothing. Maybe something really bad. I do not know. But this I know, he was an angel in disguise, like the many in our cover story.

Philip Mathew,

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THE HEROES NEXT DOOR

As the pandemic threw up challenge after challenge, a battalion of heroes emerged with solutions to every situation. From 13-year-old Ananya Srivastava, who spent her savings to send migrant workers home, to a Kashmiri man who took it upon himself to give proper burial to Covid-19 victims, these ordinary men, women and children did extraordinary things. THE WEEK explores their stories

PLUS

- Leaders who tested Covid-positive share their experiences
- We delivered with limited infrastructure: Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, Indian Council of Medical Research
- Indians realised their capabilities: Shekhar Mande, director general, Council of Scientific & Industrial Research

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Left, out

Pinarayi Vijayan's office has become one of malfeasance, and people who believe in secularism, democracy and justice would vote out his government. People prefer strong leaders, not those who promote accumulation of illegal wealth, gold-smuggling and drug-peddling ('Swing-state scrum', March 14).

Rahul Gandhi should lead the UDF campaign in the coming days. Priyanka Gandhi should also actively campaign, as she can impress voters. The election manifesto of the UDF should be released by Sonia Gandhi to create belief in people, especially new voters.

It will be suicidal for the BJP to have any understanding with the corrupt ruling dispensation in Kerala.

T.V. Jayaprakash,
On email.

Vijayan has every right to eye a second term. But it is less likely to happen. Kerala, after 1977, has alternated between the United Democratic Front and the Left Democratic

Front, and I find no reason why that will not happen again.

Yes, the Congress in Kerala is known for infighting and has groups that are always

at loggerheads, but it is the same situation in the CPI(M) and the BJP this time round, with many not happy over candidate selection.

It is a do-or-die battle for the Congress-led UDF. Its leaders know that if they don't come back to power, the alliance will start falling apart, and the Congress will be the first casualty.

The UDF, the LDF and the NDA have done a good job with the selection of candidates. Even though the results in Kerala will not have much bearing nationally, it is going to be closely watched.

Gopinath K.V.,
On email.

The LDF government is going to create history. The government stood with people during all kinds of difficulties. The disasters and tragedies did not stop the government from completing development projects in the state. Apart from raising unwanted allegations, the opposition failed to bring out anything substantial that affected the image of the government.

Ajay S. Kumar,
On email.

True hero

Kudos to THE WEEK for publishing the awe-inspiring story of traffic warden Joseph Gonsalves, who at sprightly 99, believes in discharging his obligations to society and in living life to the fullest ('Knight at 99', March 14).

Joe is a true hero to all those who have known him. He will soon shed his nonagenarian status by turning centenarian, and God willing see many more summers and win many more hearts.

C.V. Aravind,
On email.

Your report on Joe proves that old people are not obsolete. The armed forces bestow honorary ranks to achievers in exceptional cases. Can the police start a precedent by welcoming Joe with an appropriate honorary rank when he scores the century?

George Cheriyan,
On email.

It is rare to find a person who enjoys every beat of his heart, food, music, gadgets and cares for the betterment of people in his town. *Non omnis moriar, Joe.*

S.K. Rajput,
On email.

HOW TO REACH US

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Don't inflict misery

Your cover story gave an insight on the lives of common citizens from different parts of the country ('Weathering the storm', March 7). It is our obligation to make the planet a better place to live in and we should be mindful on how the world will be in the coming years, rather than inflicting misery to future generations. As the famous statement goes, 'We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.'

Joan Marion,
On email.

Your cover report on ordinary people exploring climate issues in the country was meaningful and it made me sad. I will say meaningful because it set alarm bells ringing. It revealed how Puducherry lost its beautiful beach, how Delhi has become polluted to the point that pollution level has to be checked before one steps out of the house, and how turtles in Chennai are finding it difficult to dig a hole in the beach to lay eggs.

Perhaps, the saddest tale to me personally was reading how Bengaluru has taken a beating in the name of development.

Jothindra P.L.,
On email.

Take the bull by the horns

Former Delhi Police chief Neeraj Kumar admitted

that law enforcement agencies came close to achieving breakthroughs, but were unable to nab Dawood Ibrahim ('D Company looks for a new CEO', February 28). Kumar recalled having spoken to Dawood three times during his career. At another moment, which was pregnant with subtext, he wrote, "one of my seniors, whom I had kept in the loop, inexplicably asked me to stop talking to Dawood". Who was the person? What was the reason to stop Kumar from continuing the interactions?

It is sad that Kumar alludes so much but doesn't take the bull by the horns. The Dawoods of the world are not born; they are made. Who makes them? Why isn't Kumar going further?

His article provides evidence of another failure in implementing police reforms despite the Supreme Court approving the suggestions placed in Prakash Singh & Others vs Union of India in September, 2006. Of what use is reforms when individuals like Kumar still hem, haw and hedge?

Why has Kumar not spoken a word about the political and corporate forces and pressures that covered and shielded the likes of Dawood? It has many parallels with some of our runaway billion-aires abroad.

Rahul Jayaram,
On email.

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SON'S DUTY

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam's son V.P. Jayapradeep could not get an AIADMK ticket in the upcoming assembly elections. But that has not dimmed his spirit. Even as his father is busy campaigning across the state, armed with PowerPoint presentations, Jayapradeep has been holding meetings with party workers every morning, ensuring that they go door to door seeking votes for OPS in his Bodinayakanur constituency. Biding his time, did somebody say?

SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy gives an opportunity for every voter in the country to send a message to the rulers and seekers through ballot. And, a voter in Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh had this to say, though not through ballot. In the recently concluded Nandyal Municipality elections, polling officials found a note along with the ballot paper. The letter addressed to the Andhra Pradesh chief minister was an appeal to bring back certain local brands which were removed from the shelves of wine shops in the state. The letter warned the chief minister that there would be consequences in the next elections—he would lose a vote—if he failed to meet the demand.

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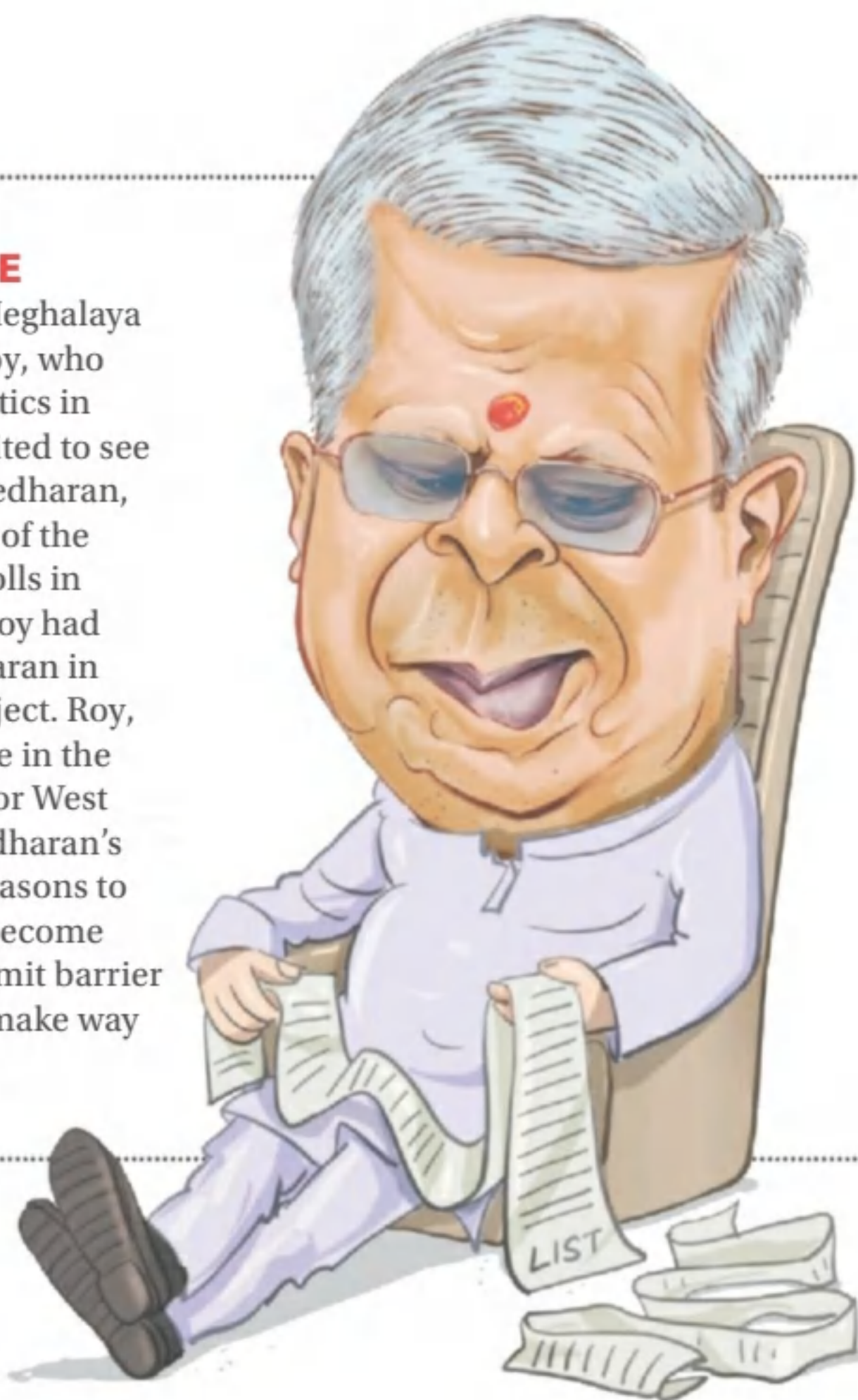
Dr L H Hiranandani Hospital being felicitated by **Devendra Phadnavis** former **Chief Minister** of **Maharashtra** for its leadership role during the **COVID** pandemic.

DIMMED STAR

Recently, a 'missing name' became a point of discussion in Madhya Pradesh politics. When the BJP announced its star campaigners for the West Bengal polls, Rajya Sabha MP Jyotiraditya Scindia was not among the five leaders from Madhya Pradesh on the list. The Congress leadership was quick to score a brownie point. Had he remained in the Congress, the leaders said, he would have been a star campaigner.

HOPES NEVER AGE

Former Tripura and Meghalaya governor Tathagata Roy, who returned to active politics in West Bengal, is all excited to see his former boss E. Sreedharan, 88, becoming the face of the BJP in the assembly polls in Kerala. In the 1970s, Roy had worked under Sreedharan in the Kolkata Metro project. Roy, 75, is yet to find a place in the BJP's candidates' list for West Bengal. But after Sreedharan's candidature, he has reasons to feel hopeful as it has become evident that the age-limit barrier for party ticket could make way if situation demands.



DECLASSIFIED HUMOUR

Former Union minister Yashwant Sinha revealed an official secret post joining the Trinamool Congress. He disclosed details from a cabinet discussion some 21 years ago when the Kandahar plane hijack happened and the A.B. Vajpayee government had to release three terrorists. Sinha said that in the meeting Mamata Banerjee, then railway minister, offered herself to be exchanged for the hostages. Many pointed out that Sinha made a mistake by revealing details from a cabinet discussion. But a senior BJP leader said: "It is not declassification of [any] document. It is declassification of humour."








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Pursuing the Prince

Sourav Ganguly has made it clear that he is not in the electoral or even the political arena. Despite this, leaders such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP president J.P. Nadda have brought up the BCCI president quite often in their campaign speeches in West Bengal. Singh, whose main interest is agriculture and party organisation, apart from his administrative experience in the home and defence ministries, has waxed lyrical about Ganguly's shot-making. He has said that his party's performance against the Trinamool Congress would be like Ganguly hitting bowlers to all parts of the ground. In another rally, he said the BJP would hit sixes like Ganguly.

The former India captain is the second biggest star the BJP has failed to woo in these assembly elections. At least the bigger star—actor Rajinikanth in Tamil Nadu—kept the BJP on tenterhooks. He announced the launch of a party, praised Modi and held long talks with an RSS interlocutor. But he withdrew citing health reasons, dashing the BJP's hopes of hitching its wagon to Rajini's party for an electoral stunner in the south. With yesteryear star Vijayakanth's Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam exiting the National Democratic Alliance, the BJP has lost its last cinematic glitter in Tamil Nadu.

Ever since Modi and Shah identified Bengal as their big target, Ganguly was among the top names the party wanted.

The former captain, who had maintained equable relations with Left Front chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and then with Mamata Banerjee, was seen by the BJP as the ideal leader; he would appeal to the youth and the women of Bengal. He had a heroic reputation as player and captain, and his handsomeness would appeal to both the young and the middle-aged.

But, like his illustrious ODI opening partner Sachin Tendulkar, Ganguly was friendly with all parties, but would not pad up for anyone. The other two members of India's famed 'fab four'—Rahul Dravid and V.V.S. Laxman—have remained politically aloof.

The BJP has roped in many film stars like Mithun Chakraborty and lesser cricket stars like Ashok Dinda, but no one matches the glamour of Ganguly, who effortlessly took control of the Cricket Association of Bengal before moving on to the BCCI. When Shah's son, Jay, became BCCI secretary, there was speculation that Ganguly would join the ruling party at the Cen-

tre. But Ganguly kept smiling and refused to commit.

Both Rajinikanth and Ganguly had bouts of illness ahead of the elections. And leaders of major parties, including Mamata, made a beeline for the hospital to wish Ganguly well.

Even if he keeps his lips sealed till the eighth phase of polling in Bengal, BJP campaigners like Singh would invoke his name. If nothing else, this would garner applause from those who admire the cricketer and the BJP.



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Quad to guard the east

It is official—the Quad is born. The rulers of Australia, India, Japan and the US got together in cyberspace last week, and gave it spirit. In a joint statement, which they called ‘The Spirit of the Quad’, they swore to strive for an Indo-Pacific “that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.”

No mention as to who was applying coercion, and making the region unfree, closed, exclusive, unhealthy and undemocratic. Diplomats don’t vilify the villains by name.

Indo-Pacific is a term coined early this century to refer to the geostrategic space that stretches from Africa’s east coast till America’s west coast (don’t run your eye westward; you will lose your way in the African or Amazon forests). It encompasses the Indian and the Pacific Oceans through which most of the world’s metals, minerals, manufactured goods, guns, gas and oil are being traded.

Naturally, most of the world’s warships are going to be around these waters. Strategic *rajgurus* say, the power politics of the next few decades will be played around this region, just as it used to be played around the Baltic, the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean in the bygone centuries.

Geostrategists come up with such theories and doctrines now and then which inspire statesmen to get visions (also daydreams) on how to shape the world. Didn’t we see how Xi Jinping, inspired by Genghis Khan’s Golden Horde, has been getting visions of building silk roads and golden belts?

Early last century Sir Halford Mackinder, regarded the father of geopolitics, came up with a theory that power and politics would flow from the heartland of Eurasia. Inspired by Alfred Mahan who had championed seapower, Nicholas Spyk-

man pointed out that Mackinder’s heartland was peopled by peasants, and that the more industrialised and seagoing rimland of Europe had a higher potential to dominate global politics.

Though neither of these theories was meant to be doctrines for global powercraft, Spykman’s vision is said to have inspired the US to encircle and contain ‘heartland’ Soviet Russia during the Cold War. A series of military pacts were signed, starting with the old rimland powers of the North Atlantic. Most of the pacts were dissolved in a few years, but the North Atlantic one survived the Cold War, and is still punching beyond its weight.

Russia’s decline and China’s rise have shifted power politics further eastward. As the sun rose on the new century, the world found China asserting in the waters of the east and even reaching out to the south. Techno-smart Japan in the east, and resource-rich Australia deep south, both of which had been lying cosy under the US security umbrella during the Cold War, began to get nightmares.

It was Japanese PM Shinzo Abe who first thought of



a security dialogue among the Indo-Pacificans with India in it. He had seen how India had used its warships to reach succour to the tsunami-hit Indian Ocean littoral in 2004. He had also seen how the navies of the old rimland powers were queuing up to exercise with India. Soon Australia was interested, and so was the US which had got tired of being a global Lone Ranger.

Initially shy of getting into security pacts, Narendra Modi sought to mollify China with good words, trade pacts and Doklam deal. But the bully didn’t change his ways; his nasty push in Ladakh was the last straw on the Indian elephant’s back.

The Quad is only a security dialogue yet, and not a pact; but don’t be surprised if it becomes one in our lifetime.



Govt. of Haryana

Education for everyone

Under the Super 100 programme,
convenient and free coaching are being
provided in Government schools,
In which 25 students of 2018-20
batch qualified for 'IIT Advance'
and 72 students for 'NEET'

Extension of State Model Sanskriti
Schools on block level,
establishment of one model
sanskriti school in each block

For the first time CBSE Board
Government schools in the State

15 new Government Colleges
opened in one year

Decision to open
4,000 play-way schools, In the first phase
1135 play-way schools are under process

Online Education System for students,
Education to 52 lakh students
through DTH and Cable TV

Haryana Teacher Eligibility Test
(HTET), eligibility duration
increased from 5 years to 7 years

Approval for making passports
in 114 Govt. colleges
6800 Passports made Free of Cost
for Applicant Students



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Kharghar corporate park

focused on the need to integrate land use planning with transport plan. The main objective is to reduce private car trips, improve public transport like mass transit system with improved level of services and people in focus. CIDCO explored a "Transit Oriented Development (TOD)" and transit-oriented land use pattern to develop transport infrastructure of Navi Mumbai. The development plan of Navi Mumbai provides an integrated transportation system consisting of roads, railways, waterways and airways.

City level high-capacity expressways with controlled access are planned and are being constructed at the periphery of the development of nodes, to facilitate uninterrupted flow of inter-city and intra-city vehicular traffic, considering the overall requirement of the residents as well as industrial and business people. Feeder road system has also been provided for safe and economical internal movement of nodal traffic. Other complementary transport systems, namely, water and air transport, are also contemplated in the transport development plan to provide faster modes of inter-city transport.

Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA)

Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA)



Metro

is one of the largest Greenfield airports aimed to provide world class facilities for passengers as well as cargo operations. The project will ease the pressure of Mumbai International Airport and will connect Navi Mumbai with the world. The land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement of PAPs have been done properly by CIDCO. The task to recourse

Ulwe channel has been accomplished. The pre development works have been accomplished by 100 per cent while the work of resettlement of PAPs has been completed till 99 per cent. This is one of the ambitious projects of CIDCO and will surely uplift the living standards of Navi Mumbai inhabitants by taking the city to global charts.



"CIDCO has been constantly working towards the prosperity of Navi Mumbai in all aspects. The city is well connected to all major cities through painstakingly designed transit network that has helped in augmenting trade and business creating employment opportunities. Several housing schemes inclusive of every economic section along with unique infrastructural facilities have led to the upliftment of both elite and common section of the satellite city."

— Dr. Sanjay Mukherjee,
VC&MD, CIDCO

Navi Mumbai Metro Project

CIDCO has undertaken the work of the elevated Metro Project from 2011 with the purpose of connecting various nodes of Navi Mumbai to the rest of MMR, promoting the convenience factor. Due to pandemic induced lockdown and several technical issues, metro development work was halted. CIDCO has now appointed Maha Metro for the fast implementation of line no 1 from Belapur to Pendhar. On February 23, 2021, Maha Metro deployed a team of 20 expert engineers for ground level execution. CIDCO's VC&MD Dr. Sanjay Mukherjee along with MD of Maha Metro Brijesh Dixit and other concerned officials of both corporations visited the metro sites and examine the current status.

In total, 4 lines have been proposed for this project. Six coaches, exported from China, have already arrived at Taloja Depot for line no. 1 i.e. Belapur-Pendhar. These coaches are designed as per the latest modern technology. The work of this line measuring 11.10 km with 11



Kharghar corporate park

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Airport

metro stations is expected to complete till December 2022. The successful empty trial run of the metro rail was conducted on 11 September, 2019 at the hands of the former Chief Minister.

Kharghar-Turbhe tunnel

Kharghar-Turbhe tunnel project comprising 3.5 km elevated road and 2.5 km tunnel will make travelling convenient for commuters using Thane-Belapur and Sion-Panvel highway. This will help in decongestion of traffic and fast movement. The route will also connect Kharghar-Vashi, Taloja node. CIDCO will be contributing funds for this project. CIDCO with this new connectivity wants to develop the Central Park – Phase - II with the tourism point of view.

Airoli-Kalva Double Elevated Corridor

CIDCO has approved to transfer two adjacent plots measuring 919 sq m in Digha village to the Mumbai Rail Vikas Corporation (MRVC), a public sector undertaking formed under the Ministry of Railway of Government of India. This will pave the way for construction of Airoli-Kalva elevated rail corridor that connects the Trans-Harbour with the Central Railway main corridor. The development of this project will reduce the pressure on Thane railway station and travelers from Kalyan will be able to travel conveniently.



Nerul Jetty

NAINA

With the endeavour to prevent uncontrolled growth of the region around NMIA, CIDCO is planning to construct and develop a city called NAINA (Navi Mumbai Airport Affected Notified Area), measuring 648 ha. from Thane and Raigad districts. The Interim Development Plan (IDP) of NAINA proposed for 23 villages received the necessary approval in April, 2017. This project is going to be implemented through 11 Town Planning Schemes.

The beneficiaries of these schemes will receive the remuneration in the form of final plot, that is 40 per cent of the original



plot whereas the remaining 60 per cent land will be used for the development of infrastructure in the scheme.

Kharghar Valley Golf Course

CIDCO's commitment to upgrade the standard of living of the people led to envisaging the Kharghar Valley Golf Course. CIDCO has decided to upgrade the 9 holes golf course to 18 holes. Thus, national and international level tournament of such prestigious game will be organized here, stimulating the tourism of the state and the nation. This will also assist to amplify the living standards of the citizens.

The large tract of open green land that Kharghar nurtures in its lap with the Pandavkada waterfall as a backdrop makes it an ideal location for Golf Course. This will encourage the visit of international players and tourists to this scenic site. Spread over 103 hectares of land, this international standard golf course of par 27 and 7, 137 yards includes Magnus-Opus golf and club House. The proposal for extension of 9 holes to 18 holes is under consideration and at preliminary planning stage. It comprises of clubhouse along with a detention for flood control. It also consists of residential stock including high end luxurious villas, five-star hotel, high end residen-

tial apartments, bungalows and a golf academy.

Centre of Excellence (COE)

The Centre of Excellence (COE) for football is planned for International Corporate Park (ICP) within the recreation ground admeasuring about 10.5 ha of land which is an integral part of the Master Plan of ICP. M/s. ECPL, the consultants working on ICP was assigned the additional work of planning, design of various facilities in COE. After discussions, correspondence, site visits, inter-alia with representatives of FIFA, Mumbai Football Association (MFA), the area earmarked for recreational zone is considered appropriate for planning and developing various facilities envisaged on the COE and a FIFA compliant sports complex.

Rugby stadium

After rejuvenating the Kharghar valley golf course project, CIDCO has decided to develop four football grounds in International Corporate Park. Rugby will be played on two of those grounds. Thus, 22 players with padding overt their body will be seen playing on the rugby ground very soon.

Palghar District Headquarters

With this project, CIDCO is going to develop various offices of district level coupled with infrastructure like roads, footpaths, water and power supply, sewage, etc, on an area of 103.57.90 hectares while Palghar New Town will be developed on the remaining 337.00 hectares. For this project, the GoM has transferred the land to CIDCO.

Thane Cluster Scheme

It has been approved in the general body meeting of Thane Municipal Corporation to avail the assistance of MHADA and CIDCO in the implementation of cluster scheme. Thus, the development of the city will be conducted in a planned manner which will boost the cluster scheme.

While 12 layouts were already approved for cluster scheme, nine more urban development plans for the scheme has been approved in third phase. MHADA and CIDCO will be the enforcement authority in the cluster scheme.

CIDCO's mission

CIDCO has been persistently laying benchmarks in the path of urban planning and development with its exquisitely planned and developed infrastructures and unique projects. CIDCO is further looking towards taking the satellite city to the supreme level of transformation. It has several ambitious projects in pipeline like Navi Mumbai International airport, Navi Mumbai Metro, International Corporate Park, Mumbai-Trans Harbour Link, Mass Housing Schemes, etc, will enhance connectivity, trading and business in the region leading to influx of more population thereby, augmenting the economy of the region. The corporation will not leave a single stone unturned in the process of development of the region. These projects are going to be historic in the field of urban development and will accelerate the growth of Navi Mumbai.

Leading from the front

Dr Sanjay Mukherjee, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of CIDCO have put forth a new conception of work. Several halted and tardy projects are revived and have gained pace once again. Pandemic induced lockdown and prevailing recession had posed challenge in every sector to regain its previous stature. Considering this, he is focusing on projects with great potential and scope, which will fasten their developments in optimal time and resources. He has been consistently taking various initiatives to boost up the real estate sector and his focus relies on providing affordable houses to every economic strata of the society. Thus, CIDCO surely attain its proposed goals within stipulated period under his valuable guidance.

A Special Initiative by THE WEEK with CIDCO



The hardline avatar

In his fourth term as chief minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan has turned aggressive—both in governance and politics

BY SRAVANI SARKAR

Films have great recall value, and politicians of all hues are well-aware of that.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's favourite punch line is a take on the 2017 Salman Khan-starrer *Tiger Zinda Hai*: "Tiger *abhi zinda hai* (Tiger is still alive)". The first time he used it was in December 2018 to reassure supporters while moving out of the Chief Minister's House, after a defeat in the assembly polls had ended his 13-year rule. In an interesting turn of events, the line was repeated by Rajya Sabha member Jyotiraditya Scindia, whose switch to the BJP from the Congress along with a clutch of

MLAs in March 2020 paved way for Chouhan's return as chief minister.

Chouhan's most recent use of the punch line, accompanied by animated gestures and expression, happened at a public meeting in Bhopal on March 9, a fortnight before he completed one year in his new term as chief minister. "Tiger *abhi zinda hai aur shikaar pe nikla hai* (Tiger is still alive and is out on a hunt now)," he said, in an apparent warning to the mafia and antisocial elements.

Whether it had the desired effect on criminals is not known, but it did burnish the new avatar that Chouhan had been painstakingly constructing for the past year. Political analysts,



PTI

**THE COMBATIVE
CHIEF**

Shivraj Singh Chouhan

adversaries and a growing section of common people agree that Chouhan, in his fourth term, is a changed chief minister. Moving away from his moderate and conciliatory image, he has become aggressive in both governance and attitude.

Chouhan's oratory and people skills are well-known, and the BJP's thumping victory in the bypolls in November 2020 highlighted his continuing popularity. But during the past year, especially after the bypolls, Chouhan's public speeches have become fiery—he has often threatened the mafia and antisocial elements, saying he would hang them upside down, destroy them and bury them.

In an exclusive interview with THE WEEK, Chouhan said that his attitude towards the mafia had been the same in his previous tenures, too, but agreed that he had become stricter because “middlemen and mafia were nurtured during the short Congress tenure. They have to be discouraged for the betterment of the state”.

On the other hand, his apparent hurry to pass the anti-love jihad law, his alleged bias against minorities during incidents of communal tensions, initiatives like changing Islamic names of cities and constituting a cow cabinet and getting an openly majoritarian MLA Rameshwar Sharma to become pro tem speaker are being cited as examples of his hardline tilt.

So much so that many people said that Chouhan was trying to emulate Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a hindutva hardliner, in some ways. Chouhan, however, dismissed it saying that he had a working style of his own.

Political commentator Manish Dixit said that Chouhan might be aware that this could be his last term as chief minister. He is, therefore, trying to pitch himself as a probable prime ministerial candidate, though publicly he asserts that he will not move out of state politics. “That is

perhaps why he hastens to implement the pet schemes and themes of the Union government and the party high command,” said Dixit, “and is showing this hardline tilt in keeping with the current political demand.” He, however, adds that his public posturing has had little impact on governance, be it reining in the liquor and sand mafia, or tackling crimes against women.

Analyst Girija Shanker, however, said that Chouhan's changed attitude had more to do with his need to ensure that there is no repeat of the 2018 defeat in 2023. “His personal ideology has always been clear as a typical BJP leader, but he kept governance separate from his ideology earlier,” said Shanker. The trigger for the change, he added, could be the

Many people said that Chouhan was trying to emulate Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a hindutva hardliner, in some ways.

national endorsement of the BJP's right-wing politics in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Also, his current tenure as chief minister is more of a gift, said senior political writer Rasheed Kidwai, rather than something he had earned, as in 2008 and 2013. “Naturally his choices are now curtailed. His dependency has increased owing to Scindia and related factors,” said Kidwai. “There are too many competitors with direct link to party bosses. Therefore, he is not as sure-footed as earlier.” Also, as the BJP has a long list of second-rung contenders for

the prime minister's post, Chouhan is no longer sure of what the future holds for him, added Kidwai.

Moreover, the RSS does not count him in the same league as Yogi Adityanath, said Kidwai. “His earlier image of a moderate leader, like Atal Bihari Vajpayee's, is doing him no good as far as his future in politics goes,” he said. “So his aggressive public posturing and actions might be emerging out of these dilemmas.”

Entrepreneur Pawan Chhajed from Bhopal said that Chouhan is going with the current flow of politics to reinforce his party's and his own support base as he is aware of its success. He is also aggressively pushing the development agenda, he said, which would be noticed by the common people.

Congress Rajya Sabha member Digvijaya Singh, however, said that Chouhan was always a hardliner. “You are mistaken if you say it is a new thing,” the former chief minister said. The only big change in Chouhan, he added, was that he had become very vindictive. Singh, however, did not elaborate on that point.

Congress media cell general secretary K.K. Mishra is clear that insecurity is driving Chouhan's aggressiveness. “His old image of being a moderate leader has been demolished as he does not have a majority government now,” he said. “His opponents in the party are very active and that has put a lot of pressure on him. There are rumours that he might be replaced after the assembly polls in West Bengal and other states. The Uttarakhand instance (where the chief minister was changed over infighting) further gives credence to the theory.” Mishra, too, said that Chouhan's dialogues have failed to make any impact on the mafia or governance. “Thus he goes on with this show of aggression,” he added, “but is hollow inside.” ●



■ INTERVIEW

Shivraj Singh Chouhan,
chief minister, Madhya Pradesh

Media thinks I have turned aggressive. People don't

BY SRAVANI SARKAR

Q/ What has been your biggest point of satisfaction during the past year?

A/ We took over the responsibility of the state amid the Covid-19 crisis. Today, the biggest point of satisfaction is that we, along with our frontline workers and the people of Madhya Pradesh, faced the situation with courage and confidence and

emerged as winners. Even in such times, the state achieved number one position in wheat procurement in the country. The 'anti-mafia' campaign for the safety and security of the common man and focus on developing the roadmap for an 'Atmanirbhar MP' are some of the significant works we did during this period. We are happy that we were able to survive and sustain the welfare and development

of the state during these trying times.

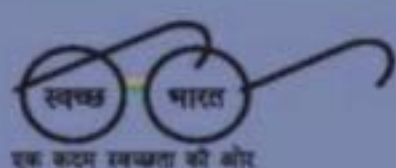
Q/ What will be your focus in the remaining 2.5 years of your government's term?

A/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given the mantra of atmanirbharta (self-reliance), which is a great vision for new India. Our biggest focus now is to transform Madhya Pradesh into one of the most emerging and developed states of the country.



We stand united in the commitment to fight against Climate Change. Digital Technology is forming the core of our businesses and changing the way we run our processes. It is simplifying every aspect of our business. Today using the boon of Technology such as Automation, Digital Connectivity, Real Time Data Monitoring and Artificial Intelligence, we are able to design simple solutions that positively impact not just our lives but our Planet as well.

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Amid the Covid-19 crisis, the state has successfully started working in this direction, and soon everyone will witness this transformation.

We want Madhya Pradesh to be a state that works on the principle of good governance, is free from crime, where our youth, especially our daughters, can move freely and get opportunities to explore their future in a more positive environment...and where farmers have a smile on their faces. Making a new, prosperous and atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh is our primary goal and dream.

Q/ Despite repeated efforts, the state is not seeing many big investments. What are the steps being taken?

A/ We are firmly moving towards making Madhya Pradesh the preferred investment destination. Various initiatives have been taken towards this:

■ We are moving towards achieving investments worth ₹10,000 crore. The same will generate over 30,000 employment opportunities.

■ We improved our Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) ranking by three places, to be placed fourth in India in the joint report of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), government of India (GoI) and World Bank in September 2020. We are top in the western region, ahead of some of the industrially advanced states of the region.

■ More than 40 services related to opening new industries have been brought under the umbrella of deemed approval. We are offering instant approval for 15 services, 15-day approval for about 20 services and 30 days for the rest.

■ (National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency of India has rated) MP Industrial Development Corporation, our single-window agency, as a top-performing investment promotion agency. We secured 97 per cent on the overall parameters.

■ Last year, GoI allowed additional borrowing of 2 per cent of GSDP post compliance of certain EoDB reforms. Madhya Pradesh has been among the first five states to avail the additional borrowing limit of ₹2,373 crore for the successful implementation of reforms proposed by GoI.

■ During the pandemic, we helped industries restart and provided support for movement of raw materials and finished goods. Labour laws were reformed to (promote growth of) the industrial ecosystem in the state.

The new farm laws are very beneficial for farmers and will bring revolutionary changes in their lives. The farmers of Madhya Pradesh are (convinced of) this fact. There is no farmer agitation in the state.

Q/ The state government supported the new farm laws, but there have been several cases of traders cheating farmers in open market. Even a relative of the state agriculture minister was duped.

A/ The new farm laws are very beneficial for farmers and will bring revolutionary changes in their lives. The farmers of Madhya Pradesh are (convinced of) this fact. There is no farmer agitation in the state. As far as cheating is concerned, action has been taken against those guilty in all cases.

Q/ You have issued a strict crackdown on crimes against women and different mafia. Yet, these crimes continue unabated.

A/ Madhya Pradesh Police is working actively in this regard.... No organised mafia or culprits [in crimes] against women will be spared. We want to create a better environment where 'rule of law' is supreme.... It is also the duty of society to be active and responsible for the safety of women. We have launched the 'Samman Abhiyaan' for creating awareness about women's safety. We also launched 'Operation Muskan' to ensure safety of our young girls and boys. Under this operation, 2,444 minor girls and 266 minor boys (who were missing) have been found and sent back to their families.

Also, action has been taken against more than 1,500 land mafia agents; government land, with an estimated value of ₹8,800 crore, has been freed from their possession. More than 52,000 victims of chit-fund fraud have been issued refunds worth ₹7,200 crore. More than 172 FIRs have been lodged against those involved in

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other projects fall short



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The amenities of other
properties don't match up



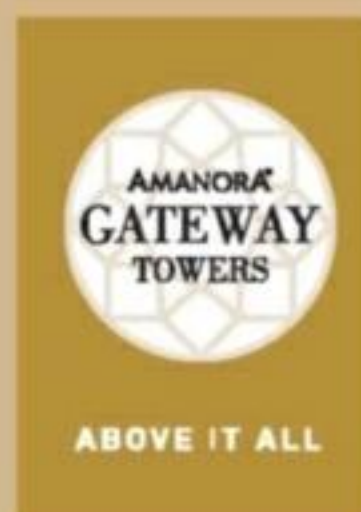
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adulteration. People of Madhya Pradesh have welcomed these steps.

Q/ Unemployment continues to be a major issue.

A/ We have already started recruitment for vacancies in the government sector. We are creating opportunities for both skilled and unskilled candidates. The rural employment scheme for labourers has been initiated. Covid-19 left many people unemployed; the Rozgar Setu portal is for them. Our career fairs have benefited around 1.44 lakh persons. Tourism is an emerging sector and we are focused on its development. We managed to generate livelihood and job opportunities for around 20,000 beneficiaries.

Q/ People say you have become a hardliner, aggressive in this term.

A/ This is not a common man's perception. It is the media's perception, and it is not new. I have always fought unethical and illegal practices. My attitude towards the mafia was same in the previous tenures. This time I am stricter because middlemen and mafia were nurtured during the short Congress tenure. And they have to be discouraged for the betterment of the state. The Freedom of Religion law (commonly referred to as the anti-love jihad law) is part of the 'Beti Bachao' campaign for us and we are committed to ensuring the safety of women in every way.

Q/ There is also a perception that you are imitating the Uttar Pradesh chief minister in your decisions and actions?

A/ Again, this may be your perception and not the people's perception. The people of my state have a different view about me. Every individual has his own working style. I am Shivraj Singh Chouhan and I have my own ways of working.

This time I am stricter because middlemen and mafia were nurtured during the short Congress tenure. **And they have to be discouraged for the betterment of the state.**

They are like God to me and I am their servant.

Q/ The BJP formed a government within one and a half years of losing the elections in 2018. Would anti-incumbency become a factor again in 2023?

A/ Even during the 2018 elections, there was no such thing as anti-incumbency, I feel. We got more vote share than the Congress. Also, we have initiated so many development works, and people are well aware of it. That is the reason why people trusted us again.

Q/ Forthcoming local body elections are being looked up on as semi-finals for the 2023 assembly polls. Will the BJP repeat its performance?

A/ Of course. The BJP is a disciplined, well-organised and dedicated party whose focus is to be always ready when it comes to serving the country and its people. I am sure that we will get the love and support of our people in the upcoming local body elections.

Q/ Despite the bypoll victory, do you feel there is discontent among a section of party leaders about the preference for ex-Congress leaders in the BJP?

A/ As I said, the BJP is a disciplined party and organisation. We perform together as a unit. It is a big family and decisions are taken encompassing all opinions, listening to everyone and on the basis of wide consultations. All our party members are well aware of this culture and they also perform and act accordingly.

Q/ Your camaraderie with former chief minister Kamal Nath often becomes a talking point.

A/ Why not? The battle between political people should never be personal. It is a conflict of ideologies, not identities. Kamal Nath ji is a senior politician.... Whenever we meet, we have an exchange of thought on many issues.

Q/ Though it is too early to ask, do you think you will be the chief ministerial candidate in 2023?

A/ These are party-related matters and party decides about them. My only focus is the betterment of my state and people.... I believe in giving 100 per cent to the present because your future is decided by your present. 🇮🇳

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**NATIONAL
EGG CO-ORDINATION
COMMITTEE**

Liver transplantation after Covid-19 infection: The first peer-reviewed published report

In 1990, Dr Joseph Murray won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for his decades of work in Solid-Organ Transplantation. Today, transplantation has become the treatment of choice for many patients with organ failure. In India, the burden of liver diseases is on the rise and so is the number of liver failure cases. It is estimated that in our country more than 10,000 people require Liver Transplantation every year but only approx. 1000 transplantations are carried out.

The Covid-19 pandemic became a big deterrent for many centres to carry out Solid-organ transplantation (SOT) which in-turn impacted several critically ill patients. Many centers had to initiate SOT within the first few months of the pandemic because end-stage liver failure patients cannot wait. There was an inadequate set of guidelines and data to draw any conclusions regarding the outcome of transplant in patients who got infected with Covid-19. Also, there was no data on managing Covid-19 patients who are awaiting Living Donor Liver Transplantation (LDLT) and the timing of liver transplantation and organ procurement from a

living donor.

At AIG Hospitals' Centre for Liver Sciences and Transplant, researchers and clinicians worked together to formulate the "First Report" on "Early liver transplantation after Covid-19 infection". This study is the first of its kind and was meant to understand the timing of transplantation and organ procurement after Covid infection to ensure the best outcomes for Liver Transplant Candidate and Donor's health. Published on 28th January in one of the world's most respected medical journals, the American Journal of Transplantation, the study is poised to become the global reference point for Liver Transplant Candidates who get infected with Covid-19.

The study was conducted on 38 candidates who underwent Liver Transplantation at AIG Hospitals between May 2020 and October 2020, out of which 10 candidates and five donors were Covid-19 positive. It was proven conclusively that patients with mild Covid-19 can safely undergo liver transplant without any added complications after 14 days, provid-

ed the patient is deemed to be fit for the surgery.

Anup, 18-year-old son of a fruit hawker in Dhanbad, Jharkhand was among those 10 liver transplant candidates. "Doctors at a hospital in Ranchi told that our son won't be able to survive as he got infected with Covid," said Kiran Devi, Anup's mother. With help of a social campaign led by Sonu Sood, Anup was airlifted to AIG Hospitals in Hyderabad.

"Anup was suffering from autoimmune hepatitis induced acute-on-chronic liver failure. The only option left was liver transplant. Being Covid-19 positive, we stabilized him and kept him under constant monitoring for 14 days before going for the surgery," said Dr Anand Kulkarni, Senior Consultant, Hepatology at AIG Hospitals.

Commenting on the relevance of this study, Dr P. Balachandran Menon, Director, Liver Transplant and HPB Surgery, AIG Hospitals said "It is crucial for the healthcare professionals to get access to guidance on how to safely perform surgeries during the pandemic, as well as recommendations on when to delay."

"From the start of the pandemic, we ensured that all necessary precautions are taken so that we can contain the infection within our hospital premises. We created separate Covid and non-Covid emergencies, ICUs along with providing all our staff with high-end PPEs. Research has shown that when these safety steps are followed, the risk of a patient being infected with Covid-19 during surgery or in the hospital is extremely low," said Dr D. Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman & Chief of Gastroenterology at AIG Hospitals.



Dr. D Nageshwar Reddy with Anup and his mother



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COMMANDERS AND CHIEF



PLANNING TIME
Mamata Banerjee with
Kalyan Banerjee

PHOTOS: SALIL BERA

With Mamata Banerjee injured, her five trusted men will have an increased role in the Trinamool's election campaign

BY RABI BANERJEE

Mamata Banerjee was itching to head back into battle, but doctors at the state-run SSKM Hospital in Kolkata asked her to stay put for at least two more days. The chief minister had hurt her left leg and hip during her campaign in Nandigram on March 10.

Though there has been speculation on whether she fell or was pushed, the doctors were more concerned about Mamata's low sodium levels. "For a diabetic and senior citizen, lowering of sodium in the blood is dangerous," said a doctor at the hospital. "It might cause heart or kidney disease. If not treated, it might lead to heart failure."

Mamata, however, soon hit the streets in a wheelchair.

Some senior Trinamool leaders had linked the Election Commission's removal/transfer of senior police officers in the state to the "attack" on Mamata. Miffed, the commission asked poll observers to investigate. On March 14, based on their report, the commission pronounced it an accident and removed the district magistrate of East Midnapore. It also suspended some senior officials.

Mamata's leg will need time to heal, which means that senior party leaders would have to take on additional responsibilities. While many veteran leaders have defected to the BJP, and more are expected to do so, the following five have stood by her and would be crucial to Mamata's chances of re-election.

KALYAN BANERJEE

THE CALCUTTA High Court lawyer, who has advised Mamata on legal matters since 1984, has been

entrusted with saving the party in Hooghly, Howrah and Bankura. If needed, he could also be used in his hometown of Asansol.

Kalyan is one of the few Trinamool leaders hyping Mamata's Covid-19 response. "Look at other states and then see Bengal. We are safe because of Mamata Banerjee," he said.

The Serampore MP has bitterly criticised those who have left his party for the BJP, including former cabinet minister Rajib Banerjee and former Mamata confidant Suwendu Adhikari. He said that these leaders used Mamata's image to make their own political fortunes.

When the party's internal study showed that it would fare poorly in western Bengal, especially in Bankura, Mamata gave him the responsibility of regaining lost ground. On his advice, the party changed most of its candidates in Bankura, Howrah and Hooghly.

For instance, Singur movement leader Rabindranath Bhattacharjee was denied a ticket this time. He promptly joined the BJP and got a ticket. "The BJP has taken all the dirt from our party," said Kalyan. "In a sense, they have cleaned our party. We thank them." He said he would ensure that the party wins in the seats (around 50) that he is in-charge of.

Kalyan has been a major player in the Trinamool's court battles, including those linked to the Nandigram and Singur movements. About the cases he said he had always challenged the government of the day. "If needed, I will challenge this government as well," he said. "I am happy that Mamata Banerjee has never done anything anti-people."

He alleged that the BJP government had systematically destroyed the autonomy of the country's institutions. "The most recent casualty is the Election Commission," he said. ●



SUBRATA MUKHERJEE

AFTER DECIDING to contest from Nandigram, the first person Mamata turned to was Subrata Mukherjee. She sent her political mentor to the constituency to assess the ground situation. Mamata's historic win in 2011 had its origins in Singur, Nandigram and Janglemahal. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, though, the BJP gained massively in Singur and Janglemahal. Even in East Midnapore, where Nandigram lies, the BJP's rise has been sharp.

Mukherjee will monitor the Trinamool's organisation in Nandigram and devise ways to checkmate BJP candidate Suwendu Adhikari.

Mamata would need Mukherjee's experience to offset any saffron momentum. The 75-year-old, who will contest from Kolkata's posh Ballygunge, will campaign in the 11 seats in Kolkata and 31 seats in South 24 Parganas. He will also monitor the party's organisation in Nandigram and devise ways to checkmate BJP candidate Suwendu Adhikari.

The former Kolkata mayor said this could be the first Bengal elections where a section of the people might vote for religion. "I have been participating in elections since 1971, but I have never seen such a situation," he said. "Today, the politics of *hindutva* is at its peak in Bengal. Religious sentiment is overriding the model of development."

But did the Trinamool not polarise Muslim votes in the past? Mukherjee disagreed. "Muslims are coming to us in large numbers because of Hindu polarisation. We need to give them political shelter," he said.

Mukherjee had lost the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Bankura, and has decided to return to his old Ballygunge seat. "If I remain fit, I will

never quit politics. I will continuously work for the people," he said.

In 1972, as a 27 year old, Mukherjee had become information and broadcasting minister in Siddhartha Shankar Ray's government (the youngest cabinet minister in Bengal history) and was also an aide of Congress stalwart Priya Ranjan Das-

muni. It was Mukherjee who told Dasmuni about a young firebrand named Mamata. Dasmuni then helped her get a ticket in the 1984 state elections, in which she beat the Communist Party of India (Marxist) veteran Somnath Chatterjee.

Once, as a Congress leader, Mukherjee used to bring prime ministers

to campaign in Bengal. "But today, we have to face the prime minister (Narendra Modi) and home minister (Amit Shah) as challengers," he said. "Many other Central ministers, along with big leaders of other regions, are flocking the state. [It is a] very tough situation this time, but we hope to emerge victorious." ❶

SAUGATA ROY

PARLIAMENTARIAN of the year in 2019, Saugata Roy has been a tough critic of the Modi government in the Lok Sabha. Regardless, his peers respect him for his argument, and his knowledge of the law and the Constitution. Many in the Trinamool privately say that only Roy should lead the party in Parliament.

But Roy is a powerful man in Bengal, too, and Mamata knows that. He is her crisis manager. He was the one tasked with placating Adhikari before he quit following a tussle with her nephew Abhishek. Though Roy failed to stop him, he did prevent a

few others from jumping ship.

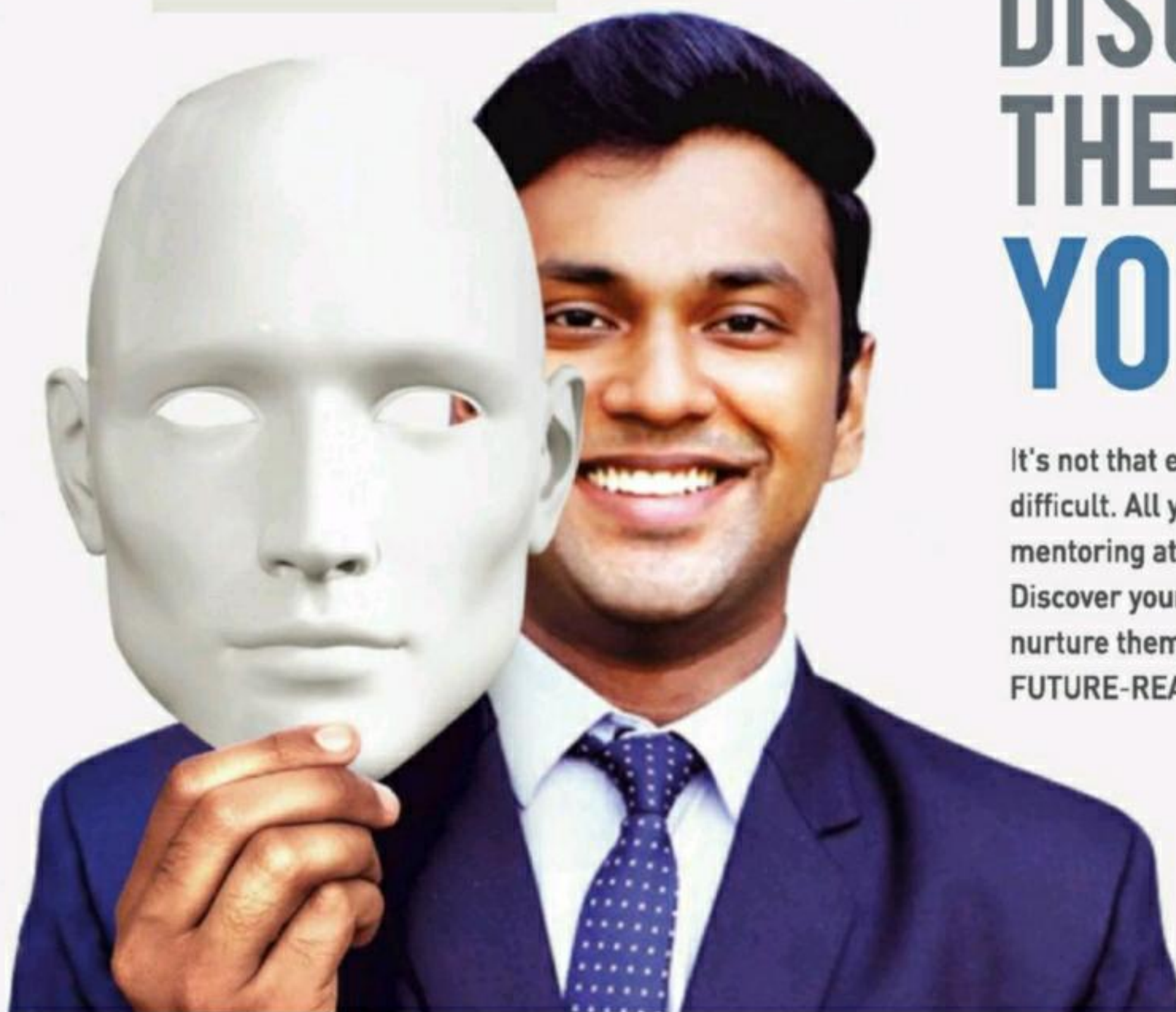
The Dum Dum MP will play a crucial role in North 24 Parganas, the state's biggest district with 33 seats. The political winds in three subdivisions—Barrackpore, Bangaon and Bidhannagar—favour the BJP. While the Barrackpore subdivision is populated by many non-Bengalis, the Bangaon constituency has a large number of refugees known as Matuas. The BJP is eyeing this community; the party had won the Bangaon seat in 2019. In Barrackpore, too, Trinamool defector Arjun Singh had swung the votes in the BJP's favour. In Bidhannagar, some Trinamool defectors have been extolling Modi's

successes. Roy, who will also handle his party's publicity drive in Kolkata, would have to play a crucial role in these areas. "I know there is a polarisation attempt by Modi and Amit Shah. But that would not work in Bengal," he said.

Asked how these elections were different, Roy sounded like his friend Mukherjee. "Obviously, we have never faced such a battery of top leaders in Bengal," he said. "We have never faced such a huge infusion of money. We had always faced the communists, who are localised. So, in a way, they (the BJP) have brought a different political culture to Bengal." ❶



SALIL BERA



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PHOTOS: SALIL BERA

MADAN MITRA

HE IS CONTROVERSIAL, colourful and tough, and has remained by Mamata's side during troubling times. Many rated him highly as state transport minister, before he got embroiled in the Saradha chit fund scam in 2014.

This time, Mitra will contest from Kamarhati, near Kolkata, but he will also be used in places where the BJP is strong, like Barrackpore, Bangaon and Salt Lake. Given his influence in Kolkata, Mitra is going to play a major role in the city's 11 seats. The Trinamool is banking on him to regain lost ground in Bhabanipur, Tollyganj and Rashbehari.

Even as he tries to do that, he also has to contend with the Enforcement Directorate; the agency recently called him in for the chit fund case. "I will find time to meet them even during this busy time," he said. "I have always helped them [with] the case in the past."

Mitra was in jail for two years, but continued as minister during that time. He also contested elections from jail in 2016, but lost. Out on bail, he contested the 2019 byelection from Bhatpara, which he again lost. But wins and losses are part of life, he said, adding that Mamata will remain invincible despite the BJP's best efforts. "I will only tell the BJP that it should not overlook us. We are connected to the people, and that would always remain our plus [point]," he said.

After Mamata, he is the party's most popular face on social media, and he has already sung a theme song for his party. He has also claimed that he will work to defeat Singh in Barrackpore, and deny the BJP a single seat in Kolkata.❶

RABINDRA NATH GHOSH

FIVE YEARS AGO, Ghosh had delivered north Bengal to Mamata. The party won close to 30 of 54 seats there; the region had been the stronghold of the left and the Congress. In return, she had made him north Bengal development minister.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, however, the Trinamool faltered. The BJP won seven of the eight seats in north Bengal; the Trinamool got none.

Ghosh, however, remains positive. "The BJP has collapsed in the past two years," he said. "Price rise, [especially of] gas cylinders, would go against them."

He added that, organisationally, his party had regained lost ground. It could regain the support of the Gorkhas with both Bimal Gurung and his rivals supporting Mamata. "Also, in the plains, the people have understood the BJP's game," he said. "The seven MPs are of no use. They have not been able to bring any project to north Bengal."

Ghosh, who will contest from Natabari in Cooch Behar, said he was travelling extensively in north Bengal. "If needed I will go to all eight districts. We will get a different result this time," he said.

Ghosh said that the BJP had won north Bengal because the left's votes had moved to the right. "The left had a vote share of 38 per cent in north Bengal, which completely went to the BJP during the Lok Sabha elections," he said. "They are returning to the left and to our party as well."

Calling this election a battle of survival for everyone, Ghosh said that the left's revival would ensure Trinamool's victory in north Bengal. "The left would completely cease to exist [if it does not win], and so it is trying to regain its votes. Our old votes have also come back thanks to the inefficiency of BJP MPs."❷





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Covert entry

Despite being the junior partner to the N.R. Congress, the BJP plots to have its own government in Puducherry

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

AFTER THE COLLAPSE of the V. Narayanasamy-led Congress government in Puducherry on February 22, the BJP has stepped up its political campaign in the Union territory. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah flew down to Puducherry in quick succession to launch the BJP's election campaign. Both leaders unleashed a scathing attack on Narayanasamy and the fallen Congress government. The BJP has been eyeing Puducherry as a stepping stone to the Tamil heartland.

"The BJP wants to capture power through backdoor. This will definitely not happen," Narayanasamy told THE WEEK. But the BJP believes that it has a chance, especially because of its control over the levers of power in Delhi and the strain on the Congress-DMK alliance. Despite initial hiccups, it has sealed its alliance with the All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) led by former chief minister N. Rangasamy. According to the deal which was finalised on March 9, the AINRC has been allotted 16 seats, the BJP has got nine and the AIADMK five.

The BJP-AINRC seat sharing arrangement was finalised after five rounds of talks between Rangasamy and the BJP's Puducherry in-charge Nirmal Kumar Surana. But the AINRC is upset that the BJP has not yet accepted Rangasamy as the chief minister candidate of the alliance. "Why should we go with the BJP? We want Rangasamy



to be our chief minister candidate. But the BJP has not said that openly," said Ravikumar Kandasamy, an AINRC member who was part of a group protesting against the BJP outside Rangasamy's residence. Rangasamy, however, said he was confident of victory. "All differences have been sorted out. We will form the government," he told THE WEEK.

The Congress and the DMK, too, had been trying to woo Rangasamy. Even a day before the BJP-AINRC deal was finalised, Puducherry Congress chief A.V. Subramanian said his party would not hesitate to align with Rangasamy to keep the BJP out. A.M.H. Nazeem, Karaikal district secretary of the DMK, released a video inviting Rangasamy to lead the anti-BJP front.



PHOTOS PTI

WHO WILL BLINK FIRST?

(Left) Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew down to launch the BJP's campaign; All India N.R. Congress leader N. Rangasamy

Rangasamy is seen as a simple person with an emotional connect with the people. He earned much sympathy when he was forced to launch the AINRC after the Congress high command chose Narayanasamy over him. He has been reluctant to go with the BJP this time, especially after the debacle he faced in 2019, when the AINRC-BJP alliance lost bypolls in two assembly seats and also the sole Lok Sabha seat in Puducherry. "He did not want to go with the BJP. But he had no other option as the Congress-DMK alliance still has chances to come back to power," said a source close to Rangasamy.

Despite its alliance with the AINRC, the BJP is plotting to have its own government and chief minister. One of the potential candidates is former Con-

gress leader A. Namassivayam, who defected to the BJP in January, despite being the second-in-command in the Narayanasamy cabinet. Half a dozen more Congress leaders followed him. "Narayanasamy failed to keep his promises. The Congress did not work for the people. This is the reason why their MLAs joined our party," said BJP leader V. Saminathan. He is confident that the BJP will form its own government despite Rangasamy's insistence on the top post. "Everything has been sorted out. You wait and see," he said.

The BJP will, however, find it difficult to implement its plan. For instance, it may not be easy for Namassivayam to retain his Villianur constituency, which has a considerable Muslim population. He has now been shifted to Mannadipattu, considered to be a safe seat. Being the son-in-law of Rangasamy's brother, he is also likely to face pressure from his family to scale down his ambition. Moreover, most of the MLAs who defected to the BJP are no longer so popular in their constituencies, and the BJP itself has no mass base in Puducherry.

The BJP had explored the possibility of prolonging president's rule in the Union territory under Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan, the new lieutenant governor. But the plan was abandoned after Narayanasamy played the victim card on the day of the trust vote and exposed the BJP's strategy. Subsequently, just before the elections were announced, the Centre appointed retired IAS officer C. Chandramouli and A.P. Maheshwari, who retired on February 28 as director general of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), as advisers to the new lieutenant governor, indicating that Soundararajan will have an extended tenure. The lieutenant governor is travelling extensively across Puducherry, trying to build a rapport with the people.

With a friendly lieutenant governor in charge, the BJP expects to fill the nominated seats in the assembly with its candidates. The support of the three nominated MLAs may turn out to be crucial in case of a hung assembly. Customarily, the lieutenant governor nominates candidates recommended by the cabinet. But in 2016, lieutenant governor Kiran Bedi ignored precedent and appointed three BJP office-bearers who had lost their deposits in the assembly elections. "Nominated MLAs cannot vote in the assembly. But they were allowed to vote. This shows the BJP's plan to form the government," said Narayanasamy.

Although elections in Puducherry are on April 6, the real political game will begin on May 2, when the results are declared. The endgame will depend on the number of seats won by the main alliances. ●



Sasikala is waiting

When V.K. Sasikala was released from jail in Bengaluru, she feistily decided to travel by road to Chennai. The journey was a political triumph. All along the route were cheering crowds on both sides, enthusiastically welcoming back their prodigal aunt—"Chinamma" or younger amma. They greatly delayed her progress, as she herself had so often witnessed their delaying her beloved friend. She reached Chennai hours late, even as Amma [J. Jayalithaa] herself had so often arrived late, exhausted but her spirits buoyed by the prospect of victory.

There were, however, no smiles, only scowls on the faces of the chief minister (EPS) and his deputy (OPS). They poured scorn and cold water on their erstwhile patron, complaining that she had no right to display the two leaves symbol and the name of their party on her car as she had been expelled from even the primary membership of the AIADMK. She airily dismissed the charge.

There was, however, no groundswell of support for her among MLAs or other high echelons of the party, despite the cadres having so clearly demonstrated their continuing commitment to their Amma's favourite companion. The MLAs were preoccupied with proving their loyalty to current leaders to not risk losing tickets to fight their seats once more. As for EPS and OPS, they did not want to face a challenge to their hard-won leadership with assembly elections around the corner. Their relief must have known no bounds when Sasikala abruptly, and unexpectedly, announced her withdrawal from active politics. Why did she do so?

Let it be noted that she took her time making this startling announcement. She needed the time to assess her prospects within the AIADMK; within her nephew, T.T.V. Dhinakaran's wobbling outfit;

and within her family. Clearly, it was because she judged the moment to be unsuitable that she decided not to strike for the top slot right now.

I do not believe for a moment that there is any finality to her decision. I think she has correctly assessed that the coming elections will herald the defeat of the EPS-OPS led party, probably resoundingly and hence definitively. She realises that the right moment to make her bid to come in would be when the party is looking in defeat for an alternative leadership and alternative allies.

While the DMK alliance is all set to carry away the trophy, her nephew's party has failed to get kick-started despite Dhinakaran having won Jayalalithaa's seat of R.K. Nagar in a sympathy wave. Why go down separately when she does not wish to go down collectively with EPS-OPS? Much better to wait a while, have no responsibility for the coming reverses to the AIADMK-BJP, then rouse the cadres, who are and will remain with her and then take a shot at leading her party to victory five or ten years from now?

Moreover, her brother, V.K. Dhivakaran, appears to have advised her not to align with the sinking ship that Dhinakaran has floated. By a moment's patience, she could reunite her party, reunite her family and decide herself, and not by political inheritance, whether to accept dominance over her Dravidian party of the looming shadow from Aryavarta. She has age on her side; charisma on her side; Amma's blessings on her side; and she is not burdened by anti-incumbency. Moreover, her opponents in the party can no more than hint at her being a jailbird because she is one only to the extent that their revered Amma was almost one.

I think we will be hearing from Sasikala soon after the assembly election results are announced on May 2. Watch this space.



Close encounters

Threats from many insurgent groups in Assam keep security forces on their toes

BY NAMRATA BIJI AHUJA

ON MARCH 3, Nahid Karishma, deputy superintendent of Assam Police, and her team waited patiently for hours at the Diphu railway station in Karbi Anglong district in southern Assam. She had intel on a terror attack being planned at the railway station. In fact, she had been gathering intelligence for weeks about the activities of the banned Dimas National Liberation Army (DNLA).

Nahid and her team intercepted a man with a Chinese grenade just before he reached the platform. “A major disaster was averted,” said Satyaraj Hazarika, deputy inspector

general of police. “It was an operation based on Nahid’s collection of intelligence at the district level.”

The intelligence, however, has been piling up. The DNLA, allegedly, is supported by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), one of the biggest insurgent groups in the northeast, and it is planning an explosion at Dhansiri market. Another warning says the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) is threatening oil installations in the state and recruiting youth. Yet another one says Bodo youths are regrouping in the villages of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) to create a new militant group. Then across the border in Bangladesh, there is a

surge in anti-India activities by the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

In addition to all these, there are about a dozen warnings about subversive activities being planned during the assembly elections in the state. Ironically, the elections were supposed to be a litmus test for the Narendra Modi government’s claim that insurgency had been curbed in the state that had long been a hotbed of separatist movements. “Assam remains a focal point in the northeast,” said Lt General Shokin Chauhan, former chairman of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group in Nagaland. “It is the richest state and it connects all the northeast states. Most of the



NEW BEGINNING

A former NDFB militant surrenders his arms to Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal in Guwahati

extortion by insurgent groups and criminal elements is connected to rich people in the state because of tea gardens and industries." It is also a transit route for insurgents.

Assam has been a tinderbox over the past few months. It witnessed widespread protests over the government's move to implement the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the winter of 2019-2020. While the BJP is maintaining a strategic silence on it, the Congress is keeping the pot boiling through its anti-CAA campaign and cobbling up a grand alliance with Badruddin Ajmal's AIUDF, Bodoland People's Front, CPI, CPI (M), Bodoland Democratic Front and Anchalik Gana Morcha.

The Assam-Bengal corridor has also become active on the security graph with the police from both states trying to track the movements of JMB and its associated operatives. After a blast in Burdwan in Bengal in 2014, a few JMB men were arrested in Assam. "We have information that Islamic fundamentalist groups are trying to expand territory," said Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, director-general of Assam Police. "They are taking advantage of the proximity with Bangladesh, hiding in border districts and making forays into Assam and West Bengal."

A political blame game has also begun with BJP holding the Mamata Banerjee government responsible for rising "radicalisation" in West Bengal. "If you see last several years' record, police forces of other states have intelligence about terror activities in West Bengal but the state administration does not seem to be aware or equipped to handle it," said Sukanta Majumdar, BJP MP from Balurghat. He said the NIA's probe into the Burdwan blast brought out how the state was vulnerable to terror activities. "There are congregations being held by radical outfits in the state who are propagating

extremism and have cross border support," he said.

Police say there was a high-level meeting of JMB functionaries in Dhubri in May 2020 for planning operations in Assam and West Bengal. But the arrests of two JMB cadres in Hooghly and Murshidabad by a special taskforce on May 29 and June 2 foiled the plans. The Assam Police, however, believe a new wing of the JMB has come up.

Meanwhile, the Islamic State terror module in lower Assam is using the remnants of the Harkat-ul-Mu-

The Islamic State terror module in lower Assam is using the remnants of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, which was busted in 2010-2011.

jahideen, which was busted in 2010-2011. These cadres, trained in Afghanistan and Bangladesh in making bombs, have been carrying out a recce of venues of important political meetings, said a counter-terror official.

A Kerala-based extremist organisation, too, is recruiting in Assam by cashing in on the anti-CAA sentiments. There are recruitment and training camps in Barak Valley, Goalpara, Nagaon, central Assam and Char areas. "These fundamentalist groups are trying to acquire a secular clout and are using the CAA to mobilise support, but they are not getting credence among the minority community," said Mahanta.

There is also a growing threat from dreaded outfits like ULFA and NSCN (Khaplang). The kidnapping of two employees of Quippo Oil and Gas In-

frastructure Limited on December 21 by a joint group of ULFA and NSCN (K) showed that they were trying to fill their coffers before the elections. Intelligence inputs have warned that these outfits may try to extort from parties and candidates, and influence voters.

A year ago, 1,615 militants belonging to different factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) surrendered before the authorities, which led to the signing of the Bodoland Territorial Region Accord (BTR). A historic peace deal between the state, the Centre and Bodo stakeholders, BTR was the third accord signed in the past 27 years to end the violent movement for a separate Bodoland.

While the accord changed the name of the Bodoland Territorial Area District (spread over Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri) to Bodoland Territorial Region, there was no mention of a separate Bodoland state. However, after the signing of the agreement, K. Batha, a key NDFB leader, left for the jungles. Batha has now returned with G. Bidai, the dreaded army chief of the banned outfit, and he is reportedly trying to build a militant group by recruiting Bodo youths.

Ranjit Basumatary, former general secretary of the NDFB(S), said Batha's return was a setback to the Bodo peace process. Basumatary, who is now an executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Council, has urged the Union home ministry not to delay the implementation of the clauses of the accord, which include monetary assistance, recruitment of NDFB cadres in government jobs, ex gratia payment and rehabilitation, and a special assistance package. "There is trouble in the lower BTR areas as youth are joining Batha because they have no means of sustenance," he said. "We are still waiting for the special assistance promised by the Centre." ●

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INTERVIEW

Providing COVID care was like running a marathon

Dr Narayani is a leader who was clear in her resolve to make Fortis one of the first in the city to manage COVID patients. Here, she recounts the journey that started a year back, with literally no end in sight.

How do you look back at this one-year journey with the pandemic?

Actually, I am unable to recollect the time before the pandemic hit us! My work life spans over two decades, but the past year pushes everything into oblivion. The journey was full of disruptions, new challenges each day not knowing what lies ahead and most importantly, no standard answers available.

It was like running a marathon with numerous do-or-die dashes on a track strewn with mines! When the marathon will end is a question that remains to be answered.

When did you decide on becoming a COVID care unit?

COVID was international news until February 2020; as it came closer home, question of Fortis allocating beds for COVID care came up. I had conflicting thoughts—if I transform my hospitals for COVID, will my frontline staff be ready to work? Will it reduce non-COVID patients due to the stigma? What about our financial stability?

I took a call for all my four units—Fortis Hospital, Mulund, would become one of the first in Mumbai for COVID care. My strategy involved offering critical care services (being experts in that space) and making Mulund a referral centre for the other three (Kalyan, Mahim, Vashi), continuing to run them as non-COVID units.

Did the team accept your decision?

It wasn't easy to motivate the team especially my key clinicians, as we knew

what we were getting into. However, I remained firm. A core team was formed to draft a process-flow and safety measures. With an initial plan ready, I went back to finally convince them. Once they were persuaded, focus was shifted to the infrastructure and employees.

How did you ensure front-line employees' safety?

Engaging and keeping employees safe was vital. The team designed a manpower plan and initiated discussion with every segment managing patients at close-contact (nursing, housekeeping, security) to address genuine fears. We committed fully to their care in case they got infected. Each and every department was trained with effective use of technology. Hospital provided accommodation to most staff as lockdown crippled transportation and healthcare workers were ostracised by housing societies.

Post two COVID months, I was pleased with our team's performance and entire staff 100% safe. We were viewed as role-models within the network and by other private hospitals.

However, in May, a COVID duty doctor tested positive; within a week, few more staff got infected. My care-givers became care-seekers! We managed to keep the show running even with a depleted team. After a stressful three weeks, all staff were discharged post a full recovery.

What were the team's main challenges?

In May, cases surged and there was a never-ending clamour for beds. Mulund was sought-after as it headlined media/press coverages; COVID patients couldn't be refused but our routine footfall was reducing rapidly.

COVID-work could no longer be Mu-



Dr S. Narayani

(Zonal Director, Fortis Hospitals, Mumbai)

lund-restricted; Our hospitals like Vashi transformed into a dedicated COVID centre; Mahim managed mildly symptomatic cases; Kalyan, being a small facility, couldn't provide COVID services but became a knowledge-partner with the Corporation. Soon, we were extending treatment to cases beyond Mumbai. As beds' demand mounted, we kept rising to the occasion; home-care scheme was launched for mildly symptomatic patients.

We were grappling with lockdown, government capping and increased cost of care. Our financials needed attention; my management team, clinicians and myself opted for compensation-related cut-backs to tide over these tough times.

What is next on the agenda for Fortis?

We are recognised as a preferred destination for COVID. A post-COVID OPD was inaugurated and the facility offers COVID immunisation. On the economic front, emphasis is required, but launch of our 'New Age Hospital', (hybrid care) has picked speed. My team is readying for the 6th JCI re-accreditation, and the hospital is all set to become the 1st hospital pan-India to be assessed on brand-new edition of JCI protocols. Life goes on.



FORTIS HOSPITAL, MULUND: MARCHING ON IN THE COVID BATTLE

Hospital's war cry

The pandemic posed myriad challenges to the team at Fortis Hospital, Mulund, Mumbai, due to its unanticipated nature, critical ones being absence of prescribed treatment norms, vaccine unavailability and effective management of protocols of COVID and non-COVID patients. To keep up its pledge to the community "healthcare for all", the Fortis team rose to the occasion, ready to combat this public health emergency.

A core team of experts was created. It comprised of the Zonal Director (Mumbai), Infectious Disease Specialists, Intensivists, Critical Care experts, Emergency Care experts, medical services, administration and nursing. Post extensive brainstorming sessions, the objectives were laid out:

- Creation of a safe patient pathway

- Development and standardisation of clinical protocols
- Frontline engagement
- Post-COVID management

Infrastructural modifications

The team mapped a chart highlighting crucial touchpoints during a patient's hospital visit. Efforts were undertaken to ensure no cross contamination happens at any touchpoint. Multiple preparedness runs were conducted to create a safe patient movement pathway, leading to carving out a 'hospital within a hospital' set-up. Currently, the hospital has a '3-tier COVID defence structure' with immaculate screening, Fever Clinics (FLU) and in-patient isolation facilities. All this was executed without impacting admitted patients and OPD services.

Uniform clinical protocols

In a similar vein, transformation was needed in the COVID patients' treatment guidelines. The team reviewed available literature, and had discussions with colleagues overseas who had managed these patients.

Clinical protocols were laid down for four patient categories:

1. Confirmed COVID-19 positive
2. Suspected positive
3. Patients with upper respiratory tract infection
4. Patients seeking regular medical aid

All hospital protocols were reviewed for standardising of admission, investigations, level of care, details/frequency of communication with relatives across wards, HDU and ICU. Consistent schedules were established for blood sample collection, diet



and drug administration.

Uniform Infection control practices and ICU protocols were implemented for effective functioning. Meanwhile, the hospital's Director of Clinical Care got aboard the Maharashtra Government COVID-19 Taskforce, further synergising facility's efforts with rest of the state. Referrals were coming from outside the city, and the hospital had to expand its bed strength to accommodate maximum number of COVID19 positive patients. The facility was gaining pan-India recognition for its "best clinical outcomes".

Frontline warriors' engagement

Adequate medical personnel were needed to manage the patient load. A 7-on-7 schedule (7 days' duty followed by 7 days' of isolation) was prepared for the clinical staff. The staff was required to have extensive awareness to manage COVID patients. Training sessions incorporated blended-learning approach with webinars, e-learning modules, certificate courses and classroom training (maintaining safety standards).

Initially, sessions were conducted on COVID-19 awareness, hand/respiratory hygiene reinforcement, infection control practices, PPE don-

ning/doffing, etc. As treatment norms became clearer, training focussed on COVID-related medications, transmission-based precautions, specific training on positive patients' critical care, COVID-related documentation/consent and emphasis on mental health (stress management, maintaining appropriate sleep cycle, coping with behaviours in a social-setting, etc.) were incorporated.

Digital mode for patient care!

Treatment shifted from a majorly offline to a digital mode. This seamless transition was customised for patients needing assurance due to COVID fear/myths, and those infected, requiring treatment. Multiple technological interventions were undertaken like online counselling on a dedicated COVID helpline that was managed by medical experts, tele/video consultations and AI chat-bot for risk-screening. Home-care services were launched for mildly symptomatic patients, thus restricting patients' hospital visits.

Community awareness on COVID was generated through specially-curated content on social-media, live interactive discussions with the hospital's COVID19 experts, broadcast

of informational videos, along with recovered patients' testimonials. As the lockdown eased, 'new normal' advisory series were circulated, to enable the community to adapt better, depicting regular activities like ATM-visits, grocery-shopping, managing special conditions like diabetes, dialysis etc.

A 'new age hospital'

The hospital continued rendering care to non-COVID patients even amid the pandemic. The emergency department, designed with negative pressure rooms within the existing infrastructure, provided uninterrupted service for COVID and non-COVID patients. Initially, digital/online consults were extensively utilised. Soon, regular OPDs and set schedules for dialysis and chemotherapy resumed. Treatment of patients especially with serious ailments like cardiac conditions, Cancer, remained unhindered; this included surgeries in the OT, while ensuring that all protocols were followed.

Aiming to tackle short and long-term implications for patients who emerged winners post their COVID battle, the hospital launched the city's first dedicated post-COVID OPD. Driven by Intensive Care Specialists and Infectious Disease Specialists along with Mental Health Experts, the OPD continues to provide focused care based on three pillars—clinical assessment, psychological intervention and rehabilitative care. This model is being adopted at other civic and private hospitals as well.

The hospital marches on in its fight against the deadly virus by becoming a COVID-19 vaccination centre, further strengthening its partnership with the Government and the allied civic bodies. An inoculation zone was identified within hospital premises, where about 500 citizens have been receiving the vaccination each day; the team hopes to intensify this crusade over time.

Fully equipped as a hybrid-care hospital with expertise to manage diverse ailments offering uncompromised care and safety, including the dreaded COVID, Fortis Hospital Mulund has emerged to be a trailblazer in the fight against COVID-19.



CRITICAL CARE: THE CORE OF COVID MANAGEMENT

Dr Rahul Pandit

Director - Critical Care, Fortis Hospitals, Mumbai
& Member of State Task Force for COVID-19

Post December 2019, a calamity of unknown proportions unfolded, sweeping healthcare systems around the world. The western countries, even with their mature and established healthcare facilities, struggled as the pandemic created havoc. An infectious disease not seen during modern times, showed just how ill-prepared we humans were to deal with it. India was no exception; Mumbai became the pandemic's epicenter when it began and spread across the country.

In these testing times, doctors pausing routine work and hospitals struggling to cope were commonly seen. However, across the board one specialty which stood up to take the challenge chin-up was Critical Care. They were the frontline workers, who had no option but to quickly adapt to the challenge and start functioning.

Fortis Hospital Mulund (Mumbai) was one of the pioneers in setting up a COVID-19 Intensive Care Unit (ICU), leading the way in managing the virus. This required a complete transformation in thought process vis-à-vis standard ICU management. The hospital team had to start from carving out a new ICU within the existing infrastructure, which would adhere to infection control protocols. A separate entrance and exit was just the beginning; increasing air exchanges in the AC unit, devising negative

pressure rooms, donning and doffing of PPE areas and manpower training had to be implemented immediately. The hospital team standardized protocols, teaching videos were created and informative publications distributed electronically across the country. Clinical management standards for COVID were prepared, scientific publications like 6-minute walk test helped people understand the physiology, complexity and identification of critical COVID patients early. Meanwhile, I was appointed as a member of the Maharashtra Government COVID-19 task force. The Fortis ICU protocols were deliberated by the task force, to be included as a part of the state's COVID management protocol.

Many aspects of our clinical care differed from how other ICUs were managing the disease. The high flow nasal cannula device became the standard of care for non-invasive ventilation of COVID patients. Its efficiency, ease of use, patient comfort facilitated recovery of many patients, aiding several others to progress on to invasive ventilation. For the patients needing invasive mechanical ventilation, the team followed a strict protocol—no hesitation in ventilating patients when essential, unlike ICUs where ventilator outcomes were questioned. Prone ventilation became the norm. The clinical outcomes spoke for themselves; lowest mortality rates were seen among our ventilated patients. The

proof of the pudding was when the medical community recognised Fortis Mulund as their preferred destination for COVID treatment. More than 200 doctors, several paramedical and nursing staff have been treated at the unit, successfully.

Support was extended to patients unable to reach Fortis, admitted in other hospitals on ventilator, with their condition continuously deteriorating. We became one of the few teams in the country to initiate an Extra Corporal Membrane Oxygenator (ECMO) retrieval program, wherein the team would visit, start ECMO at the referring hospital and aid patient transfer (on ECMO) to Fortis. It was a gratifying experience for the hospital; the service was widely acknowledged by the doctors and the community at large.

The virus was predominantly affecting the lungs. There was a small group of patients whose condition was not improving despite maximal care. Lung transplant was their only hope. We decided to resume our lung transplant program and it's in top gear right now.

This journey has been one of crests and troughs, bringing to the fore our abilities as a team, establishing Fortis Hospital, Mulund, as one of the leading health-care providers in the country, during the most unprecedented time, with Fortis ICU at the core of care delivery.



Dr Anil Heroor

HOD & Sr Consultant - Surgical Oncology
Fortis Hospital, Mulund, Mumbai

CANCER CARE DURING COVID-19

Onco-specialists at Fortis Hospital, Mulund, conducted over 500 lifesaving Cancer surgeries during the pandemic

CCOVID-19 came as a classical black swan event. When nobody expected it, the virus completely disrupted our lives and changed the world as we knew. During the pandemic every kind of intervention as far as cancer care was concerned, went for a toss. Even in developed countries, patients with cancer suffered immensely, and countries like India were no exception. India has about 12 lakh cancer patients annually. In most patients, cancer diagnosis gets delayed by 3-4 months; this has been documented by a study done at a government hospital in Kolkata. However, the pandemic not only delayed diagnosis further, but completely disrupted care in many ways.

The initial pandemic days were challenging as the entire healthcare community was in a state of panic. At the same time, many questions concerning the continuity of healthcare services for cancer patients were raised, as they are immunocompromised and are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. It was even thought that patients who could wait should delay treatment.

At Fortis Hospital Mulund, with active involvement of our multi-disciplinary team, comprising of our COVID-19 task force, who were managing COVID care across Mumbai, clinical protocols were

standardised in no time.

DEVISING SOPS FOR REINSTATING CARE SERVICES: Keeping with all infection control protocols, our cancer care team decided to continue administering cancer treatment. Cancer surgeries continued but we were selective in advising patients eligible for surgery. Post chemotherapy or those undergoing chemotherapy and those due for surgery in a short time, were advised to continue their Chemotherapy.

An article published in *Lancet Medical Journal* in July 2020, claimed that COVID-19 would result in 15-16% additional deaths among Cancer patients, annually. This was disheartening and therefore we did everything in our capacity to ensure patients get the required care during this time. We were already losing people to COVID-19, we did not want to lose more people to Cancer. So, we strengthened our protocols further and reinstated facilities for Cancer treatment schedules. Patients who were fit, with no signs of severe co-morbidities such as uncontrolled diabetes or those on chemotherapy, were advised to continue routine treatment.

During the early months, we made COVID-19 testing mandatory for surgery, to ensure both the patient and the providers safety. Now, we are better informed, RT-PCR test 48-72 hours before surgery is mandatory. Of course, not everything is back to the way it was. There are additional investigations that are now pre-requisites to surgical intervention. But we have crossed the difficult part to ensure patient safety.

INNOVATION TO ELEVATE PATIENT SAFETY AND EXPERIENCE: There was also a lot of discussion around pa-

tient's exposure to the anaesthesia and surgical team during their operation. To administer anaesthesia, a workstation was created which looked like a hood, allowing the Anaesthetist to intubate without hampering work, while providing adequate safety to members in the OT. It's not easy operating with a full PPE, especially if the surgery is lengthy, the team gets exhausted early.

The hospital has a robust laparoscopic and robotic surgery centre where multiple cancer surgeries are performed using minimal access technique. There was apprehension that the smoke generated during laparoscopy procedure may carry the virus and contaminate the operating team. We adapted to the new working conditions quickly by utilising a home-made method! Our brilliant young surgeons designed a smoke evacuator by using a simple IV set and a saline solution bottle to help withdraw the smoke.

More and more patients were advised minimal access and robotic surgery that reduced human touch & ensured higher precision. Even from the patient's perspective, robotic surgeries are advantageous as it enabled smaller incisions, early recuperation and shorter hospital stay—crucial aspect during the pandemic.

Management support in implementing protocols, keeping the OT running smoothly by timely procurement of equipment and zero staff shortage, enabled and empowered us to keep offering timely interventions. It was courageous of the entire team, especially the essential staff that risked their lives for serving patients in these tough times, to go the extra mile to serve those in need, all in a bid to save and enrich lives.



Quad is more than anti-China

Everyone likes to be a member of an exclusive club, yet no one likes a club whose membership rules disbar you. That social paradox extends to the world of international relations. When Russia brought together Brazil, China and India to launch a quadrilateral group called BRIC, with the stated objective of creating a new world order, the US pooh-poohed it as a gathering of wannabes. A decade-and-a-half later the heads of government of Australia, India, Japan and the US have come together to form the Quad. China has dismissed it as a 'talk shop'.

When China invited South Africa and made BRIC into BRICS, many analysts argued that they lacked the concrete required to hold them together. It took three BRICS summits of long speeches, longer joint statements and no concrete agenda for India to finally come up with the proposal that the group set up a rival to the US-led World Bank in the form of a development bank, now called the New Development Bank. That China came to dominate BRICS and the bank was located in Shanghai was a natural consequence of the fact that China's national income and its foreign exchange reserves are more than the combined national income and reserves of the other four.

Quad's success will be determined by the extent to which the US is willing to address the concerns of its three partners. In any club the most powerful set the terms of engagement. What Quad will achieve in geopolitical terms apart from putting China on guard, important as this objective is, is not yet clear. China's protestations about Quad being a ganging up are vastly exaggerated given that it is itself a member of many such plurilateral groups that have kept one or the other Quad members out.

What Quad has already achieved in geo-economic

terms is to use the Asian demand for Covid-19 vaccines as an opportunity to create a four-way economic relationship that combines the benefits of American research, Japanese funding, Indian manufacturing capacity and Australian marketing network to supply vaccines to Asian developing countries. This is without doubt a smart idea and one that can ensure its equal ownership by all four partner countries.

For the Indian pharmaceuticals industry, that has for many years faced an unequal playing field in overseas markets, the vaccine opportunity has been a boon. Countries that once sought to erect barriers to entry to Indian pharma are now laying out the red carpet. This is welcome news. The Quad have

already demonstrated their ability to cooperate in the space of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region and will continue to explore new areas for cooperation and combined action.

For Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the formalisation of Quad and its elevation to summit-level meetings is without doubt the single

most important diplomatic achievement of his prime ministerial career thus far. Modi had no remarkable foreign policy achievement of his own in his first term, like Manmohan Singh's historic nuclear deal with the US. He did, however, take forward many initiatives of his predecessor, including the relationships with the US, Japan and Australia.

The formalisation of Quad and the articulation of a clear purpose and agenda through a joint statement is a landmark development on the geopolitical and geo-economic front and a significant achievement for Modi. It has the potential to provide a framework within which India can once again secure a global environment more hospitable for its economic rise. It is entirely possible that over time countries like Canada, South Korea and Vietnam will seek membership of a Quad Plus.



Baru is an economist and a writer. He was adviser to former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN

COVER STORY

WAR
AGAINST
THE VIRUS



A

THE

BEHIND THE SCENES
Housekeeping staff at a
quarantine centre in Kolkata

A person wearing a full-body blue protective suit, including a hood and gloves, stands next to a large, dark wooden door with a grid pattern. The person is looking down at their hands. The scene is dimly lit, with a blue light source illuminating the person and the door.

GE OF ROIES

FOR EVERY COVID-19 WARRIOR WHO WENT TO
BATTLE, THERE WAS A BATTALION OF HEROES
WHO BROUGHT SUCCOUR TO ALL AND SOLUTION
TO PANDEMIC-INDUCED PROBLEMS

BY REKHA DIXIT

SALIL BERA

Nanotechnologist Sandip Patil ramped up production of his pathogen-resistant masks and supplied it to hospitals and government agencies across states.

It was the summer of 2020. Covid-19 had locked the world into tight rings, both within nations and internationally. In the UAE, many Indians were stranded, having lost jobs and with no means of returning home. When India launched its biggest ever repatriation mission, Vande Bharat, there was a scurry to book a seat home.

Ananya Srivastava, a 13-year-old living in Dubai, had a grand sum of 3,000 dirhams in her savings box, money she had been collecting for over three years by denying herself many little treats. She was saving to get herself a dog for her 13th birthday. Then, she heard her father in discussion with his colleagues about booking a special charter for northeast India, to send home retrenched workers. When Ananya learnt that there were people who did not have money to get back home, she was shaken. A little later, she went to her parents with her savings. "Will this take them home?" she asked. Ananya's contribution sponsored the return of two men.

Much before Sonu Sood became the patron saint of the stranded, young Ananya was that little angel who understood their pain. Tiny though her contribution might have been, it was that vital drop in the pool of heroism that is helping the country tide over the havoc of the pandemic. "I only wish I could have done more," she says. Give until it hurts, Mother Teresa used to say. Ananya is honest enough to admit that it saddened her not to get her dog. They tried adopting one, but the paperwork was so cumbersome that the attempt failed. Ananya stoically began saving again, till January 2021 when a friend's dog had a litter. Her parents felt she had earned it and brought home a tiny Maltese, whom she named Pebbles.

Over the last one year, the pandemic-induced lockdown has thrown up one challenge after another. Each of these challenges raised a battalion of heroes—men, women and children, who came out with succour and solution to every situation. As the world looks at India's performance during the last year, there is wonder in how a country with a huge population and a basic-at-best health infrastructure not just dealt with the virus so well—with a per capita death toll much below that of the advanced nations—but was also able to reach out

to the less privileged across the world.

This was because the country began preparing for the pandemic much before it hit our shores. As Shekhar Mande, director general of Centre for Industrial and Scientific Research, says, India was well aware of how poorly equipped it was, and got into a war mode to prepare armour and ammunition for the battle ahead. In fact, much as we doff our caps to the Covid-19 warriors, or frontline workers—health and conservancy staff, transporters and supply chain managers—who ensured that people could stay at home, we salute those who armed and armoured these warriors, too, while themselves remaining in the shadows.

India is one of the countries where the mask protocol has been good. Nanotechnologist Sandip Patil, an alumnus of IIT Kanpur, was among the first to provide an India-designed mask that not just created a barrier and kept out pollutants, but



AAYUSH GOEL

Ananya Srivastava, 13, gave up **3,000 dirhams—money she had been saving for three years to buy a dog—to sponsor the return of two retrenched men from Dubai.**

was also pathogen resistant. He had developed this mask, sold under the brand name Swasa, a few years earlier, when India began battling winter smog. His enterprise was modest. But when the pandemic unfurled, Patil went back to the incubation centre at his alma mater and ramped up production, tirelessly supplying hospitals and government agencies across states. The masks were much cheaper than imported varieties (in any case, imports had stopped). Patil was pleasantly surprised to see Prime Minister Narendra Modi donning these masks. In the early months, he was the largest maker of N95-class masks in India. By July, other manufacturers also entered the market. India is now providing masks to other countries in its aid hampers.

If the mask is the first line of defence, the ventilator is the last resort. The story of how India became a ventilator-maker reads like a race-

against-time thriller. On March 16, the prime minister's office announced the Covid-19 innovation challenge and Amitabha Bandopadhyay, who heads the bioincubator at IIT Kanpur, reached out to his various groups. One was a duo, Nikhil Kurele and Harshit Rathore, both 27, who had a startup unit in Pune, manufacturing robots to clean solar panels. "I asked them if they would make a ventilator," says Bandopadhyay. They had never seen a ventilator in their lives, and knew next to nothing about medical technology. "Yet, we researched, staying up all night. And in 48 hours, we came up with our first design," says Rathore. "We saw our first ventilator only after we had designed one."

Knowing they were onto something big, Bandopadhyay contacted alumnus Srikant Sastri, and together, they formed a task force of 20. "We had two Padma awardees on board, five CEOs, medical technology experts.... Every day at noon, we got



33,000

Number of meals Sameer Dhar (in picture), proprietor of the Nowhere Terrace, Gurugram, was providing per day in April. His kitchen is still feeding the needy.

Deploying Technology Against The Pandemic

Criterion Tech Pvt. Ltd. is a technology company offering intuitive software and hardware solutions for enhanced patient care. The pandemic prompted us to adapt our technology for better management of COVID-19 patients and for minimising disruption in the healthcare delivery amongst non-COVID patients. We worked closely with two major COVID centres in Lucknow to help combat this crisis.



REMOTE MONITORING DASHBOARD

Initial reports about COVID-19 suggested that patients were succumbing to the disease after sudden deterioration. This made us realise close monitoring of COVID-19 patients will be essential in preventing such adverse events. Another issue that we anticipated was that healthcare workers, our most vital line of defence against the pandemic, would be most at-risk of contracting the infection themselves.

Thus we re-purposed the Patient Monitoring Dashboard for remote viewing of investigative parameters and live vitals of patients. Moreover, a high definition live-stream of patients from inside the COVID-19 wards was enabled on the dashboard for visual assessment of patients' conditions. An intercom and

public address system was dedicated for communication between the doctors monitoring remotely and the healthcare workers inside the ward.

The Remote Monitoring Dashboard (RMD) is being used at the control rooms of government and private L-3 COVID hospitals, viz. Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences and Era's Lucknow Medical College. Having been set up at the start of the pandemic,

it has enabled continuous monitoring for thousands of patients suffering from moderate to severe COVID-19.

The most-experienced doctors, who were also the most at-risk for severe infection, used the RMD to assess patients' conditions without repeated exposure to COVID wards. The colour coding of deranged values and smart alerts for deteriorating patients helped them provide telephonic guidance to younger doctors working inside the wards.

Due to the continuous stream of patient data, doctors were able to see trends in vitals and investigative parameters of patients. This is one way in which the overview provided through the dashboard helped the doctors at the control room comprehend much more patient data than what is generally possible while managing patients first-hand. The doctors working inside the COVID ward attested to this.



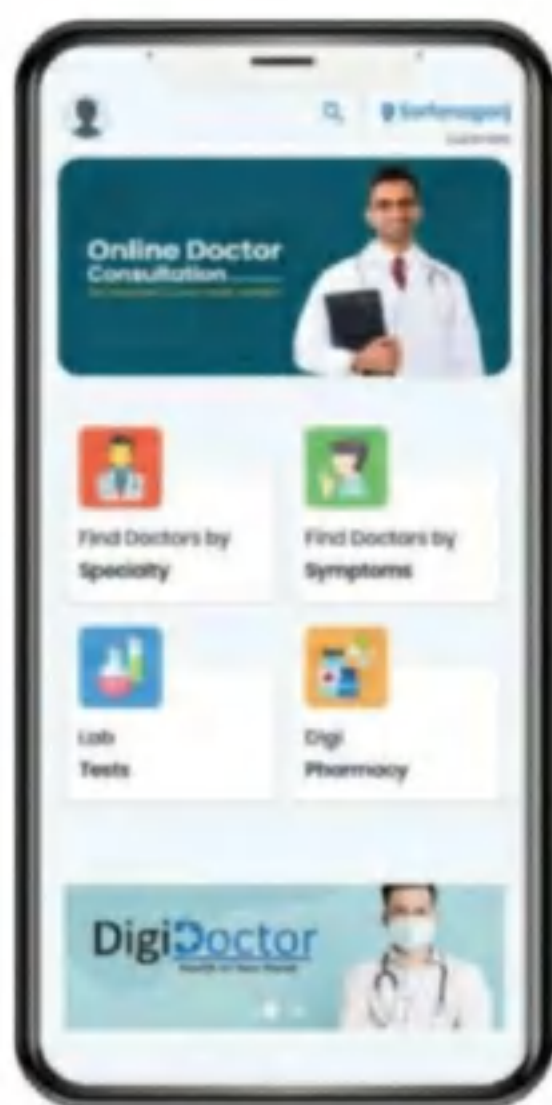
They reported that the alerts they got from the control room helped in better prioritisation of patient care inside the wards and prevented adverse events on multiple occasions.

Such remote monitoring and guidance by specialist doctors enabled by the dashboard also helped save precious time in the management of emergencies by saving the time it would have taken them in wearing a PPE and reaching the patients for managing emergencies themselves.

These are some of the ways in which the Remote Monitoring Dashboard helped save lives during the pandemic and contributed to a recovery rate as high as 94.2% amongst COVID-19 patients at L-3 hospitals.

DigiDoctor

Digi Doctor by Criterion Tech is an online healthcare consultation app that



has provided thousands of patients access to telemedicine since the start of the pandemic. It provides quality remote medical evaluation and prescription from specialist doctors. Moreover, it digitally transmits patient's medical images, processes health problems and suggests appropriate medical specialities for consultation. The app also helps maintain a record of vitals such as heart rate, oxygen saturation, blood pressure, pulse rate, perfusion index and temperature.

During the COVID-19 crisis, going outside one's home for medical consultation was and still continues to be a stressful

experience. A common dilemma for patients during the pandemic has been whether to postpone their hospital visits or risk going to hospitals amidst all kinds of patients. DigiDoctor's telemedicine platform has mitigated this stress amongst several thousand patients by providing them the convenience of seeking medical guidance from the comfort of their homes.

Telemedicine consultations through DigiDoctor have helped many types of patients avoid hospital visits for follow-ups as well. The ease of virtual consultations and follow-ups has enabled easier implementation of social distancing at hospitals and clinics.

DigiDoctor has had such a significant impact on the wellbeing of patients due to the doctors of various medical specialities who have provided crucial service on this platform during this pandemic. Many of them provided their service to patients at a subsidised rate or even free of cost. DigiDoctor applauds their invaluable contribution towards combatting pain and suffering at a time when the world needed it the most.

DigiDoctor is available on Android and iOS for patients and doctors around the nation. To know more, visit www.digidoctor.in

SMART OPD Kiosk

Crowded help desks and long queues at the reception of any clinic or hospital is a common occurrence at healthcare



OTHER INNOVATIONS

- **Hospital Information System** with all standard modules and advanced clinical decision support system
- **Urine Measurement Devices** for output monitoring and fluid management of ICU patients
- **Ventilator Data Transmitters** for remote monitoring of ventilated patients
- **NutriAnalyser App** for tracking of nutritional input
- **Automated BMI Machine** that transmits data to HIS
- **Video Laryngoscope** with remote viewing functionality for monitoring intubations
- **Advanced Ambulance** with "Mobile ICU"
- **Bluetooth Pulse Oximeters & BP Machines** with option to integrate with apps and HIS

facilities. Sometimes it takes a very long time to just get an appointment. The patients are already unwell and the time-consuming queues and waiting rooms add to their distress. Criterion Tech's Smart OPD Kiosk helps cut down on their waiting time without additional manpower requirement.

The Smart OPD Kiosk consists of a user-friendly interface with integrated sensors for measurement of various parameters such as Blood Pressure, Pulse, Oxygen Saturation, Height, Weight, and BMI. Patients can use the kiosk to measure these vitals, while also getting the option to submit their symptoms and brief medical history. Utilisation of patients' time in this manner helps collect vital information which gets displayed on the doctor's computer in the consultation room and saves time during consultations.

During the pandemic, the intuitive kiosk has helped maintain social distancing and enhance patient experience while decreasing the manpower requirement for registration at multiple healthcare facilities.

For more information visit:
www.criteriontech.in

together for an online conference, then went ahead with our responsibilities—raising funds, getting clearances, and looking at manufacturing and marketing issues, while the inventors tinkered away,” says Sastri. They raised ₹4.6 crore from donations for the project. At one point, Kurele and Rathore needed some electronic equipment from Singapore. The task force contacted the Indian high commission there and was able to get the components delivered in a special flight at a time when both countries were in lockdown.

It was an exciting time. The inventors improvised, using a fish tank pump for one of their initial models. Even that was difficult to obtain and they sent a message to their housing society for it. Within 90 days flat, the team had its completely indigenous ventilator ready for ICU use. It was priced at less than half the cost of an imported ventilator. They have sold over 500 units and even exported to Bhutan and Nepal. “There is a big demand from hospitals in smaller towns, who want life saving equipment, but at affordable prices,” say the innovators.

Bandopadhyay and Sastri have written a book, *The Ventilator Project*, detailing this adventurous initiative. It was published recently.

Then, there were those who focused on the victims of the pandemic. Not every victim was one who tested positive. There were also those who were displaced and jobless. Sameer Dhar, 47, proprietor of Nowhere Terrace, a pub-cum-co-working space in Gurugram, kept his kitchen running even when restaurants began shutting down in early March. He had to feed his 64 employees. Soon, maintenance staff from nearby units also came seeking a meal. On March 28, when the unemployed migrant force began walking home-wards, Dhar shivered as he recalled his flight from Srinagar during the exodus of the early 1990s. His connection with them was instant, and he began providing them with meals. “I was preparing 3,000 meals a day when the municipal commissioner contacted me and asked if I could scale up,” he says.

By April, they were making over 33,000 meals



Students of Delhi's Jesus and Mary College are taking individual, remedial classes for underprivileged children, sometimes even recharging their phones.

a day. “We set up a gas line on the terrace, forced a utensil shopkeeper to open up and sell his biggest vessels to us,” he says. And as with all good things, the word spread, and donations came in. Someone gave ₹21, another ₹5,000. Someone left a quintal of rice, someone supplied vegetables. “I was only captain of the ship,” says Dhar. “There were so many people who chipped in. We worked from day to day, never knowing where tomorrow’s supplies would come from, somehow, they did.” The city municipal corporation helped with delivering the food. Nearly a year later, Dhar’s kitchen is still feeding the needy. There is still a huge number of hungry people out there.

Online education may be the new normal for today’s students, however, with poor internet access, as well as the financial burden of the pandemic, UNESCO has put the number of children who will drop out of education worldwide at 2.4 crore. In India alone, estimates say that the number of children out of school will double, with a majority of them never being able to return. Kanishka and



HEREOS ASSEMBLED

(Left to right) Srivastava with her dog Pebbles; Mary Michelle, president, education programme, Jesus and Mary College; nanotechnologist Sandip Patil; Kurele and Rathore

Ingenious, Indigenous

Inventors Nikhil Kurele and Harshit Rathore had their low-cost ventilators ready for ICU use in 90 days.

Himanshu Arya are among the few primary schoolers who are valiantly struggling with their online classes, conducted via WhatsApp. These municipal school children began floundering by the autumn of last year, with their parents unable to teach them properly, and teleclasses having limitations.

Then, students from Delhi's Jesus and Mary College contacted their parents and offered individual, remedial classes. These *didis*, themselves undergrad students, conduct hour-long tuitions for the underprivileged students, free of charge. Mary Michelle, president of the college's education programme, says: "We used to teach underprivileged students of nearby areas in the past, but the lockdown halted that exercise. When the new term began, we thought of going online, and got contacts of needy students. We are teaching children from primary till the age of 16. Some children don't have data, so we do their classes through regular calls. Sometimes our volunteers themselves top up data for their students." These teachers are themselves scattered across the coun-

try now, since hostels have not opened. The programme, however, is running well, the individual attention being vital to the young learners. Across the country, several such interventions are helping stem the dropout rate.

And just because the country has opened up and people are returning to work and campuses, it does not mean we do not need heroes. The pandemic is still on and the country is in constant need for newer interventions for emerging situations. One such solution has been developed by the innovation team of Indian Institute of Science and Education Research, Bhopal. Called the Crowd and Mask Monitoring System, this low-cost artificial intelligence device replicates manual policing. A high resolution camera can scan the corridors or rooms, and if it detects that social distancing norms and mask protocols are not being maintained, it triggers the announcement system to blare out a pre-recorded warning.

Now, whoever said every hero has to be a swashbuckling knight in shining armour? ●

We delivered with limited infrastructure

BY NAMITA KOHLI

Q/ The decline in Covid-19 cases is being attributed to our innate immunity and a young demographic, among other factors. How do you assess this decline?

A/ In India, we have maintained a 5T strategy—testing, tracking, tracing, treating and technology. Our testing has been aggressive, and similar work has been done for oxygen, PPE kits and masks, by the ministries of health, science and technology, textiles and others. From day one, we have been serious about the pandemic. A practical and systematic lockdown when cases were only [in the hundreds] has helped. Other ‘mysterious’ factors behind the lower number of active cases and deaths include perhaps a better innate immunity, the hygiene hypothesis and the BCG hypothesis (that the BCG vaccine, which is part of India’s universal immunisation programme, could have helped against Covid-19). I would still consider our dramatic, concerted, pre-emptive, proactive, innovative and calibrated efforts as the reason behind this decline.

Q/You spoke about testing, which was a serious challenge. How was that tackled?

A/ In the beginning, we had one laboratory for testing (National

Institute of Virology, Pune). By May, we scaled up the number of labs, including the private sector ones to do a hundred thousand tests, and by August-September, this number went up to a million tests. Our strategy has been a calibrated one, where we scaled up depending on availability of labs, manpower, consumables and kits. We have also been innovative in trying to scale up testing modalities by using the molecular test, TruNat, by March-April; we got the



AAYUSH GOEL

Q:

Deaths following vaccination have been reported.

rapid antigen test in June. Mobile testing labs were also set up. We also had a gazette notification that stated that all [550] medical colleges were to set up a lab. This has worked well for us; these labs have now become national assets.

Q/What do results from various serosurveys, including the recent one by ICMR that showed 21 per cent seropositivity, suggest about our pandemic response?

A/ The surveys suggest that we have been able to restrict the pandemic to larger cities. Serosurveys have consistently told us this—urban slums have seen the highest seroprevalence, urban areas about half of that, and rural areas even lower than that. [But,] there will be discrepancies and issues, especially when looked at from a retrospective lens.

Q/What did we learn from the countries which the pandemic struck before us?

A/ One of the big things that we learnt early on was the point about herd immunity. India never talked about it. Many nations tried that, including Sweden, parts of America, and the UK. What they did was allow the virus to find its own herd immunity. We focused on preventive measures, testing and other strategies. We also figured that an early lockdown was essential to sensitise our population about key preventive measures.

Q/But the debate about herd immunity crops up each time a serosurvey indicates over 50 per cent seropositivity, particularly in cities such as Delhi where the latest seropositivity is reported to be 56 per cent.

A/ I think we should just not speculate on herd immunity at all. Focus on preventive measures and try to improve our vaccine uptake. The sero-conversion that we will get because of the vaccine is far more protective than any other measures. Serosurveys are useful when the pandemic

a:

Adverse effects are simple ones that you can get with any injection—tingling, mild fever, cough, body ache and muscle pains. Serious effects, including hospitalisation, are less than 1 per cent; the numbers for both are equivalent to international standards. We have seen a handful of deaths, occurring one to four days after vaccination. Here, we collect data, forensics and analysis are done, sent to the ethics committee and then to the drugs controller. Forensics and pathological tests can establish connection, if it exists. But, causality has not been established. None of the deaths are linked to vaccines. Deaths caused by vaccines are extremely rare.

starts, peaks, and they help us plan public health measures that are to be used in a particular region. But they lose their value once vaccination starts... since the seroconversion that vaccination causes alters the figures of the seroprevalence.

Q/Do you think your target for vaccination is realistic?

A/ By July-August, we aim to give the two doses of Covid-19 vaccines to 30 crore people. I am optimistic. India is the vaccine capital of the world. We make the best vaccines; we supply 60 per cent of the vaccines to the developed world for various diseases. India's universal immunisation programme has been running for 60 years now. So that experience will definitely help us.

Q/Several countries such as the UK, EU countries, and the US, are facing supply issues.

A/ In India, it doesn't seem like we would be encountering these issues. Currently, we have two vaccines, and there are more on the horizon.

Q/There is growing concern about various mutant strains, particularly, the South African and Brazilian strain. Is that a cause for concern?

A/ Mutant strains are definitely a cause of worry. Which is why despite our low numbers, we have to be cautiously optimistic, so that there's no second peak. We need to continue following Covid-appropriate behaviour; avoid mass gatherings, even after vaccination.

Q/With Covaxin, a closer follow-up is required since the vaccine is in clinical trial. How is that being done?

A/ There are two types of follow-ups—active or passive. In the case of Covaxin, it is an active follow-up, where a signed consent from each of the participants is taken, and they are followed-up for any adverse events. They are also given a form to fill, and if they have any adverse events they can come back with that form on day 28. They also receive telephonic follow-ups on day seven and 28. It is tedious, but it has to be done.

Q/Do you think vaccination should be free for all?

A/ I am a strong supporter of public health. I firmly believe we have to nurture and spend on public health. We need to maintain our expenditure on climate change, preserving our ecology and ecosystem, and our biodiversity, so that we are able to prevent pandemics. As for vaccines, in most parts of the world, it is being provided by the state at the moment. What will happen in the future, we don't know—how the pandemic, the mutant strains, will behave. The government has [made the right choice by] allocating ₹35,000 crore for vaccines.

Q/As far as health care is concerned, the pandemic has been a huge wake-up call. What are your thoughts on that?

A/ I think the most important thing we learnt is that we have always underestimated our potential. We have to come out of our silos, and work together; scientists, institutions, organisations and ministries. If we do that, sky is the limit. We were able to deliver when our health care infra was limited. We can always do much better. We still have several problems, the communicable diseases that we have to eliminate—tuberculosis, leprosy, malaria.... We also have to control non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, cancer, stroke and heart attack,

I am optimistic, says Bhargava about India's target of vaccinating 30 crore people by July-August.

60%

India's share in the developed world's supply of vaccines, for various diseases.

“India's universal immunisation programme has been running for 60 years now.”

since they contribute to 60 per cent of the daily adjusted life years lost in India.

Q/What was your Covid-19 experience like?

A/ It was terrifying, initially. But I must commend the health care workers. They worked tirelessly; 24x7. I think it's something which [others] in this country should realise—the kind of dedication and work that was put in by the health care workers. [I saw it at] the AIIMS trauma centre where I was admitted. Scientists at the NIV, too, worked till 2am, Saturdays, Sundays... 24x7 [to develop vaccines].

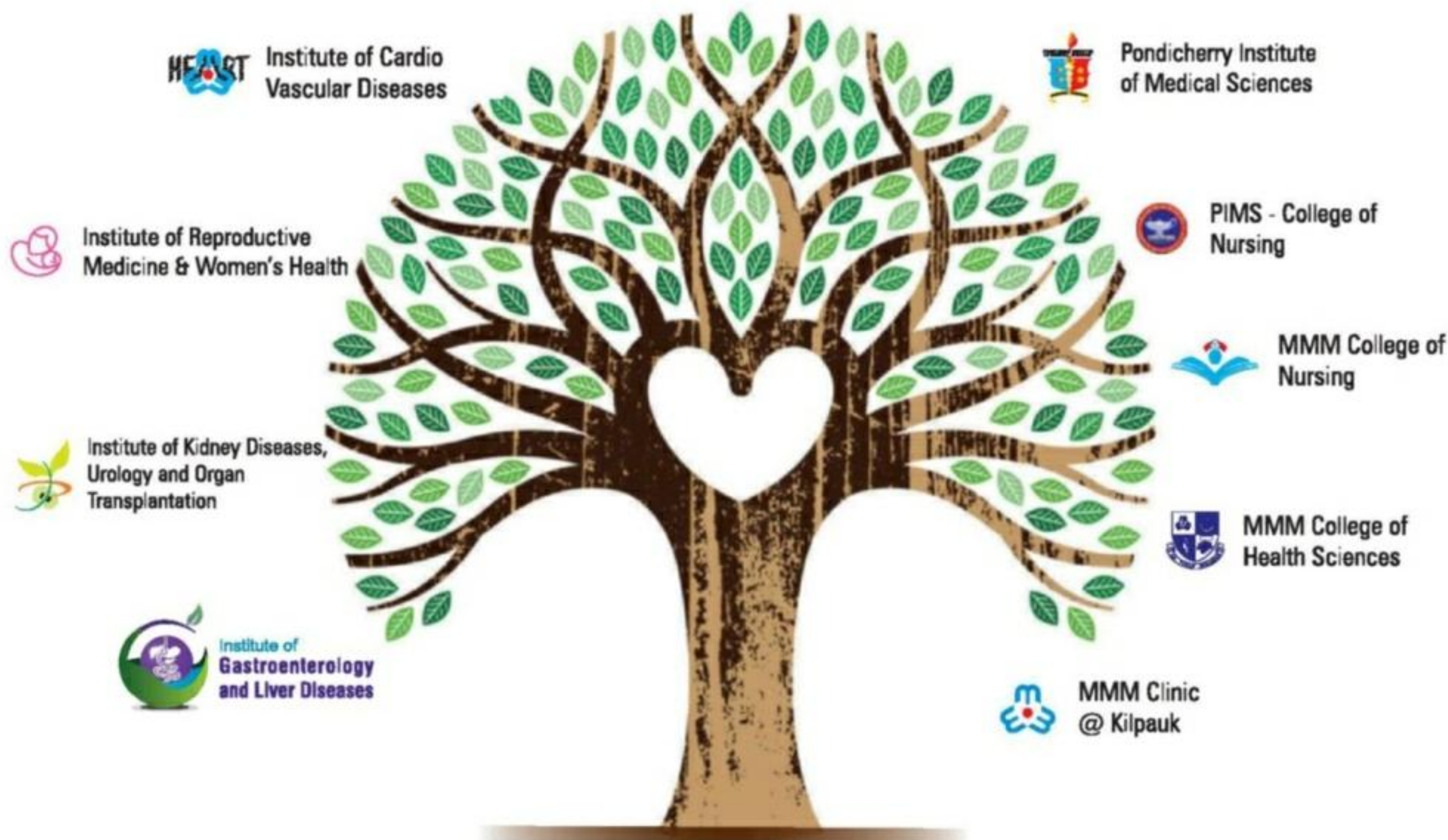
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550

Number of medical colleges that set up labs for Covid testing.



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Tested to the limit

Dr Satish Tandale and his fellow residents rose to the challenge posed by the pandemic

BY POOJA BIRAIA JAISWAL

In April 2020, barely a week after the lockdown was announced, Mumbai's civic-run BYL Nair Charitable Hospital became the city's first tertiary care centre; it had 800 isolation beds and a 50-bed intensive care unit for Covid-19 patients. Within weeks, both its buildings were converted into dedicated Covid-19 facilities with 1,500 beds. But, the hospital's resident doctors had begun attending to Covid-19 patients in early March. They were first sent as screening teams at the international airport and thereafter to treat the first few Covid-19 patients admitted in the nearby Kasturba Hospital.

As cases soared, there were reports of residents expressing their reservations about turning a tertiary medical college into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital. Yet, the call of duty consumed them and served as an opportunity for self-training. "Many of us were excited," says Dr Satish Tandale, a third year resident (pathology). "We were a mixed lot,

with juniors and seniors; irrespective of specialty, we all did it (attend to Covid-19 cases). We had no idea how our lives were to change; in terms of dealing with an unprecedented volume of patients and surviving it."

Tandale, who is also the president of Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors, says the "harrowing experience" of nine months inside Covid-19 wards will remain etched in his memory forever. "There were so many moments of extreme exhaustion during each eight hour, non-stop shift," he says. "Every day was frustrating because the numbers just kept grow-

ing. Initially, the problem was sourcing the PPE kits and N-95 masks. But once we had them, the problem was how to dispose of them." Tandale, who hails from Beed, did not see his parents for 10 months.

More than 100 residents at the hospital contracted the virus while on duty. "Initially, we had the 'seven-day duty, seven-day quarantine' schedule, but, the quarantine was eventually reduced to one day," says Tandale. The hospital, which, at the time, was the biggest Covid-19 facility, was facing a severe shortage of staff, even as all Covid and non-Covid hospitals were referring

their patients to Nair hospital. Now, there are only two to three wards dedicated to Covid-19 cases.

"The most important lesson I learned was how doctor-patient relations underwent a drastic change," says Tandale. "Even though we saw many families roughing up residents across various hospitals, personally I experienced patients' faith in us and the hope that we will bring light into their lives. Also, at Nair, the residents, who were at the centre of it all, came together to prove that government hospitals, too, can emerge victorious during testing times." ■

AMEY MANSABDAR



Nine months in Covid wards

“Every day was frustrating because the numbers just kept growing.”

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Veteran's battle

B.S. Yediyurappa's leadership shone through even as he fought the virus himself

BY PRATHIMA NANDAKUMAR

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa has had a difficult time since he took over the reins of the state in July 2019. A bribery case against his family members, growing dissent within the BJP and demands for reservations by various communities, among other issues, have all tested the seasoned politician. But, the biggest crisis was surely the pandemic.

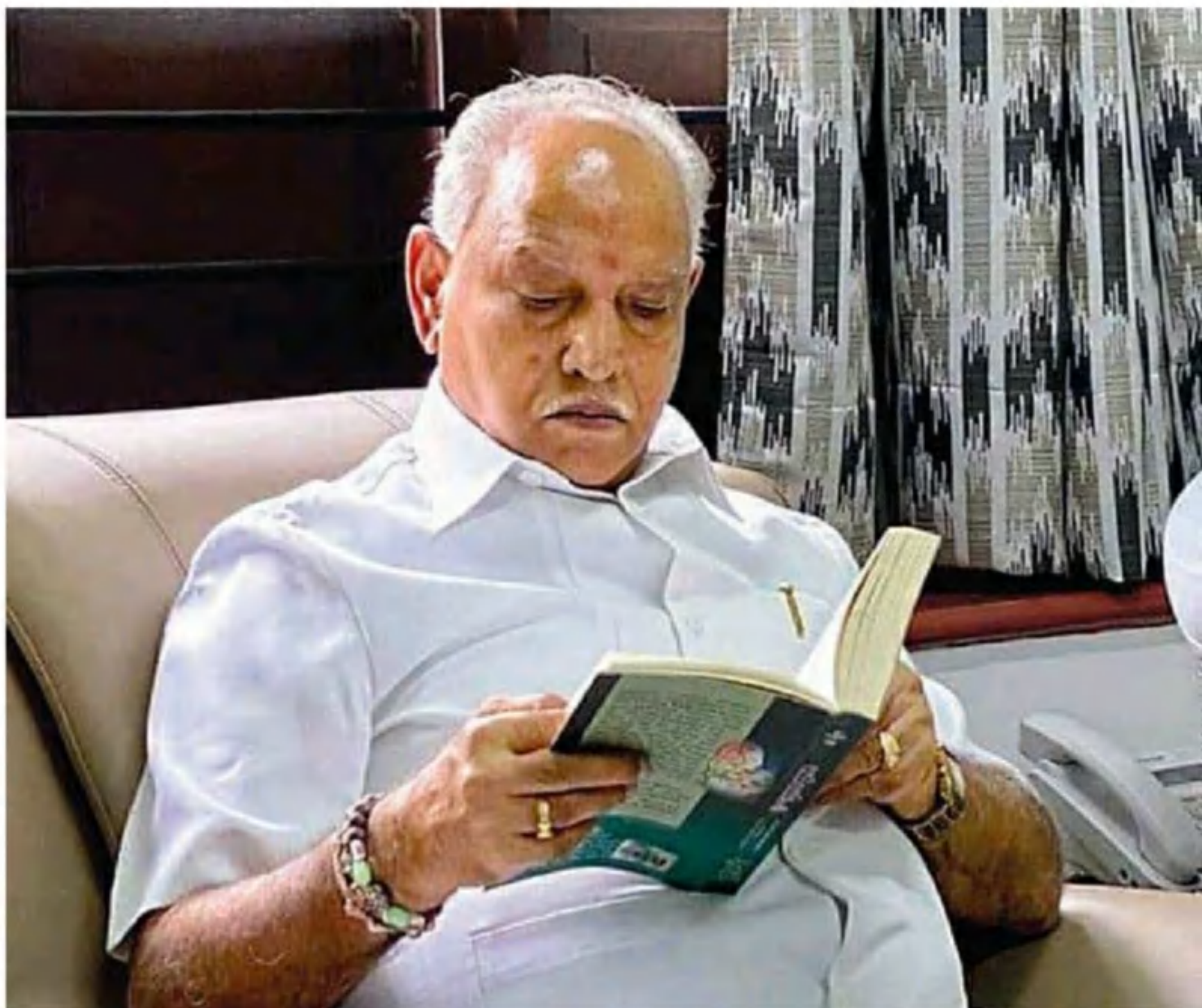
When it struck, the chief minister was already battling floods. But, the veteran was unfazed and tackled this new foe head on. "We had stringent enforcement of lockdown, containment and quarantine norms," he said. "We evolved strategies for aggressive contact tracing and testing, identified the hotspots, trained and streamlined the frontline workers, adopted latest treatment protocols to reduce mortality and tame the deadly virus. Most importantly, we made Covid-19 testing and treatment free."

The state also leveraged its technological prowess for effective contact tracing, surveillance, containment and contingency plans. This included mobile applications like Corona Watch, which gave Karnataka an early edge. The app alerted people to the movement of Covid positive people in a particular vicinity.

It looked like

Better safe than sorry

After Yediyurappa went back to the CMO, his staff was tested every five days. Testing was also made mandatory for all visitors.



Yediyurappa had everything under control. But, then news broke that the 78-year-old had tested positive for the virus. There were concerns that his age would lead to complications. Luckily, he was asymptomatic. However, he was hospitalised on doctors' advice.

Yediyurappa started working from his hospital bed, clearing files, holding virtual review meetings and consulting expert committees. After 10 days, he tested negative and was back home, but quarantined himself. To add to the worries, heavy rains devastated parts of the state while Yediyurappa was in isolation. He monitored relief work and was in constant touch with the chief secretary and the local administration via phone and through video conferences.

Yediyurappa has had a daily exercise routine for decades. Amid Covid-19, too, he got in one hour of morning and evening walks. He also started drinking herbal remedies to increase immunity. He attributes his good health to his diet—millets and vegetables, along with fresh milk from cows that he rears. The chief minister says that the time spent with calves also helps relieve stress.

He says he would have loved to spend more time with his grandchildren. But that was not possible because of the pandemic and his hectic schedule. During his hospital stay, when he was not working, he was reading. He says he read *Yayati* (Kannada translation of V.S. Khandekar's novel) and *Veera*

Sanyasi (biography of Swami Vivekananda by Swami Purushottamananda). He confides that he also watched re-runs of the Mahabharat on Doordarshan.

Once he completed his 'exile' and returned to the chief minister's office, he took all precautions to ensure that he would not have to be hospitalised again. The RT-PCR test was made mandatory for all visitors, including ministers, bureaucrats and government officials. His staff was tested every five days.

Yediyurappa's calm response had a lot to do with how well Karnataka tackled the pandemic. The state's model of Covid-19 response earned praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the World Health Organization, while the virtual training of 2.5 lakh frontline and health care professionals was appreciated by President Ramnath Kovind. ❶



People-first approach

BY N. BIREN SINGH



SALIL BERA

I knew I would become Covid-19 positive one day or the other, as I was in the thick of things. I opened the state-level Covid control room in the chief minister's secretariat itself so that I could personally supervise operations round-the-

clock. Of course, I was worried, but, as the head of the government, I cannot shirk my duties. So, when I tested positive, I took precautions to avoid any contact, even with family.

Though I felt a little weak after recovering from Covid-19, I went straight back to work. It was a challenging situation. But I have to think of my people first and I had little time for my own problems.

[Now,] we have been able to successfully carry out the vaccination drive. The state had already begun preparations for it under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, long before the vaccines were approved.

**Singh is chief minister, Manipur.
As told to Rabi Banerjee**

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In middle of regular routine, 2020 happened unexpectedly and unconventionally. Right from the small businesses to large ones, from school kids to corporate employees, street hawkers to consultancy firms it was a turnaround for their respective approaches and work models. No one was prepared for such a huge global wave of lockdown and alternative remote work options. 2020 saw an exceptional example of turning adversities into opportunities in which the whole world stood unified and put unparalleled contribution to make the world, make their lives and the businesses they ran into something very consumptive and efficient.

2020 was a year of pandemic, while everyone was restricted to their spaces and freedom was an anomaly; they adapted, they innovated; it was a perfect rhetorical of turning blessing into disguise. Like million working hands came forward in setting examples. Steadfast Consortium amid these unforeseen turns of events stood dauntlessly strong in setting examples to the world.

With the hashtags flooding on the social media, front line workers risking their lives to save the country and everyone pertaining to the digital platforms Steadfast has made to the news throughout the year for its ubiquitous resource worthy services and products that are present to absolute necessity in every wake of health and wellbeing which is why it is quite often very correctly familiarised with being “one stop solution” to every health-related services tangible, intangible. Recognising the silver-lining that every cloud has is the mantra of the success every known name in the history has sworn by and Steadfast has also made it the core of its operations to identify the travesties and turn them into sublime resources.

Steadfast consortium is the group of multiple sister companies each and every element of which has contributed in 365 days of positivity and spreading hopes and alacrity amongst the masses. To take a glimpse into the Steadfast year and how it has stood correct to its values of providing utmost and absolute answer to every requirement related to the health and wellness which is the Steadfast forte the principal foundation of Steadfast Health was laid. Steadfast Health is aggressively patterned in catering wholesome health-based requirements at just one platform. It is a portal of fully data-based and quality research-based content which has answers to the common curiosities based on health especially in the covid times and otherwise.



Aman Puri - Director

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The crust of Steadfast Nutrition directs upon providing and catering to the nutritional needs of different category of people right from endurance athletes to regular consumer. Steadfast Nutrition being the brainchild of Mr. Aman Puri who himself has set exemplary annotations in the field of sports, has its foundation on pure innovation. Mr. Aman Puri has multi-matched the exact need of the hour by being on the alternate side of the game himself and Steadfast Nutrition with its premium range of products are the outcome of his years of experience, strenuous hard-work, resilience and mottos like:

"We Understand Organs Better"

The Steadfast wellness range of products are tailored to suit the wholesome requirements of current time. 2020 has transformed and in-fact refined the vision into broader perspectives of bringing positivity among the office culture and outside. While people are indulged in different stress patterns Steadfast Nutrition advocates the wellbeing by absolute fitness and balanced nutrition.

This was exhibited by the conducting successful walkathon "Steadwalk" twice and by organising and encouraging people to participate in virtual runs that have been conducted from time to time by Steadfast Sports, advocating the physical fitness and activities lead to health and mental wellbeing.

Steadfast MediShield being the parent company during the period of a year when travesties have become one of the reasons of pullbacks, has left no stone unturned in providing best of its services as corporate social responsibility as voluntary action to support the medical fraternity subduing the burden of Covid-19. To name a few among all, Steadfast MediShield contributed an amount of INR 1.5 Million to IKDRC hospital based at Ahmedabad, in setting up of the Covid-19 labs.

The pandemic which prominently caused global stagnancy didn't restrain Steadfast in adhering to the ground morals of standing up for the social cause for larger benefit. As a part of awareness as well as responsibility Steadfast launched an initiative on the Organ Donation Awareness Day under the campaign #phirsezindagi. The initiative aimed upon sensitising the masses on the importance of organ donation in the country like India where the donation rates lag far behind the number of transplants, through various mediums in collaboration with the recognised NGO of the country. In this awareness campaign over 100 pledges were taken for organ donation. Steadfast MediShield never fails to continue the tradition of being omnipresent in services and is one such name that has always maintained and cohered to the premiumness.

2020 has witnessed people remotely accessing internet for every query thereby increasing the user penetration and accessing of the databases has escalated to a certain percentage. In the present Covid-19 times, people have become more concerned and adapted the healthier ways of life. New hobbies have developed, more knowledge in terms of expert opinions is available to the dispersion. Steadfast through its platforms of Nutrition Daily and Nutritionist Nanny has excelled in providing one such platform for its users

Nutritionist Nanny is one such portal which provides exactly what is required or what is being looked for at one single space. From diet counselling to personalised nutritional tips, live interaction with the people to attend to the queries and presence of a certified nutrition just a click away it is relentlessly providing best of its services to a larger audience.

The year that witnessed ups and downs staying glued to the single hope of positivity has helped the world to stay all-together. In such times Steadfast has like always stayed true to its promise of creating and spreading positivity, of delivering and of caring. Steadfast stands true to its value of building a community internally strong which works in direction of making world a better place.

I was happy to see the dedication of doctors and nurses

BY MANISH SISODIA

All the MLAs had to get tested before the assembly session on September 14, 2020. I tested negative two days before the session. However, on the eve of the session, I developed Covid-like symptoms. I got tested again, and this time, the result was positive.

At that time, my major concern was for my son, who will be taking his 12th Board exams this year. I was worried his studies would get affected. I was concerned about the safety of all those working with me. Also, I was worried about the impact on my work. However, technology came to my aid, and even after I tested positive, work did not stop. I continued to hold meetings through video-conferencing.

Being in isolation had its positives. I read books that I was planning to read and watched movies. From the perspective of a policy maker, I was happy to get a first-hand experience of the home isolation system working well.

Around the tenth day after I tested positive, I had to be hospitalised because my fever had shot up. I was admitted to the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan hospital, and when they ran tests on me, it turned out I was suffering from dengue as well.

I spent more than 28 hours in the ICU. I saw people screaming and crying in panic. There was the constant beep of machines. But as an administrator, I drew satisfaction from seeing the doctors and the nurses working day and night. I saw them helping patients interact with their families via video calls.

There may have been some criticism about me

being shifted to a private hospital. However, these are occasions when decisions are taken for you by your family, by the people who love you. When it turned out that I had dengue as well and the fever was not subsiding, the family panicked. I did not have any problems at the hospital. I do not think my condition would have deteriorated had I stayed on there.

I had to double as health minister briefly, which was a challenge. The investment we made in the health sector in our previous term helped us during the pandemic. We had enhanced the ca-

28 hours in the ICU

When they ran tests on me, it turned out I was suffering from dengue as well.

capacity of hospitals. When Covid-19 hit us, we were prepared to deal with it. Bed enhancement had already begun, so some new hospitals got ready during the pandemic and helped us ramp up capacity to meet the rush of patients. The infrastructure that we had in the form of mohalla clinics came to our help when we had to set up testing centres.

The biggest takeaway from the year gone by is that investing in health should be a priority for us. In the kind of world we are living in, a virus can easily travel from one part of the globe to another and start a pandemic.

Sisodia is deputy chief minister, Delhi.

As told to Soni Mishra

SANJAY AHLAWAT





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We Indians realised our capabilities

BY REKHA DIXIT

The pandemic year was a time when Indian institutions and laboratories came to the fore, coming up with indigenous solutions, whether it was for developing testing kits or personal protective equipment, understanding the novel virus or creating surveillance mechanisms. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research is the country's research and development knowledge base and the umbrella body for 38 national laboratories. Its director general, Shekhar Mande, tells us how India's scientists helped manage the pandemic. Excerpts:

Q/ India's scientific community seemed well-prepared to tackle the pandemic.

A/ Yes, our strategy was ready in February, when we held a national meeting in Goa, anticipating that the



AAYUSH GOEL

Q:

You also built hospitals?

a:

Yes, the Roorkee-based Central Building Research Institute designed rapidly deployable hospitals which can be set up within five days. We set up one in Ghaziabad and six in Himachal Pradesh.

situation was turning grim. We knew our weak areas, where we were poorly equipped. We formulated our strategy for the pandemic on five pillars—surveillance, diagnostics, new interventions (drugs and vaccines), equipment for hospitals and supply chains. We were clear on two aspects—that any new technology will require industrial support and that raw materials should be available in India. In fact, one of the first things we developed was Arogya-path, a supplier-buyer interface.

Q/ Could you elaborate on surveillance?

A/ So far, our labs have sequenced 5,000 virus genomes, which have helped our understanding, and also contributed to a global understanding. We did regular serosurveys, and in this 10,500 of our staffers contributed their blood samples, too. We conducted sewage samplings in 10 cities, and air samplings, too. This surveillance helped us understand how the virus is transmitted and we were able to map its spread. The serosurvey of August-September showed high prevalence in big cities, a few months later, we noticed higher numbers in smaller cities. The serosurvey also gave us the good news that many patients in India were asymptomatic. Genomic studies showed us how the UK mutant strain had travelled to Telangana. Interventions are possible only when we first generate data.

Q/ What new interventions did CSIR labs offer?

A/ The Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology and Tata CRISPR jointly developed the low-cost diagnostic kit, Feluda. Indian Institute of Chemical Technology,

Hyderabad, developed a low-cost process for manufacturing the antiviral Favipiravir, approved for emergency use for Covid-19, which we are marketing through Cipla. We developed Sepsivac along with Cadila Pharmaceuticals for treatment; it is in Phase-3 trials. National Aerospace Laboratories developed the non-invasive ventilator, SwasthVayu; we recently provided the Delhi government with 1,200 such machines.

Q/ Why, in your opinion, did India not suffer as badly during the pandemic as the western nations? Our per capita cases and death rate are comparably low

A/ There were many reasons, from our preparedness to our innate immunity. The first case of Covid-19 was reported in India on January 30 and the country went into preparation mode immediately. The lockdown weeks gave us time to ramp up arrangements and get a better understanding of the disease. So, when cases began rising, we were ready with diagnostic kits, hospitals and medication. The mask discipline and other protocols have been well followed by Indians, that has also helped. India is a young country demographically and this is an infection where the older generation is more vulnerable. Also, since Indians have been exposed to a host of infections, our immune systems are perhaps better than those of the more developed nations.

Q/ What are your learnings from the pandemic?

A/ Although it caused much distress, the pandemic has also been a time of opportunity, especially for the scientific community. During extraordinary circumstances, the real human grit and potential comes to the fore. For us Indians, we have realised our capabilities. In the history of India, this time will also be remembered as a coming together of potential and capability, and realising we can be atmanirbhar. **■**

For the people

How the election machinery reinvented itself ahead of the Bihar assembly polls in 2020

BY H.R. SRINIVASA

The elections to the Bihar legislative assembly were scheduled for October-November 2020. But, schools were shut after the pandemic struck, and more than 80 per cent of our booth level officers were school teachers. Getting them to the field was a mammoth task. Also, more than 90 per cent of our polling stations are schools. Since they had been closed for a long time, facilities such as toilets and drinking water needed a fresh look.

About 30 lakh migrants returned to Bihar. We identified three lakh people who were yet to be enrolled, and we finished enrolling 2.4 lakh of them before the elections were announced. The number of female voters as compared with male voters was 894 as on February 7, 2020, when the electoral roll was published. By the time the election process began, it had reached 904, quite close to the state average of 918. Even the elector to population ratio rose from 0.49 to 0.51. Altogether, we enrolled 18 lakh new voters in five months.

You cannot hold elections sitting in offices and homes. It involves mass contact. So it was a big challenge to maintain social distancing and ensure that Covid-19 protocols were followed. We identified grounds where a safe distance of six feet could be maintained between two people and chose only those buildings which had proper ventilation. The lists of these buildings and grounds were published in all the major newspapers of Bihar and also posted on our website to enable political parties or candidates to book them online for their campaign.

Another important challenge was postal ballot. It was first tried on a pilot basis in Jharkhand and then implemented in Delhi. But when scaled up in Bihar, which is the most densely populated state in the country, implementing it was difficult. It was

made even more complicated because of Covid-19. The facility was available to voters who were over 80, had a disability or were either Covid-positive or Covid-suspect. It was not easy for our polling parties to go to the homes of people to first check if such voters existed, give them the forms and then collect them. We had to instil confidence and courage both among the voters as well as our own staff.

There was also the issue of verifying if the person eligible for postal ballot existed or not. Even if one [fake] postal ballot was cast, it would have vitiated the entire electoral process. I used to get nightmares about it. I would tell my officers down the line, time and again, that if there was one mistake, heads would roll. I told my returning officers that there had to be double checking, and we could not rely solely on booth-level officers. In every district, the health department had appointed nodal officers and block-level medical officers, who identified the patients and shared their names with the returning officer. It was the duty of the medical officer in-charge to get the postal ballot form filled.

We had to procure a mammoth quantity of items such as hand sanitisers, gloves, masks, face shields and room sanitisers. Then, all those items had to be safely disposed of. The Election Commission had strictly said

1.8 lakh security personnel

In order to reduce the number of voters per booth, polling stations, staff and security personnel were increased.

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**RESULT OF TOIL**

Bihar Governor Phagu Chauhan publishing the list of winning candidates with H. R. Srinivasa (right) and Pramod Kumar Sharma, secretary, Election Commission of India (left)

57%

The polling percentage of the Bihar assembly elections. It was higher than 2015 and the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

that the disposal of the items had to be in accordance with the health department protocol.

Originally, we had 72,725 polling stations. In order to reduce the number of maximum voters per booth, the number of polling stations was increased by 45 per cent to 1,06,515. This resulted in the number of polling staff and security personnel also going up. Around 1.8 lakh security personnel were deployed. The number of counting centres also went up.

Since the number of polling stations had gone up, the number of rounds of counting, which used to be 25, went up to 37. And add to that the postal ballots. That is the reason why counting just went on and on. Most of us did not take a single holiday and there were no weekends for us. We had a number of WhatsApp groups on which we coordinated. Also, there were a number of webinars.

Officers, our office staff and polling personnel got infected with Covid-19. At the same time, we had to deal with the issue of a large number of people

deployed on election duty reporting sick. For example, in Patna, 3,800 people who were on election duty called in sick, saying they had Covid-19 symptoms. We had to make sure it

was not an excuse to avoid field duty.

Many expected the polling percentage to be just about 40 per cent. When it surpassed 57 per cent, it left everybody stunned. It was higher than the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and the 2015 Bihar assembly elections.

We have shared our experiences with the four states and one Union territory that go to polls this year. I have participated in video conferences with all five [chief] election officers. I went to Tamil Nadu and Puducherry along with the Election Commission team and shared my experiences, especially the use of technology. We have shared with the other states the Covid-19 guidelines we followed and our Covid-19 guide for voters.

The credit for the successful elections in Bihar goes to the entire election machinery. It was an experience we will not forget for a long time.

Srinivasa is chief electoral officer, Bihar.

As told to Soni Mishra

Saviours in the sky

Air India played a vital role in repatriating Indians during the pandemic

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

It was frightening not to see a soul in Wuhan. That was the first thought Air India Captain Kamal Mohan had when he landed his Boeing 747 there on January 31, 2020. As many as 68 Air India crew members, who were part of two special flights, evacuated 647 Indians from Wuhan in the early days of the pandemic; Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave them a letter of appreciation.

Air India repatriated more than 24 lakh people, till the end of February. It has been operating flights under the 'Vande Bharat Mission' and 'Air Transport Bubbles' since May 7, 2020. The Vande Bharat Mission recently concluded its ninth phase and has covered 24 countries, including Australia, the US and Japan. The highest number of repatriated Indians are from Kerala (9.62 lakh), followed by Delhi (8.35 lakh) and Maharashtra (3.80 lakh).

Recalling their first Vande Bharat flight in June, an Air India crew member said that it was an eerie experience as the once-crowded airports were nearly empty. Besides, there was also the fear of carrying back the virus. Another cabin crew member said that the risk of exposure to the virus was more as she and her colleagues had to interact with other crews, ground staff, hotel staff and passengers. They had to work in high-pressure cabins with hazmat suits for 13 to 15 hours, that too without food or water.

Meghna Nanda, chief cabin crew, Air India, said that every time she came back from a flight, the thought that she might have contracted the virus played heavily on her mind. "My small kids would be yearning to hug me and it was so difficult to stay away from them within the same house till the result of the second test came negative," said Nanda. "It was traumatic to be so close yet so far."

In a recent reply in the Lok Sabha, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said that 1,995 Air India personnel, including the Vande Bharat crew, had tested positive for Covid-19 till February 1. Of these,

MUCH RISK, LITTLE REWARD

Meghna Nanda says family members of crew also had to face stigma



24 lakh

Number of people Air India repatriated, till the end of February.

583 were hospitalised, but there were no fatalities among the flight crew. However, 19 ground staff died.

Air India also delivered medicine and other supplies to China and other places. "Those days were really terrible for my family; they would panic whenever I had to fly to China," said a pilot who flew more than a dozen cargo flights during the pandemic. "But we did it, and I feel proud to be part of the mission."

Apart from the obvious dangers, some of these heroes also had to face stigma from neighbours. "The family members of the crew also had to suffer humiliation because of the lack of awareness," said Nanda. Eventually, senior Air India officials had to talk to government officials at the topmost level to ensure that [such] issues were resolved. ■

The name is Khan

Meet the Kashmiri businessman who took it upon himself to give a proper burial to Covid-19 victims

BY TARIQ BHAT

In 2013, Sajad Khan bought a machine to make bags for retailers and distributors. Khan, who also ran a travel agency, wanted to supplement his income. However, the machine remained in storage, owing to lack of space to set it up. A year later, when Kashmir was hit by the worst floods in its history, Khan cancelled the plan to make bags and started Houseful, a retail store at Qamarwari in Srinagar.

The business clicked. Khan got married and focused on growing his business. But, when Covid-19 hit Kashmir, he decided that he needed to do something to help and started making PPE kits with the old machine. He distributed them for free, primarily to doctors and health workers. One day, when he went to give the kits to the relatives of a woman who had died of Covid-19, he found that they were reluctant to bury her.

"I realised this was a big problem," he said. "At that moment, I decided to volunteer to help bury Covid-19 victims." He spread the word through health workers and also put up a post on his Facebook page titled Athiwaas (handshake) saying that he was available for the burial of Covid-19 victims. Within no time, he started getting calls for help. "Initially, I used to wait at the graveyards alone for the ambulances and health workers to bring the bodies, but later a few of my friends joined the effort," he said. "The ambulances would bring the body to the graveyard and then we would lower the coffin into the grave." There were cases when he wrapped the bodies at the homes of the dead and took them for burial.

He said it saddened him that those who died of Covid-19 did not get a proper burial. "We struggled to find a *maulvi* (cleric) to lead the prayers," he said. "They were afraid that they would not be allowed to return to their localities if their neighbours got to know they had led the funeral of a Covid-19 victim." He added that the gravediggers would flee the moment the body arrived.

Once, it struck him that, as per Islamic traditions, the body should be placed in the grave on its right side, facing the *qiblah* (Mecca). "After that, I ensured compliance with the rule," he said. "I felt sad that the burials were [not] happening as prescribed in Islam because of the unprecedented situation."

He recalled an incident when a man said that a deceased man should not be buried in that locality as he was not a resident of the area. Khan told him that the man's neighbours claimed that he was, and requested him to not obstruct the burial. But, the protestor did not budge and others soon joined him. There was a huge altercation, but Khan stood his ground and lowered the body into the grave. "When they told me to remove the body from the grave, I told them to do it themselves," he said. "No one dared to go close to the grave for fear of contracting the virus."

Khan's family got to know about his volunteering only when a local newspaper reported it. He said that was because only his mother was at home with him during the lockdown; the old lady was perhaps not keeping track of his activities as closely as his wife would have. "Before the Covid-19 lockdown, my wife took my two

170

The number of bodies Khan said he had helped to bury by the time the situation had stabilised.



PHOTOS UMAR ASIF



THE MAN AND THE MISSION

(Left) Sajad Khan; when he realised that burials were not happening as prescribed in Islam, he ensured compliance

25 families, which needed help, were adopted by people outside Kashmir thanks to Khan's efforts.

children to Delhi to make them feel better post the Article 370-related lockdown in Kashmir," he said. "So, they were stuck in Delhi."

He said that once the son of a rich man offered him money after Khan buried his father. "I told him I do it for Allah's sake, not for money," he said. When the lad insisted on paying him, Khan responded by pointing to his own expensive sedan. "I don't brag, but I felt compelled [to show him the car] at that point," he said. The young man cried and said he wanted to bury his father himself, but his brothers did not cooperate. Kashmiris living in other states and abroad contacted him and offered money for the cause. "Since I had seen how people were suffering because of the loss of business, I gave them the names and addresses of the people they should help," he said. "At least 25 families were adopted by people from outside Kashmir and that gives me immense joy."

By the time the situation had stabilised, Khan said he had helped bury more than 170 bodies. "I continued to provide free PPE kits, sanitisers and masks from the little profit I made from my department store," he said. "My store was among the ones which were allowed to stay open." He added that he was surprised to see Houseful on the list of stores allowed to operate. "That is Allah's mercy and reward for me," he said with a smile. ❶

Humble hero

Mumbai Police's "Omni-Present Covid Warrior" continues to look forward to opportunities to serve the people

BY POOJA BIRIA JAISWAL

In May, Tejesh Sonawane, a police constable in Mumbai, was informed about a pregnant woman in need of urgent help. She was standing outside Mumbai's famous Backbay Depot, desperately trying to get to the nearby Cama Hospital. But, the lockdown was in full force and she was unable to find a cab. Sonawane, who was on duty at the nearby Cuffe Parade police station, borrowed a Maruti Omni from a friend and rushed her to the hospital. Over the next three to four months, he did more than 40 such trips in two 'Omni-ambulances', ferrying patients across the city to nearby hospitals for free.

"It really came from the heart," Sonawane told THE WEEK over the phone. "I could not bear to see vulnerable people being helpless in the face of a lockdown. All I needed was a car and I was overwhelmed when so many of my friends offered to lend me one."

Mumbai Police shared his story on Twitter in a video which showed his journey as the "Omni-Present Covid Warrior". "Health care workers come in all get-ups. Some

wear aprons; while others, khaki—just like PC Tejesh Sonawane from Cuffe Parade PStn," read the tweet, alongside the hashtag #AamhiDutyVarAahot (#WeAreOnDuty).

Sonawane said he has never felt so proud of himself and his fraternity in his 13 years of service as he did during the lockdown when the entire force "went out of its way" to help citizens. "I ferried pregnant women, Covid-19 patients and whoever wanted a vehicle to access emergency medical services," he said. "I would do this after duty, but, at times, even during duty hours thanks to the support of my colleagues and seniors. Then DCP Sangram Singh Nishandar and senior police inspector [Rajkumar] Dongre supported with PPE kits and sanitisers."

Sonawane would drive, help the patient into the van and thereafter onto a stretcher, all by himself. To transform the van into an ambulance, he partitioned it into Covid and non-Covid sections and refurbished it as it had not been in use for well over a year. But, all this was done at no cost. "Nobody charged me for anything as it was for a noble cause," he said. "After the first van broke down, we got another one readied for ferrying patients. Both times, I got all services for free."

But the fear of contracting the virus was always at the back of his mind. He sent both his daughters, aged six and eight, to his ancestral village in Nandurbar district. "I actually asked my wife to leave as well, but she wouldn't," he

said, laughing. Fortunately, he did not test positive for the virus. Sonawane is enjoying the attention he is receiving from his colleagues, including the DCP who rewarded him with ₹5,000. But he is not new to fame and recognition.

In 2016, he was awarded the Jeevan Raksha Padak for climbing the water pipe of a six-storeyed building to stop a middle-aged man from attempting suicide. Sonawane continues to look forward to opportunities to serve the people. ●

Tejesh Sonawane

Police constable,
Mumbai Police

"I could not bear to see vulnerable people being helpless in the face of a lockdown."





MUTHALAMADA SNEHAM AASHRAMAM

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The distribution of food parcels by Muthalamada Sneham Ashram for those who are engaged in Covid resistance and suffering is surpassing a number of 10 lakh. Timely food parcels were delivered to inpatients, police and firefighters Food parcels delivery are also available in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah meets Sunildas, Chairman, Muthalamada Sneham Charitable Trust, during a meeting at the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Thiruvananthapuram. Near former Governor Kumm anam Rajasekharan.



Postal stamp has released by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami in the presence of swami sunildas on the occasion of food parcel distribution during covid reached an year.



Swami Sunildas who distributes food parcels to covid Defense Forces handover the postal stamp to Minister of State for Home affairs G. Kishan Reddy.

Guinness World Records and Limca Book of Records were awarded for the operational excellence of the Sneham Charitable Trust.

Being human

A mob prevented the burial of his boss. But, Dr Pradeep Kumar fought back and proved that compassion is not heroism, but a prerequisite for being called human

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN



Almost a year after the lockdown, New Hope Medical Centre on Chennai's Poonamallee High Road is seeing patients with orthopaedic and neuro issues walking in with fresh hope. When I asked for Dr Pradeep Kumar, the nurse at the patient care centre pointed to a cabin on the ground floor. As I walked in, the orthopaedic surgeon was speaking to an attender: "I will see. Tell him he will recover soon."

Kumar, 36, is a man of few words, but those are filled with empathy. This was evident after the death of his colleague Dr Simon Hercules. "I do not want to recall those days," he said, getting emotional. "As a doctor, death is nothing new to me. The very beginning in the MBBS course will be with dead bodies. But I have never known this fear of death."

Hercules, 55, a neurosurgeon, was the chairman and managing director of New Hope hospital. He got infected with Covid-19 after performing a surgery on a patient from abroad. Though he had fever and cough, he did not realise he was infected. Soon, he was admitted to a private hospital in Chennai with severe breathlessness. None of his relatives or acquaintances could visit him in the intensive care unit.

"We never thought that Dr Simon would leave us," said Kumar. He met Hercules on joining the hospital a decade ago. "Simon was a gentleman," he said. "He never got emotional or spoke harshly to the staff." Kumar added that he was always strict and wanted everything to be perfect before he started surgery. "Simon was always with me when I did a spine surgery," he said. "Sometimes, I got angry if the staff missed out on anything in the theatre. But, he was still calm. There were days when he would apologise if the surgery gets delayed or postponed."

“ Society has moved away from basic human ethics and lost respect for individuals. ”

Hercules died in April. At that time, neither the state nor the Central government had laid out protocols for burial of Covid-19 victims. Just two days before Hercules's death, people on the outskirts of Chennai had protested the burial of a doctor who had died of Covid-19. "I never thought people would do the same to Dr Simon," said Kumar. "Society has moved away from basic human ethics and lost respect for [individuals]." Kumar had gone to the hospital on hearing about Hercules's death, but could not see the body owing to Covid-19 protocols. Kumar, like others, assumed that everything would be fine.

But, when hospital staff took Hercules's body to the Velangadu cemetery near the upscale neighbourhood of Anna Nagar, they were met by a mob of over 300—both men and women. They had gathered after hearing the sound of an earth mover digging a grave. Kumar said the crowd argued with "ambulance driver Dhamu and then with the policemen who arrived at the scene". Soon, the situation escalated and the mob began pelting stones at the ambulance. Dhamu was hit and began to bleed, he and his helper drove back to the private hospital where Hercules had died.

New Hope was on the route. It was late in the evening that Kumar spotted the ambulance near the traffic signal close to New Hope. The Poonamallee road was deserted except for a few policemen at the signal. Dhamu had stopped to answer the policemen's queries about the state of the ambulance and his bleeding. He was also starting to get giddy from the loss of blood. When he tried to park the ambulance there to get first aid, the policemen did not allow it. Kumar was outraged on learning about what happened and also with how the policemen were treating Dhamu.

He asked Dhamu to get first aid and also said that his helper could leave; in the heat of the moment he forgot that he did not have the authority to do so as they were employees of another hospital. "I was very upset that we could not give Dr Simon even a dignified burial," he said. He got PPE kits and helpers from New Hope and drove the damaged ambulance back to the cemetery. Despite the late hour, the mob was still around, though not as furious as it was earlier in the day.

300
people
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to prevent
the burial of
Dr Simon Hercules.
The mob began
pelting stones at
the ambulance.

Hercules died in April. Then, neither the state nor the Central government had laid out protocols for burial of Covid-19 victims.

Moreover, the New Hope team was determined to give their beloved boss a proper send off. They got past the mob to the half-dug grave.

"I drove the ambulance, I dug the grave myself, I put mud on his body because we had no shovels," said Kumar, shuddering as he recalled the night. He returned home filled with the fear of death for the first time in his life. The next morning, he was still in shock. "I was worried," he said. "Why do people lack compassion?" Recently, a radio station contacted Kumar and said it wanted to give him an award, celebrating him as a hero. He turned down the honour. Said Kumar: "I am not a hero for just being compassionate and helpful." ●

Our goal is to provide a freshly cooked meal to 10 lakh people daily

BY ABHINAV SINGH

Zomato Feeding India (ZFI) is the food delivery platform's non-profit arm which is working towards "achieving zero hunger" in India. Chaitanya Mathur joined Zomato in 2018, after 14 years of experience in fields ranging from financial analysis to event management and being a restaurateur. He took over as head of ZFI in 2020. Mathur, who has an economics degree from the University of Warwick, the UK, was in for a busy first year in his new role. Mathur spoke to THE WEEK about ZFI's participation in the Feed the Daily Wager initiative, and future plans. Edited excerpts:

Q/ Why was this initiative unique and how did it benefit daily wage earners?

A/ It impacted the lives of daily wagers who had [lost] their only source of income, leaving them with no means to earn themselves a meal during the early days of lockdown. Feed the Daily Wager saw 500 plus ZFI volunteers (Hunger Heroes), 99,883 individuals, 66 companies, 426 NGOs and 50 Zomato team

“Over the course of four months and across 181 cities, we served a total of 78 million (7.8 crore) meals.”



members come together in a collaborative effort to ensure that millions of our fellow countrymen do not sleep on an empty stomach.


Q/What kind of traction did this initiative get during the lockdown?

A/ Over the course of four months and across 181 cities, we served a total of 78 million (7.8 crore) meals. With drives from Jammu and Kashmir to Port Blair, ZFI was able to raise [about] ₹32.6 crore and distributed 7.49 lakh [ration] kits, utilising 100 per cent of the donations to purchase food grains and essentials. We also received generous in-kind support in the form of ration kits and transport services from our partners. We are glad to have been able to virtually gather the entire country to provide support to a community worst hit by the pandemic.

Q/What are ZFI's future plans?

A/ We continue to work for different communities and solve hunger at the national level. We are currently running campaigns for children (Feed Every Child) and stray animals (Food For Paws) who do not have access to proper nutrition. We have also started serving freshly cooked meals to those people in need with the help of our NGO partners, under the #IamFeedingIndia campaign. Our goal is to make at least one free, freshly cooked meal available to 10 lakh individuals daily.

Q/Could you describe an example of how ZFI helped those in need?

A/ We found a colony in New Delhi that consists of 2,800 families of magicians, puppeteers, acrobats, jugglers, singers and others who were left with no jobs to make ends meet. We decided to deploy our resources and were able to provide ration kits that could last them for two weeks, within 24 hours. For us, being able to feed someone in need and seeing a smile on their faces [is reward for] our efforts. Anyone who wants to join us on this mission can reach out to us through our website www.feedinindia.org or write to us at contact@feedi.ng. 

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Superhumans in the streets

Hyderabad's sanitation workers played multiple roles during the pandemic

BY RAHUL DEVULAPALLI

Sarojanamma, 50, had been hit multiple times by speeding bikers in the past. “Those riders escaped. What can I do?” she asks. “If the injury is minor, I just continue my work.” One such accident left her with a serious and permanent injury to her back. Still, she ensures that her duties are discharged. For more than two decades, Sarojanamma has been a sanitation worker of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation. She sweeps the road and clears trash in the Erragadda area in western Hyderabad.

The pandemic made her work tougher. Sometime in late 2020, she tested positive for Covid-19. After spending almost a week in a government-run Covid-19 hospital in Hyderabad, she was back on her feet. “When I got discharged, I told my supervisor I can start work immediately, but he insisted that I should take rest,” she says. “I was weak, but I felt the need to work during this period.”

Sarojanamma, in a way, epitomises the spirit of the sanitation workers of the city. The city employs around

25,000 sanitation workers—a mix of permanent and contract workers. When Covid-19 cases spiked in Hyderabad city, the workers rose to the occasion.

A chat with P. Kanakaraju gives a glimpse into the pressures of working in the sanitation department during a pandemic. Kanakaraju is a sanitary field assistant who supervises the work of around 120 sweepers and garbage collectors in the Kukatpally area, which is close to the city's IT zone. The initial days of lockdown were stressful and challenging for him. “In the first week of lockdown, 20 per cent of my staff did not turn up,” he says. “I learnt that many of them feared contracting the virus. I had to talk to them and motivate them to come to work. Some of them could not travel because of restrictions. We



Sarojanamma, 50

Sanitation worker

“When I got discharged... I was weak, but I felt the need to work during this period.”



PHOTOS: P. PRASAD

Crisis shift

P. Kanakaraju (left in picture), who supervises around 120 sweepers and garbage collectors, saw his usual eight-hour shift often stretch to 15 hours.

had to arrange transportation for them.”

Kanakaraju's usual eight-hour shift often stretched to 15 hours. “On some days, I had to personally collect garbage from containment zones because of lack of manpower,” he says. “My family became anxious as I was constantly taking up different outdoor tasks. So, I sent them away to my relative's house to protect them.” Ask Kanakaraju what kept him going during the tough time, he is quick to answer that it was his “service [mentality] to the society”.

Many sanitation workers had to perform multiple roles during the pandemic, from identifying the Covid-19 suspects to conducting health surveys. They also ensured that patients with mild symptoms obeyed home-quarantine norms.

For A. Dhanalakshmi, 35, a sanitation worker from central Hyderabad, wearing gloves and a

mask was tough as it made her breathless and uncomfortable. But she continued in her duties on the front lines.

“On usual days, my job is to sweep an assigned part of the road and clear the garbage,” she says. “During the lockdown, I was sent to containment zones. The patients and their family members would ask me to get fruits or vegetables for them and I would do it. On many occasions, I went hungry for the most part of the day as I would have left home early without eating. I have three kids, and I was scared for my family. But looking at senior officers on the field I asked myself, ‘If we do not come out on the streets and work then who will?’”

Not to forget, working quietly to keep the indoors of hospitals and offices clean were thousands of sanitation workers employed in the government and private sector. In hospitals, the workers had to overcome their own set of problems.

For the first few months after the pandemic broke out in Telangana, Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad was the only designated Covid-19 hospital in the state. What followed was an unexpected level of stigma against the staff of the hospital. “I live in a village on the outskirts of Hyderabad and travel 60km every day,” said S. Suguna, an attender at Gandhi Hospital. “The villagers barred me from entering the village. I had no option but to return and live in a corner of the hospital campus. I did not even see my husband and three daughters for more than two months. Even the patients' relatives were scared to go near the patients, but we did. I went through a lot of hardships then.”

A sanitation staff in the hospital, who did not wish to be named, said that some of her colleagues were drinking too much alcohol as they felt ostracised and were separated from their family for weeks together. “Majority of the sanitation workers were ready to go and clean the Covid-19 wards, where even some of the doctors were hesitant to go,” she says. ❶

Against all odds

A polio-stricken anganwadi worker is at the heart of a Madhya Pradesh village's fight against Covid-19

BY SRAVANI SARKAR

Rachna Mewada's house is but a few steps from the bylane running through Hirapur village in Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh. The 24-year-old, however, is aware that even a few steps can tire out anganwadi worker Ramkalan Mewada, who is on her daily rounds of the village. By the time Ramkalan, 36, arrives at her doorstep, beads of sweat dot her face despite the pleasant February weather. Rachna, who is four months pregnant, greets her with a glass of water, and puts out a charpai for her to sit on.

Ramkalan sits down, resting her pair of crutches on the wooden cot, and takes a few sips of water. Then begin her inquiries: Was Rachna having enough greens in her diet? Was she taking the iron tablets on time? Was she taking enough rest? Does she remember that her next vaccination is due on Tuesday? Was she giving the supplementary food—supplied as take-home ration by the anganwadi—to her son Hardik, who will soon be three years old?

To each of these queries, Rachna nods in the affirmative. But her eyes remain on Ramkalan, observing the steadying of her breath. She takes the empty tumbler from Ramkalan, and then asks the anganwadi worker a few questions of her own.

Caring is a collective affair in Hirapur—home to 1,670 villagers including 140 children and 130 adolescents. And that is what got this village, located 90km from Bhopal, safely through the pandemic. Despite 80 migrant workers returning to the village at the height of Covid-19 in May-June 2020, no positive case was reported. Neighbouring Kajikhedi, however, reported at least a dozen cases.



CHECKING IN

Ramkalan (sitting) during her routine rounds amid the pandemic

The admiration is mutual, too. Villagers are highly appreciative of Ramkalan's dedication and diligence despite being physically challenged. Struck by polio at six, she relies on crutches to walk. But she refused to let her disability deter her; she continued making her rounds amid the pandemic, come rain or shine.

"Apart from ensuring that we got the supplementary nutritious food for my two children at home, Ramkalan *didi* constantly counselled us about the precautions to be taken for Covid-19," says Lalita Malwi. "Also, she ensured that the migrant workers who returned followed the quarantine norms."

Sitabai Malwi initially found it difficult to follow the safety norms. "But constant reminders by Ramkalan made us take her advice very seriously," she says. Vinita Mewada, 17, says that Ramkalan also showed them how to make cotton cloth pads, as sanitary pads became unavailable during lockdown.

Ramkalan, however, credits the villagers for strictly following the Covid-19 guidelines. Keeping the village safe, she adds, would have been an uphill task if not for the help provided by her associate front-line workers like anganwadi helper Reena Chouria, accredited social health activist Mamta Perwal and



RAKESH MALAVIYA

Ramkalan Mewada

Anganwadi worker

“As I was regularly in the field, I was worried, particularly about my parents and nine-year-old nephew. But my family boosted my confidence to go on.”

auxiliary nurse midwife Rajkumar Sunhere.

“My seniors like Anita Chouhan madam, supervisor of the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), child development project officer Sandeep Ruhal sir and even higher officials have always been very supportive,” says Ramkalan. “They do not expect me to attend all the meetings or engage in work that involves too much movement. But during this difficult time, their support was even more intense.”

Chouhan says that Ramkalan is so devoted to her work that it hardly matters whether she can always be present at meetings or not. “We know that she will fulfill her duties and do more,” she says.

Ramkalan's biggest support comes from her family. Her two brothers and teenaged nephew ensure that she walks as little as possible during her rounds; they ferry her around on a motorbike. Every time she returns home from her rounds, her 70-year-old father Bakhshilal keeps a bucket of water ready for her and helps her wash her hands and feet.

“As I was regularly in the field, I was very worried, particularly about my parents (her father has a lung ailment and mother suffers from Parkinson's disease) and my nine-

1,670

Population of Hirapur. Despite 80 migrant workers returning at the height of Covid-19, no positive case was reported.

year-old nephew,” says Ramkalan. “But my family boosted my confidence to go on.”

Her own worries though did not stop Ramkalan from allaying fears of others. Manju Mewada, 29, caught a cold during the pandemic. She had cough, too, and that got her worried. “But *didi* not only boosted my morale, but also helped me get medicines,” says the mother of three. “She suggested home remedies for my symptoms. Constant counselling put my fears to rest.”

Similar stories of dedication abound in Madhya Pradesh, which has 97,315 anganwadi centres. Workers and helpers went out of their way during the pandemic to ensure that the nutrition and health needs of children and pregnant women and lactating mothers were being met. To laud them, the DWCD recently documented efforts of about 20 anganwadi workers through a series of experience-sharing webinars.

DWCD commissioner Swati Meena Naik says that like Ramkalan, all workers showed courage to rise up to the occasion and don the role of Covid-19 heroes. “Their efforts also reflect the indomitable spirit of womanhood to never back out and work incessantly to ensure security of the family and the community,” she tells THE WEEK.

As Ramkalan says, “*Bhagya aur karma saath ho toh koi bhi taala jaldi khulta hain* (any lock can open easily if destiny and hard work go together).” ●

Home, help

Men and boys in Uttar Pradesh become gender equality champions to tackle rising cases of domestic violence

BY PUJA AWASTHI

One of the most brutal manifestations of the psychological stress of lockdown was the worldwide rise in domestic violence. In India, the National Commission for Women launched a WhatsApp number to report such cases.

While men who had never been trained to be gender-sensitive or imbibed it from their surroundings directed their frustration at the women in the family, even those who fared better in 'normal' times found it hard to keep themselves in check.

"Without work, diversions or friends, but with uncertainty on every front, it was like being in a pressure cooker," said Shri Ram Yadav of Gurera village in Sitapur district. Yadav is among the 2,500 men in 19 districts of Uttar Pradesh who have been part of the 'Ek Saath' (Together) campaign. Run since 2017 by Sahayog, an organisation that works to promote gender equality and maternal health, the campaign engages men and boys as partners to challenge social norms stacked against women. This is achieved through gender-sensitive, community change-makers called Samanta Sathis (gender champions or literally equality partners), who are willing to change their behaviour and inspire others to do the same.

Yadav said that while men, not used to staying at home all day, started to find fault with all that the women at home would do, migrants who returned home behaved in ways unacceptable to the locals. "A little too much salt in the food, a bucket of water not filled quickly enough—all became reasons to



Shri Ram Yadav
Member, 'Ek Saath'
campaign

“A little too much salt in the food, a bucket of water not filled quickly enough—all became reasons to abuse women.”

abuse women,” he said. “Young men who had never spent so much time in their villages made a pastime of commenting on girls, ogling, whistling and generally being a nuisance.”

The latter sometimes took a vicious turn. Yadav cites the example of a young girl who was sexually assaulted by a returnee migrant when she went to relieve herself in the fields behind the quarantine centre. The police was of little help—it suggested that since the man could not be jailed owing to Covid-19 restrictions, some compromise be hammered out between the parties.

The Samanta Sathis found themselves challenged like never before. In

2,500

men in 19 districts of Uttar Pradesh are part of the 'Ek Saath' (Together) campaign.

the initial days of their work, they had been mocked, threatened and accused of trying to corrupt girls and women, but during the lockdown they found their interventions were even more unwelcome. “There was only so much that could be done over the phone,” said Yadav. “When we tried to organise meetings of two or three houses in a neighbourhood, we were reported to the police for breaking lockdown norms.”

Harsh Chaudhary, a 20-year-old Samanta Sathi from Gurera, said that they received almost double the number of complaints every day compared to before the lockdown. “One man would

fight with his wife then walk out of home, leaving her and the children scared,” he said. “Another would thrash his wife and daughter as there was no alcohol available. Even men who occasionally helped with household chores stopped doing so. It was a hundred times more challenging to make them understand that this was unacceptable.”

The Samanta Sathis, however, did not stop trying. Yadav said that marriages that were a few years old came under heightened stress during the lockdown and multiple dowry demands were made. “We pursued cases—from the local thana to the district magistrate—throughout the lockdown,” he said. “Despite that persistence, cases under the correct sections were lodged only when the lockdown eased.”

As Yadav added, it is in unusual circumstances that our true selves are revealed. “The pandemic has taught us that we are still far from being a gender-sensitive or equal society,” he said. “That is the only good that came out of it—that we learnt how difficult the road ahead is.” ●



Mind care

These professionals have been working tirelessly to help people suffering from the mental health repercussions of the pandemic

BY ANJULY MATHAI

In February last year, Dr Prerna Sharma, a clinical psychologist from a tertiary medical college in Delhi, got a notice from the health ministry informing her that she was to be posted at a quarantine camp at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) facility, nearly 30km from where she stayed. She was skeptical about what her role was to be. After all, what could be the need for a clinical psychologist in a quarantine camp?

At the centre, she was met by gun-toting soldiers wearing masks and introduced to the team of doctors from AIIMS and ITBP forces, and virologists and scientists from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). In a distant building cordoned off by tents and guarded by soldiers stayed 406 Wuhan returnees. Curious and a little scared, she dropped all her reservations and gave herself up wholly to the task of alleviating the anxiety of these people. Wearing a PPE kit, she went to each floor of the facility and spoke to as many people as she could. Most people were experiencing the anxiety of staying in an unfamiliar place, unpreparedness, apprehensions about the virus, sudden displacement from work or studies and being away from family.

By the end of two weeks, she had gained a lifetime of experience. But it was not easy. "It was so hard to separate my personal life from the stories I was hearing," she says. "I was out for more than 300 days, and when I came back home, I did not have the luxury of isolating myself. I had my family, including my five-year-old son, to take care of. No one prepares you for this kind of thing."

According to an online survey conducted by the Indian Psychiatry Society in April last year, more than two-fifths of the 1,685 participants experienced mental health problems (primarily anxiety or depression) because of the pandemic. The

number of mental health professionals available to take care of these problems is sadly few—India has 0.75 psychiatrists per lakh individuals. Yet, many of these mental health professionals have been working round the clock to make up for the shortage during this trying time.

"In March last year, we created a WhatsApp group to reach out to health care professionals and put up posters for tele-counselling services for the people," says Nithya H.M., assistant professor of clinical psychology at the Government Medical College, Chengalpet, who is also part of the Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists. "We started with work in Tamil Nadu and later it became pan India." They also liaised with the Institute of Mental Health and the Madras Medical College, which provided them with a list of Covid positive patients each morning. Their team of volunteers would then make around 20 calls each a day to these patients and their families. Details of patients, including pre-morbid conditions, were documented in a Google form.

This has been a taxing period for her. She relocated from Chennai to Chengalpet in March so that she could avoid the commute from home to the hospital. "Initially, I slept only for four to five

0.75

The number of psychiatrists per one lakh individuals in India.



Nithya H.M.

“Initially, I slept only for four to five hours a day, thinking about strategies to deal with the potential mental health issues.”

hours a day, thinking about strategies to deal with the potential mental health issues and to promote positive mental health among both health care professionals and the public at large,” she says.

And it is not just individual mental health workers who have upped their game. Certain mental health startups, too, have risen to the occasion. Trijog, for example, founded by a mother-daughter duo in 2014, is providing discounted sessions to deal with the increased case load during the pandemic. Wysa, an AI chat bot created to help address mental health problems, was chosen by ORCHA, a health app evaluator, as the best platform for Covid-related stress and anxiety. ePsyclinic, started by Gurgaon-based Shipra Dawar in 2015, was the exclusive partner for several state governments including the Haryana



Shipra Dawar

“We provided pro bono counselling to 2.7 lakh people, including migrant labourers, delivery executives, and women facing domestic abuse.”

required close supervision and physical proximity, and handling the epidemic of student suicides during the lockdown and the burnout experienced by health care workers.

These challenges may only be set to grow, he says. According to *The New York Times*, the hidden fourth wave of the pandemic is going to be the mental health crisis. Are we prepared for a possible deluge of mental health problems? Dr L. Sam S. Manickam, a professor of clinical psychology, does not think so. “After the 9/11 attacks, 5,000 volunteers were given training in psychological first aid to deal with the mental health fall-out of the attacks,” he says. “In India, after a natural calamity, the National Disaster Management Authority deals with the physical dimension. But the psycho-social aspect is sadly neglected.” ●

and Rajasthan governments, to take care of people’s mental health needs during the pandemic. “We provided pro bono counselling to 2.7 lakh people, which included ASHA workers, migrant labourers, senior citizens, blue collar workers like Zomato and Swiggy delivery executives, and women facing domestic abuse,” says Dawar.

Dr Varghese Punnoose, professor and head of department of psychiatry, Government Medical College, Kottayam, Kerala, says: “When the second Covid patient in India—a medical student from Wuhan—was admitted in my hospital last January, I had no idea that psychiatrists would have any role to play in the treatment,” he says. “So I did not even attend the training programme on how to wear PPE. But the next day, I had to get into the Covid isolation room wearing PPE because one of the patients refused to undergo tests; he was angry and in denial. That was an eye-opener.”

He says some of the challenges they faced included dealing with alcohol withdrawal symptoms among those in Covid wards, stigma against those suspected to have Covid, managing patients who

Hub and spokes

Zoho Corporation has employed a unique work philosophy to adapt to this pandemic

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

Nine years ago, when Sridhar Vembu's multinational software firm, Zoho Corporation, purchased four acres of land in Mathalamparai—a remote village near Tenkasi in south Tamil Nadu—to branch out its operations, there were not many supporters for that idea. But Vembu had a vision of “transnational localism”, by which his engineers across the globe work from rural areas, closer to their hometowns, to deliver globally-competitive products. In 2018, the Chennai-headquartered company started another ‘feeder office’ in Renigunta village close to Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. In March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck and IT companies struggled hard to establish work from home (WFH) norms, the industry realised the power of Vembu's village vision that promotes remote working, and working from or close to hometowns.

While even industry majors found it difficult to streamline and move into WFH norms, the 8,000-plus employees of Zoho took just four days for this transition. It was at the beginning of March that Vembu announced a “remote-work” culture in the company. “The only thing was that we had to structure it,” says Vembu over a ‘Zoho meeting call’ from his Tenkasi home. “There were disturbances in terms of network, which we corrected in just a few days.”

The company was able to come up with a remote-working tool kit in a short period after Vembu's announcement. This tool kit named Zoho Remotely has 11 cloud-based apps to enable working from home. “I will not say that we were prepared for the pandemic,” says Vembu. “But we were prepared for a recession. We thought the industry as such might face a set-back globally because of a recession.” Vembu was conferred with the Padma Shri award this year. He has also been made a member of National Security Advisory Board, led by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

Founded in 1996 as AdventNet, and renamed as



8,000-plus employees of Zoho, founded by Sridhar Vembu (in picture), took just four days to shift to WFH.

Zoho (after its online office suite) in 2009, the company provides several web-based business tools and IT solutions. The Zoho software suite consists of around 45 applications that help in operations like customer engagement, accounting, project management, social media marketing and email campaigns. In 2019, the company generated a total revenue of ₹3,410 crore. Some of its product like Zoho Desk was built entirely in its rural feeder office in Mathalamparai. “You need not have to be necessarily in a metro to run or work for a software company,” says Vembu. “My idea of moving to the village was to give the employee peace of mind and also boost the local economy.”

Unlike many other software companies, Zoho has not cut down on the jobs or brought in pay cuts during this pandemic period. They have a clear plan for the post-Covid phase, too. “Instead of waiting for [things to] return to normal, we have started redefining it [the work culture] for Zoho,” says Rajendran Dandapani, director of engineering, Zoho Corporation. “[We will have] no monolithic [centralised and large] offices, instead, a hub-and-spoke model [with] 15 to 20 offices, [each with] maximum 100 employees, scattered around the countryside.” ●

Doctors' fightback

This Bengaluru patient may have broken the world record for most days spent on ECMO

BY MINI P. THOMAS

Venugopala M., 59, from HSR Layout, Bengaluru, tested positive for Covid-19 in September. He was discharged on January 30—131 days in the hospital, including 64 days in the intensive care unit. Dr Rajesh Mohan Shetty, consultant (critical care medicine), Manipal Hospitals, Whitefield, said that Venugopala's lungs were 100 per cent affected; 64 per cent or more is considered severe disease.

To make matters worse, he had a history of hypertension and developed severe Covid-pneumonia. "The patient's oxygen level was low, and so, other body parts also started getting affected," said Shetty. "He had low blood pressure and started experiencing drowsiness." The respiratory problems took a toll on his kidneys and liver, too. "His chances of survival seemed bleak," said Shetty.

As his condition deteriorated, he was placed on ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation—using a pump to circulate blood through an artificial lung into the bloodstream). "ECMO gives oxygen to the body and removes carbon dioxide," said Shetty. "Once the lung recovers, we stop ECMO and the body takes over." A case report published in the European Heart Journal claimed that a patient who was on ECMO for 49 days is the "longest ECMO Covid survivor in the world". Venugopala was on ECMO

for 56 days. "We've submitted the data to ELSO (Extracorporeal Life Support Organization)," says Shetty.

Notably, the medical team did it without a tracheostomy (inserting a tube into the windpipe through an incision in the neck), which is usually done in such severe cases. "We took the patient off the ventilator within a few days of initiating ECMO; it was able to manage the lung function," said Shetty. Getting off the ventilator meant that Venugopala did not have to be sedated any more. He could eat and drink on his own and even talk to his family. "He didn't have problems associated with long-term ventilation," said Shetty. "That reduced the complication levels as well. There was no deterioration. His other body functions were normal. We were just waiting for his lungs to get better." On the 40th day, his lungs showed signs of improvement.

Venugopala's family remained hopeful and optimistic during the difficult time. They arranged money for the treatment by selling property. "We didn't lose hope because we knew dad is strong-willed," said his son Manoj V. Reddy, 30, who works as delivery lead at Acuity Knowledge Partners in Bengaluru. "We trusted the doctors and they kept us updated. When we were not allowed to meet dad, the doctors spoke to him and kept us posted."

Shetty said the family's confidence in the doctors was key. "Even we did not know whether he would definitely improve and survive," he said. "However, thanks to the family's faith in us, we tried as hard as possible, replacing what-ifs with even-ifs."

Venugopala, a BEML employee, got his daughter Ruchika married on March 3, a mere 31 days after he was discharged. It seems like he certainly made up for lost time. **1**



RESILIENT, RESOLUTE

Venugopala with
hospital staff

Hope resurrected

India has successfully revived organ transplants, which had declined drastically because of the pandemic

BY MINI P. THOMAS

Yogish, a driver from Tumakuru in Karnataka, was among the many patients in need of organ transplants who were driven to despair by Covid-19. The 25-year-old, who uses only one name, was suffering from end-stage renal failure and had several health complications, including breathlessness and weakness. He underwent dialysis and waited for eight months for a transplant.

His turn finally came in February 2020. But, Covid-19 meant that elective surgeries were being postponed even before the lockdown. In July, he contracted the virus and the surgery was deferred for another two months as the risk of reactivation of the virus was high during that period. Yogish finally got the transplant, from his father, in October.

Patients in need of organ transplants suffered a double blow because of the pandemic, says Dr Sonal Asthana, lead consultant, HPB (hepato-pancreato-biliary) and liver transplant surgery, Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru. "Being immunocompromised, patients with end-stage organ failure found themselves to be at an increased risk of Covid-19 and avoided hospital visits as far as possible," he said. "Also, they could not access transplantation facilities because of fewer donations and most ICU resources being directed to Covid-19 care."

Dr Shailesh Raina, director, urology and robotics, Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre, Mumbai, said the patients themselves were afraid when the pandemic was at its peak as they would have to go on immunosuppressants after the transplant, leading to a higher chance of getting Covid-19.

The health care crisis prompted the Liver Transplantation Society of India and the Indian Society of Organ Transplantation, supported by the National Organ Tissue and Transplant Organisation, to issue guidelines about how to care for a patient in need of



Lithika, 7 (in picture)
got part of her father's liver after the hospital helped to crowdfund the surgery.

a transplant. And over the last two months, there has been signs of revival. "There has been a spurt in organ donation and transplant activities have returned to near-normal levels," said Asthana.

Despite Covid-19 wreaking havoc with India's transplantation machinery, there were also heart-warming stories that gave hope to all. Like that of Lithika. The seven-year-old had acute-on-chronic liver failure. Her father Channa Nayaka, 40, a security guard, was ready to donate part of his own liver (the organ can regenerate itself), but the family could not afford the surgery. The team at Aster RV Hospital, Bengaluru, stepped up and arranged the money through crowdfunding and the surgery was successfully performed in October.

Interestingly, paediatric transplants seemed to continue despite the dip in overall transplants. Between March and November, when transplants were worst affected by the pandemic, paediatric transplants increased from 10 per cent of the total to 15 per cent. Children, yet again, provided a ray of hope amid the darkness. ●

Silver linings

While Maharashtra has seen a rise in Covid-19 cases, the situation could turn around with better adherence to safety protocols

BY POOJA BIRAIA JAISWAL

March saw Nagpur go under lockdown owing to the surge in Covid-19 cases; so did Parbhani district. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray warned that strict lockdown measures would be initiated in other regions, too, to contain the spread. The Union government has already dispatched a team to assist the state administration. The current rise in daily cases is reminiscent of the state's situation in October, when 10,000 plus cases used to be reported every day. Mumbai has been reporting more than 1,000 cases daily. But city doctors say that it is not all bleak. The spike, they say, is limited to certain areas in the city and that the cases are milder.



Dr Anita Mathew,
internal medicine specialist,
Fortis Hospital

The numbers have definitely gone up. However, we have not seen a spike across all wards in Mumbai. There are certain wards where the numbers are really high. For instance, in Mulund, where I practise, we have a huge number of cases and there has been a constant increase. We expect this to continue well into the next couple of days or weeks. It may go down over a period of time. And the dip will only happen if people become more responsible. Vaccination has also brought in complacency. And with numbers going down in between—when the city reported about 300 cases a day—people assumed that the pandemic was over. One interesting aspect is that the high case numbers are being reported from apartments, and not necessarily from slums. I work with a municipal hospital as well and we are not seeing overwhelming numbers there.



Dr Alpa Dalal,
consultant chest
physician, Jupiter
Hospital

The city is undergoing vaccinations on an unprecedented scale. But the complaints of reactions post vaccination are much hyped. They are essentially mild in nature—pain at the jab site, mild fever, joint pain, dizziness and headache. These are all expected. But those who are frail, have very poor cardio-respiratory functions and are allergic to the ingredients used in the vaccine can develop serious reactions.

As of now, we are seeing that the cases in Mumbai are milder. Most people are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic, and the need for hospitalisation and ventilators is much less. We are seeing only 20-25 per cent of the ventilator cases we saw during last year's peak.

Lessons in humanity

These educationists helped children tide over difficulties posed by the pandemic

BY ABHINAV SINGH

Hundreds of students of professor Manish Jha from remote and backward areas of the country did not join his online classes when Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai started them in July 2020. Jha and his colleagues encouraged those who missed classes to attend Zoom meetings from wherever possible. He found out that many of them did not have stable internet connections and had to find areas near their homes that had good reception. The professors later learnt that many students did not even have laptops or smartphones.

“Students were hesitant to inform us that they did not have gadgets to attend classes,” said Jha. “We also found that many of them did not have money for internet recharge on their phones. We then prepared a Google sheet and pooled in money. We provided laptops and smartphones to our students.”

In addition to this, about 50 TISS students were stuck in the campus hostel. They could not go home as they had not anticipated an immediate lockdown. They were however provided for by their professors and the faculty. “None of the students who were left behind tested positive in the campus. As soon as the first phase of unlocking started, they went back home,” said Jha.

These are two examples of the efforts taken by those at TISS Mumbai to help their students. The faculty members helped the students when they needed



them most. There are many such situations that brought out Covid heroes in the field of education.

Take the case of 33-year-old Avneesh Chhabra, a Gurugram-based saffron trader, who is passionate about technology and social causes. He wanted to help children who were stuck in their houses. “When the lockdown started, underprivileged children were under tremendous stress,” said Chhabra. “They were stuck in their small homes and were not used to being with their parents all day. They witnessed domestic violence and high alcohol consumption.”

And so, in May 2020 Chhabra launched a free online platform called PassionGuru, which offers passion-based classes for children. “Through this platform, I wanted them to be more imaginative and future-ready via vocational education,” he said. “Such children rarely get a chance to pursue what they love

Manish Jha

professor, TISS, Mumbai

“ We pooled in money and provided laptops and smartphones to our students. ”



2,000 underprivileged children are being trained through PassionGuru, a free online platform launched by Avneesh Chhabra (in picture).

doing. We wanted to get them access to passion mentors. Today, we are training more than 2,000 children in different art forms." PassionGuru is Chhabra's self-funded venture and he works with different NGOs that tend to scores of underprivileged students.

The classes are for children in the 8-16 age group, and a completion certificate is also provided to them. The platform has chosen art forms such as kathak, taekwondo, singing, yoga, sign language and sketching. The platform even ran a campaign to raise funds to provide smartphones for children who did not have them.

Pradyut Voleti is another entrepreneur who wanted to help children de-stress. He heads Dribble Academy in Delhi, which gives free basketball training to children in villages and slums. However, the pandemic brought unique challenges. Children who were used to playing on courts in their localities were socially isolated and could not practise. Those from low-income families had almost no access to the internet to continue their training online.

"In Noida, we worked with our corporate partners such as the HCL Foundation and provided our students with a basketball each as well as internet recharges,"

said Voleti. "We even provided dry ration which motivated the children to attend online classes and helped them support their families during the crisis."

Dribble Academy also invited famous volunteers to conduct sessions, like American coach Nate Cox who conducted dribbling sessions, and former IPS officer Shantanu Mukherjee, who spoke to the children on International Tigers Day. Once the lockdown was eased, Dribble Academy set up basketball hoops on trees and in nearby villages.

Some educationists also came up with interesting innovations to stop the spread of Covid-19 within their campuses. Professors Debasis Chakravarty and Aditya Bandyopadhyay from IIT Kharagpur developed an artificial intelligence (AI) image processing-based alert system for public places to ensure physical

distance. This product has been installed at the IIT Kharagpur campus.

"The idea came to my mind when I saw the measures announced by medical practitioners globally," said Chakravarty.

"The basic principle of social distancing also emerged as a direct consequence of my research area of obtaining the localisation status from an image-based concept, which we apply for the autonomous ground vehicles (AGV) research group. The development of this system involved the students from the AGV research group."

The future plan of this institute is to get this setup more user-specific and situation-specific. The development team is optimistic that this setup would be useful in the future as well.

Universities such as Lovely Professional University (LPU) came forward with an initiative in June 2020 to offer free education to the wards of frontline workers who were infected with Covid-19 while serving the nation. The university had announced a 100 per cent tuition fee waiver for the children of these victims—whether survivors or deceased—as a token of gratitude. The university also announced scholarships worth ₹20 crore to support the workers involved in the country's fight with the pandemic including medical professionals, policemen, media persons, railway and airline employees, bank employees and others.❶

Pause, play

The BCCI ensured the careful return of cricket after the lockdown—a much needed move for players and fans alike

BY NEERU BHATIA

Recovering from his multiple coronary stent procedures at his home in Behala, Kolkata, Sourav Ganguly must be a happy man as he catches the cricket action on the telly. The BCCI president and his office bearers had taken their time to finally allow cricket to resume in India after the nationwide lockdown was lifted last year. Even as other sports restarted training, cricket remained at a standstill. The BCCI agreed to organise the 2020 edition of the Indian Premier League in November, hosted by the United Arab Emirates.

Much before the pre-season training for the IPL formally began, most cricketers were training at their homes. Navdeep Saini was one of them. The 28-year-old fast bowler from Karnal, Haryana, plays domestic cricket for Delhi and is with Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL. He has had an eventful six months. He went from training at his family farm during the lockdown to entering the IPL bio-bubble in October, before moving to another bubble in Australia, where he made his Test debut, though he was originally drafted as a net bowler.

"When the lockdown started, we all went home," Saini told THE WEEK. "We knew we would have to resume training after some time and be prepared for it. I consulted my friends and got my gym equipment over to our farmhouse. I would run and keep myself busy. The focus was on ensuring that it would not take much time for me to get back into action."

For the BCCI, hosting IPL 2020 was crucial. But despite the national lockdown ending, the Covid scenario at key venues was not conducive. "Of course, we were very worried before going ahead with the IPL," said BCCI treasurer Arun Dhumal. "If we did not conduct the IPL,

it would have greatly impacted the balance sheet of the BCCI. The revenue earned from it is pumped back into domestic cricket. Some international sports, like tennis and football, resumed competitions but had hiccups in terms of cases and bio-bubble breaches. But we thought we should go ahead and put the best protocols in place. We executed it well. The way we conducted IPL could be an example for other sports, too."

The BCCI pulled out all the stops to ensure Covid protocols were strictly followed by all—officials, players, broadcasters, staff. It roped in Restrata, a British technology firm, to provide a safety management platform to manage movement between IPL venues, training grounds and team hotels.

Despite the absence of spectators, the players were just happy to get back to work. "When we had to go to the IPL, it was a bit difficult to start playing immediately, and it took time to build my workload," remarked Saini. But he lauds the BCCI for choosing to resume cricket with the shortest format.

"The quarantine period before the IPL was a bit difficult as one could not venture out of the room," said Saini. "But at least we knew when it ended we would be going to the ground. There was a sense of excitement of getting to play again. That you were getting to meet fellow teammates again was incentive enough."

The rules included no after-match parties and restricted access to players and families. But each franchise arranged for a 'Team Room' in the hotels, which had various activities. Saini said this informal space was important to break the monotony.

Unlike many of Saini's domestic cricket colleagues who returned home after the IPL,

**15%-
20%**

Increase in viewership for IPL 2020 compared with IPL 2019.

A full-page photograph of Navdeep Saini, a cricketer, running on a red athletic track. He is wearing a yellow t-shirt with 'Fly Emirates' and an Arsenal crest, black shorts, and white sneakers with blue accents. He is also wearing large black headphones. The background shows a green fence and trees under a clear sky.

Navdeep Saini

Cricketer

“ India-Australia was such a big series. So, we were not bothered about the restrictions. ”

his bio-bubble life would continue in Australia. The BCCI had sent the entire T20, ODI and Test squads plus support staff and back-up players all together. Australia's stricter Covid protocols were not easy, but this brought the team together and the focus remained firmly on the cricket.

The joy of getting to don the India cap was bigger than the frustration of the restrictions for Saini and the young guns who came good on the tour. “You are playing for the country, and there is the excitement of international cricket,” he said. “It was such a big series. So, we were not bothered about the restrictions or the bio-bubble.” After the series Saini returned home to meet his family after six months.

Dhumal said the Australia tour was no doubt very taxing for the players and support staff. “But we are so proud of them,” he said. “They never let these things impact their performance. The restrictions for the Australians were different, while [our] players were there without family and could not venture out, while the rest of the city was open.”

The tour was a win-win situation for both, hosts and visitors. While Cricket Australia was happy with the revenues and all-time high television ratings, the BCCI and Indian cricket fans were over the moon with the result.

There was also the satisfaction of seeing live cricket back on TV. “There was so much gloom in 2020 that the IPL brought much cheer to fans,” said Dhumal. “It was the only real entertainment. There were no movies released and nothing else was happening except on the OTT space.” He adds that IPL 2020 had a 15 to 20 per cent increase in viewership over the 2019 season.

Having overcome the hurdle of organising international cricket at home by hosting England, the BCCI is now preparing for the next IPL edition this summer and to host the bilateral series that are pending. And yes, it has also kicked off the curtailed domestic fixtures, though the Ranji Trophy will not be played for the first time since its inception. The only big challenge left is to ensure the women's teams get enough game time. The BCCI has made some effort to restart women's cricket like the ongoing series against South Africa but a lot more needs to be done. ●

Personal touch

Meet the family which volunteered to keep a 24-hour vigil on patients admitted at their hospital

BY KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH

Early studies about Covid-19 said that deaths were preceded by a rapid deterioration in the condition of patients. Therefore, the patients had to be monitored constantly. But, during a health crisis that is easier said than done.

At Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital, the founder and his family stepped in to help their team. Mohsin Ali Khan, his wife, Saiyada, and their son Zaw volunteered to monitor the condition of patients themselves. They had technology to aid them—in 2019, Era had developed a dashboard to monitor all admitted patients from a central control room. The family put up a display of it in their living room and maintained a 24-hour vigil, taking turns to watch the screen.

"Generally, hospitalised patients have family or friends with them," said Zaw, 29, additional director (administration, research and development). "Covid-19 patients around the world were deprived of that personal care. We were attempting to fill that gap to some extent." He said that alerting staff to any issue, such as oxygen saturation of a patient dropping, was important because it was not possible for the doctors in an ICU to constantly comprehend the condition of all patients.

Zaw, a bioinformatics engineer with a master's in business strategy, had been guiding his team in novel research on personalised nutrition. This proved useful in improving re-



Zaw Ali Khan

“ Covid-19 patients were deprived of personal care. We were attempting to fill that gap. ”

covery rates. "We listed anti-inflammatory, anti-fibrosis, anti-thrombotic and anti-mucus-hypersecretion food like ginger and cinnamon," he said. The team at Era identified a compound in green tea as a promising inhibitor of SAR-CoV-2's spike protein. (Zaw warns that post-vaccination, green tea may inhibit the working of the vaccine, too.) "For children and the elderly, we baked snacks with the items in the checklist," he said.

According to the hospital, only 0.2 per cent of patients "admitted in a timely manner" died (as on February 20). The recovery rate at the L3 (critical care) hospital was 94.2 per cent, the "highest in Uttar Pradesh". Zaw said that ELMC&H was ready to



Mohsin Ali Khan



Saiyada Ali Khan

share its diet plan and the underlying science, and help interested parties to setup remote monitoring control rooms. "They can contact us at zawali@erauniversity.in," he said.

Mohsin, 56, said that he was glad the environment of research at the hospital helped save lives. "We hope to continue this," he said. "In addition to new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, we are studying cancer, neurodegenerative conditions and chronic non-communicable diseases, with promising results. By sharing knowledge with institutes around the world, we hope to enhance India's position as a world leader in science, technology and education." ●

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Real steel

Andhra Pradesh stands united against the privatisation of the Vizag steel plant, forcing the BJP and its allies on the back foot

BY RAHUL DEVULAPALLI

On the shores of the mighty Bay of Bengal in Visakhapatnam, the upcoming executive capital of Andhra Pradesh is a city within a city. Known locally as 'Ukkunagaram', the Vizag steel city is a walled enclave spread across nearly 20,000 acres, with its own distinct identity and culture. Employees and their families from all over the country occupy its 8,000 residential quarters, surrounded by lush green spaces and serviced by well-laid roads and systematically planned structures. But their lives

have turned upside down following the decision of the Narendra Modi government to privatise their employer, the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) or the Vizag steel plant. The vibrant enclave has suddenly become an island of anger, hopelessness and uncertainty.

"I have lived here for 25 years. I wanted my two children to get jobs at the plant and settle down here. Now, I do not know whether I will be able to keep my own job," said a

50-year-old skilled worker who is originally from a village in the adjoining Vizianagaram district. Most employees share such concerns. P. Naveen (name changed), who is in his early 30s, has been working at the plant for five years. He grew up in an upper-middle class household in Hyderabad and went to a reputed college. "Here I never felt like living in a typical government quarters and that is the reason why I could adjust. It has a cosmopolitan feel to it." Unsure of what lies ahead, Naveen is now looking to shift to another city.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs approved 100 per cent disinvestment in RINL in January, and a few weeks later, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reaffirmed the government's decision to privatise the plant. The move has raised concerns among its 17,000 permanent employees and 15,000 contract workers. "My mother gave away 23 acres of our farm land for the project in the 1980s," said Vijay Krishna, an employee. Land for the plant and the township was acquired from more

**IN THE EYE
OF A STORM**

Vizag steel plant in
Visakhapatnam



Manipal Hospitals celebrates 'Strong Women. Strong World'

On International Women's Day, Manipal Hospitals addressed the most relatable health issues among women from 13 to 50 years & above

Honoring the 'Power of Her' on International Women's Day, Manipal Hospitals organized an event with a panel of experts to connect with the strong women of today and address the key health concerns of women in their 13's, 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's and above. Highlighting the need to understand women's health at every age, Manipal Hospitals provided a platform to address the queries and concerns of women from different walks of life.

The event was organized in the presence of eminent officials **BJP State spokesperson of Karnataka Mrs. Malavika Avinash, Dr. H Sudarshan Ballal, Chairman, MHEPL, Mr. Dilip Jose, MD&CEO, MHEPL, Mr. Karthik Rajagopal, COO, MHEPL, and Dr. Manish Rai, Hospital Director, Manipal Hospitals, Old Airport Road.**

Dr. Hemanandini Jayaraman, Consultant- Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Manipal Hospitals Old Airport Road, Dr. Arathi Rama Rao, Consultant- IVF and Fetal Medicine, Manipal Hospitals Whitefield, Dr. Meena Muthiah, Consultant- Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Manipal Hospitals Jayanagar, and Dr. Gayathri Karthik, HOD & Consultant, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Manipal Hospitals Old Airport Road were a part of the expert panel who offered feasible solutions to the women's health issues across different category of age groups.

From menstrual pain, hormonal imbalances, fibroids, prolonged family planning, mid-life crisis and peri menopause, to various other health issues, the group of doctors at Manipal Hospitals highlighted the most



relatable health concerns faced by the women of today. During the session, practical solutions for women's sanitary hygiene, possibilities for delayed pregnancy through egg freezing, periodic ultrasound scans, pap smear and breast examination were highlighted by the doctors.

Dr Hemanandini Jayaraman suggested that swimming, yoga and exercise helps in easing period pain. "We have observed a lot of anxious mothers visiting the hospital these days with their young daughters who get their first period when they are aged nine." **Dr. Arathi Rama Rao** highlighted about the increase in awareness for egg freezing. "If there is a medical indication like a woman's mother having reached early menopause, they have a reason to check their fertility potential and freeze their eggs to conceive at a later stage", she said. **Dr Gayathri Karthik** stressed on women getting periodic ultrasound scans, pap smears, and breast examinations. "Early detection of cancers affect the cervix paves way for better chances of treatment,"

she stated. Weighing in on the ideal conception age, **Dr Meena Muthiah** said women should try conceiving between 25 and 35 years.

Dr. H Sudarshan Ballal, Chairman, MHEPL, said, "Women have played a crucial role in my life to the extent that everyone in my family has taken our maternal surname. Though women have been suppressed in the past, they have come a long way. They're present in almost all fields of occupation, be it medical, engineering, the police force, etc. Personally, I don't believe women are equal to men; women are superior to them."

Mr Dilip Jose, MD&CEO, MHEPL, said, "We are delighted that 60% of our employees are women, and they keep the flag flying for Manipal Hospitals. During the pandemic times, the efforts by our medical staff kept us going, many of which were led by women. The efforts for women empowerment will play a significant role for India to reach global standards in the healthcare sector, and we hope to seek more women leaders to join the bandwagon in the healthcare industry."



than 16,000 farmers of 60 villages. Krishna is upset that his family's sacrifice has gone in vain. "Did we part with our land so that some private player can turn it into a real estate venture and make huge profits? What am I left with? I have two daughters of marriageable age and I know that I will be among the first ones to be sacked as I am old and can be easily replaced," he said.

The employees have set up a Joint Action Committee (JAC) comprising 26 unions and associations to oppose privatisation. They have launched a relay hunger strike which has now crossed 30 days. Bike rallies and public meetings are being held in Visakhapatnam and in other parts of Andhra Pradesh. The JAC has invited students, teachers, professionals and people from all walks of life to join them. The unions have served strike notice to the management, warning that they will intensify their agitation

from March 25 if their demands were not met.

"The Centre did not spend a single rupee on the plant for the last 10 years," said Ayodhya Ram, a senior employee of the plant and convener of the JAC. The initial capital investment was ₹4,890 crore. The Centre and the state government have recouped ₹43,000 crore so far in the form of dividends and taxes," said Ram. "When the plant has provided employment to so many people and has created assets, why does the Centre want to sell it?"

Ram and others who oppose privatisation also have an emotional connect to the plant because of its history. In 1967, as many as 32 people died in police firing while protesting against the Central government's reluctance to sanction the nation's fifth steel plant in Andhra Pradesh. At the time, 67 MLAs and 7 MPs resigned in support of the demand, and the

STEELY RESOLVE

Protests in Visakhapatnam against the privatisation of Vizag steel plant

slogan "Vishaka Ukku, Andhrula Hakku" (Vishaka steel is Andhra's right) reverberated across the state. A large number of farmers surrendered their land, which was seen as an act of sacrifice for the development of the state. In 1971, prime minister Indira Gandhi laid the foundation stone for the project.

The plant became operational in 1991 with a capacity of 3.3 million tonnes (MT) per year. With three blast furnaces, the annual production now is 7.3 MT. Yet, the plant has never been allocated a captive mine, forcing it to procure iron ore at market price, which is three times more expensive. With the steady rise in the price of iron ore, the plant now has a debt of more than ₹21,000 crore,

Believers Church Medical College Hospital, Thiruvalla, Kerala

HOPE AND HEALING

It was yet another ordinary morning in March 2020. As usual, we were busy with our preparedness to receive patients, when we received an emergency call from our Health Minister. The information – three people who had travelled down to Kerala from Italy had tested positive for the novel corona virus and asking us to be a part of all the governmental efforts.

Our Response

We organised a COVID CONTROL CENTER which had a Communication and a Management Wing. Protocol for the identification of positive 'cases', treatment and most importantly, presentation (based on available data and information in literature) were introduced. Two of our community medicine faculty left immediately to assist the Pathanamthitta Collector and the Health Officials, while we quickly put together policies and procedures to be followed when we received the patients and the relatives. A comprehensive SCREENING PROTOCOL within 10 minutes was adopted, which included history taking for contact with Covid infection, travel, temperature check, etc. A fever clinic was arranged near the entrance of our hospital.

Preventive strategies

Keeping in mind that information sharing was crucial, we embarked on teaching and training programmes. We first educated all our health care workers – doctors, nurses, allied health and supporting staff – who in turn taught patients and relatives.

Break – the - chain campaign

We played an active role in the government's break-the-chain initiative, emphasizing the importance of hand washing, wearing of masks and physical distancing. We were liberal in providing our patients and their relatives with hand washing facilities, sanitizers and masks.

Webinars

Various Webinars were organised featuring infectious diseases experts and epidemiologists. The effort was to ensure that all the available information was adequately disseminated. We have also been extremely productive in the e-learning arena and have successfully conducted more than 50 international medical webinars thus far, in the past 12 months, with highly accomplished faculty from top universities of the world including Harvard University, Oxford University and Cambridge University.

Covid testing

With the increase in the number of positive cases, it became necessary to try and assist the government by setting up Covid testing facilities. Being an NABL accredited institution after a detailed inspection from the ICMR and Government, we were permitted to perform RT-PCR and antigen testing through our Central Research Laboratory. We also assisted the govt in handling the Covid testing for Sabarimala pilgrims by setting up a testing booth near the area.

Telemedicine

There was widespread panic among the public to get medical help for their illnesses due to the fear of contracting the disease while coming to the hospital. Therefore, we set up a very efficient Telemedicine hub to help our patients reach out to us. We reached out to patients by organising blood sample collection from their homes (B-Lab) and by delivering medicines through our telehealth service.

Treatment initiatives

We gave everything we had in treating the patients who came to us with the help of a competent team. Daily rounds would take anywhere between 8 -10 hours. For the positive patients who were isolated from their loved ones, utilizing video calling facilities, we were able to share their joy in bringing them together, even in their sickness.



Dr George Chandy Matteethra,
Director, Believers Church Medical
College Hospital, Thiruvalla.

For our own staff who turned positive, despite the preventive measures adopted, we introduced a very effective system to take care of them through daily communication, providing quarantine facilities and supplies. Covid testing and treatment were made absolutely free for all the staff.

Vaccination

Our effort in assisting the government was acknowledged by granting us permission to be an immunisation center. The response is enormous and we are happy to deliver our best. We will continue to respond to every need as an important aspect of our Covid response, keeping with our vision to 'bringing hope and healing with the love of Christ.'

The Covid pandemic taught humankind many important truths. But, for me, what I learned was that people are basically very good. The care and concern demonstrated by my colleagues, their response in the face of crisis, their commitment to the patients, their dedication to the people of their state and country and their willingness to risk their lives in the service of their brothers and sisters, will remain forever as one of the best memories I will treasure forever.

Today, I am a proud Indian.

Vande Mataram

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reporting losses for the past six years.

Y. Siva Sagara Rao, former chief managing director of RINL, wrote recently to the prime minister that the plant could be saved by merging it with the Steel Authority of India Limited and the National Mineral Development Corporation to form a steel giant. He said resource sharing would decrease the cost of raw materials and would increase production. "In our country, 112 MT of steel is produced annually, of which only 18 per cent is from the public sector. This is a very small share and the government does not have much control," said Rao. "It is not good to let the private sector control the industry. If the Centre implements my proposal, the production of steel by the government can go up to 30 per cent and it can break the [private sector] monopoly."

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has written to the prime minister to consider measures to revive the plant, which include allotment of captive mines and financial restructuring. Yet another proposal is to monetise the land owned by the company as it sits on a real estate goldmine. According to local developers and property dealers, each acre under RINL could fetch up to ₹10 crore. The entire land bank, according to market estimates, is worth more than ₹1.5 lakh crore. Employees fear that private players might be more interested in capitalising on the land than running the plant.

It is not just the employees who are concerned about the plant's privatisation. Union leaders say more than two lakh people are indirectly dependent on the plant. Shops specialising in mechanical and industrial spare parts dot the areas on the periphery of the township. There are also stores catering exclusively to employees who stay outside the township.

Interestingly, the issue has brought together bitter political rivals—the ruling YSR Congress and the opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Jagan is planning to lead an all-party delegation to meet Modi on the issue. Local BJP leaders are on the back foot in the face of the public opposition. The BJP's local ally, the Jana Sena Party of actor Pawan Kalyan, too, is finding it difficult to back the disinvestment decision. The bigger political question, however, is whether the YSRCP will take an aggressive stand against the Centre or continue

to have cordial relations.

Political analyst Telakapalli Ravi said the issue would prove to be a major setback for the BJP. "The party will never be accepted in Andhra Pradesh after this. The people are already upset with the BJP for not granting special status to the state. Its decision to sell the plant will only add to the negative image. Pawan Kalyan, too, will find it hard to convince his followers to keep the alliance intact," he said. Ravi, however, pointed out that Jagan is unlikely to risk a confrontation with the Centre. "He cannot afford to do so. He has not made any negative comments against the BJP."

The JAC is roping in national trade union leaders, farmer leaders and celebrities to join the fight. Telugu superstar and former Union minister Chiranjeevi has tweeted in support of saving the steel plant. Support has also come in from neighbouring Telangana. Information Technology Minister K.T. Rama Rao, who is the son of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, has expressed solidarity with the protesting employees.

"The sale of public sector companies hardly ever attracts much public support and sympathy. But that is not the case with us," said Narsing Rao, chairman of the JAC. "This government is trying to privatise the agricultural sector and the industrial sector. We want to make Vizag the centre of the fight against the privatisation policy of the government." ❏

It is not just the employees who are concerned about the plant's privatisation. Union leaders say more than two lakh people are indirectly dependent on the plant.



Handling a Pandemic

Madras Medical Mission—Rising to the Covid-19 challenge

BY VINITA NAYAR

Many hospitals were affected when Covid-19 began its march across India and many were also grappling with how to function in this scenario. However, early on, the Hon. Secretary of the Madras Medical Mission (MMM), Mr. M.M. Philip took a keen interest in responding to the outbreak. He created a core team headed by Dr. Ajit Mullasari, Director of Cardiology, which included Dr. Benjamin Ninan, HOD—Anaesthesia and Chief of Staff—and Dr. Anusha Rohit from microbiology and infection control.

Dr. Anusha Rohit says, “Before we got our first case of Covid-19, we trained all staff to handle patients if brought into the emergency with multiple drills and training sessions. A sample collection kiosk was created that ensured staff safety in line with the walk-in sample kiosks (WISK). We sourced and stockpiled PPE, including masks, face shields, and coveralls, and improved our supply chain. Every mask was tested. A fever clinic was created and protocols put in place.”

MMM received permission to be a testing centre on April 27, 2020. But getting kits and consumables was a herculean task. In addition to the existing Gene Xpert, Chepeid system (USA) that they already had permission to test with, they procured the Trunat system from MolBio (India), obtained NABL certification and ICMR approval—all

in a span of 15 days. Dr. Anusha says, “Our first patient, who came in sick on April 28, 2020, tested positive and later passed on. We learnt very important lessons in handling of the dead body and coordination with the local health officials with this episode.”

In phase I post lockdown, she explains, “Our out-patient departments (OPDs) were planned such that all of them were shifted to the block that had good ventilation and open windows. The intensive care units (ICUs), operation theatre, cath lab complex, wards were in a building with air handling units (AHUs). HEPA filters were placed at important ICUs and staff were repeatedly trained. Very stringent measures were put in place, as we saw that most hospitals had started Covid-19 care, but many patients had no access to cardiac care, nephrology, and dialysis or deliveries. So we decided to concentrate on our strengths and provide that support to Chennai residents. All patients and attendants were tested by RT-PCR. No visitors were allowed. A total of 10,436 patients and attendants were tested and 1,533 positives were detected.”

In phase 2, post-lockdown, as cases started increasing, MMM opened a Covid-19 ward with infrastructure like ventilation and exhausts and negative pressure ICUs. This facility not only treated mild to moderate cases of Covid-19, but also supported staff and their families who tested positive. Hand

hygiene and masking were compulsory. All ICU and OT staff wore N95 masks and face shields and all other staff wore surgical mask.

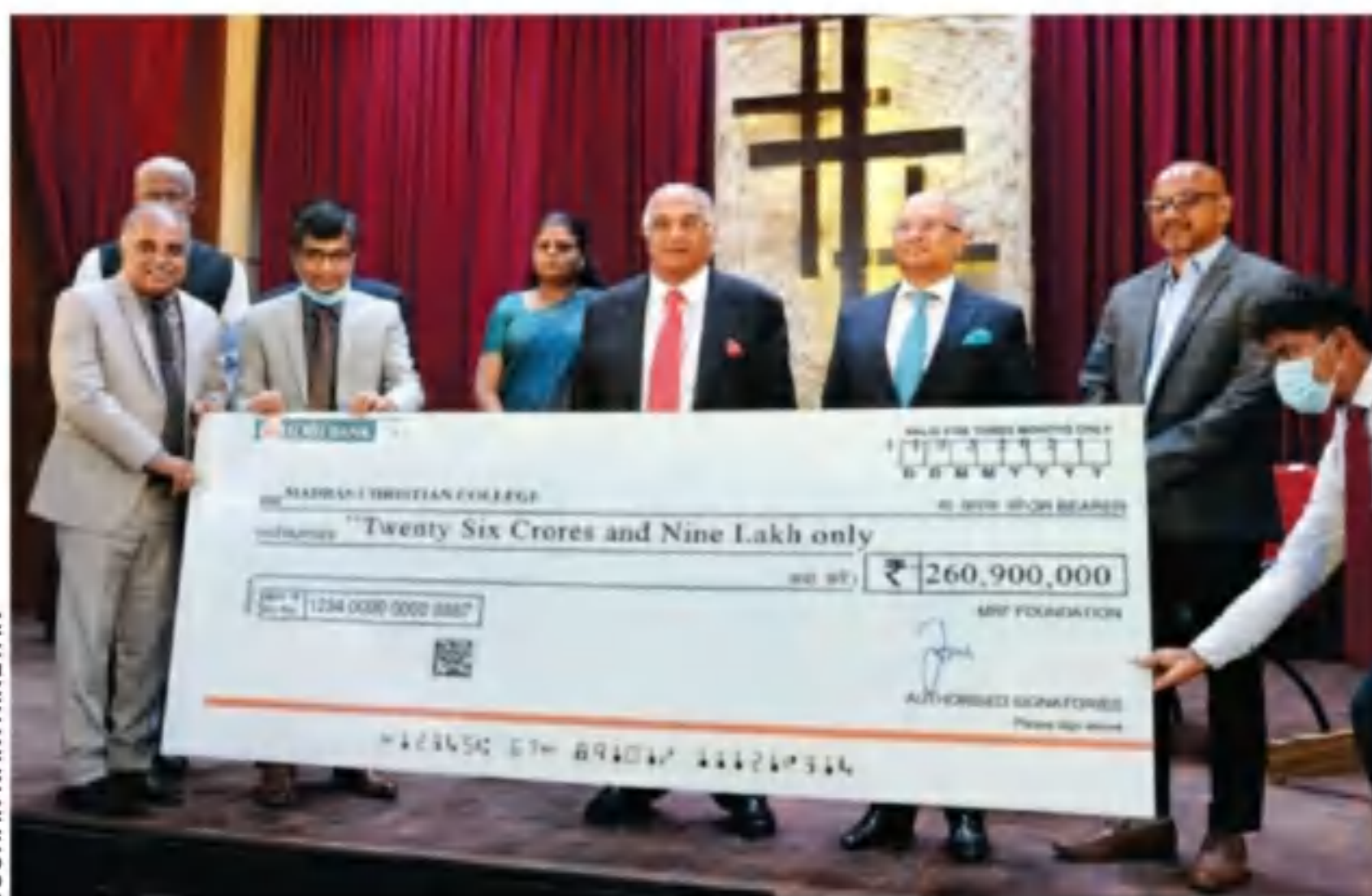
“Some services, like dialysis, were not shut down even for a single day,” says the doctor. “Our dialysis setup, catering to the susceptible population did not have a single outbreak of Covid-19, though we had many patients who tested positive. What is very encouraging is the fact that small details were looked into for the staff who worked in areas that were more likely to receive positive patients such as the emergency, ICUs, the Covid-19 ward, the fever clinic, among others. Nutritional and hydration requirements of the staff who work with the PPE in temperatures of over 40°C in peak summer was also taken into consideration. PPE was never in short supply and masks were provided to all.”

Following evidence-based medicine helped MMM deliver better care to patients, keeping patients’ safety top priority. She says, “Thrombolysis was preferred over primary percutaneous coronary intervention in patients who presented acutely to the emergency department. Outcomes did not differ from pre-Covid-19 unless there was delayed presentation. This was published in the prestigious journal *Circulation*. We also found that plasma sterilization can help us preserve and reuse N95 masks. Though we ensured no stoppage in supply, we still had a back-up plan. Our experience showed that good infection control practices, masking, hand hygiene, attention to ventilation, and continued testing helped continue services during the pandemic.”

Covid-19 vaccinations have started, but the pandemic is far from over. Dr. Anusha says, “We have not relaxed our infection control measures but only improved it as more evidence of dealing with the virus is emerging. We have conducted over 20 training sessions for all staff during the pandemic on how to deal with it. We vaccinated all staff who came forward.” She concludes, “We strive to get better on all these measures to improve patient care and provide state-of-the-art facilities to families of patients.”



TUSHAR KARTHIKEYAN



KNOWLEDGE PUSH

K.M. Mammen, chairman of MRF Ltd, hands over the cheque to Dr Paul Wilson, principal of MCC

host labs for data analytics, computational science, psychometrics, media science and instrumentation. Said Selvi Apoorva, principal secretary, higher education department, Tamil Nadu government: "An institution like MCC actually helps students not only get academic gains, but also [teaches them] how to learn. At a time when the pandemic poses a big challenge, an innovation park would help students learn how to learn."

Called the MCC-MRF Innovation Park, the centre aims to scout and train potential innovators from various streams. The greatest minds across the world would help nurture the students' innovative ideas. They will get the platform to set up their own start-ups even as they study their courses. "They will go out prepared for the outside world," said Wilson.

The park will serve as an autonomous centre. It also aims to set up collaborative spaces to facilitate inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary innovations. Located centrally on campus, the park will be easily accessible to all students and will also have spaces for outdoor classes.

"If you look at history, innovation does not come just from giving people incentives; it comes from creating environments where their ideas can connect," said MRF Limited chairman K.M. Mammen. "MRF is proud to join hands with MCC to help create such an environment in this esteemed institution." According to him, entrepreneurship and employability are the keys to defining an educational institution's success. "It is important that students have a seamless transition from the academic world to the world of work," said Mammen. "Projects such as the innovation park will help students in this transition."

Innovation station

Madras Christian College, with the help of MRF, begins setting up a world-class innovation park on its campus

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

Excitement filled the air as the Madras Christian College began initial process for setting up a world-class innovation park on its campus on March 17. Supported by MRF Limited, one of India's leading corporate houses, the park would be spread over 70,000 square feet and would groom the next generation of entrepreneurs.

"MRF Limited has made a monumental donation (₹26.09 crore) to the Madras Christian College to establish the park," said MCC principal Dr Paul Wilson. "The biophilic design of the park would connect the functional spaces with the surrounding natural environment. We are confident that this project will serve as a breeding ground for innovations and would incubate entrepreneurship in coming years."

Calling it a landmark event in Indian education, Wilson said that establishing such a park would encour-

age industry interaction with MCC students.

Said MRF Limited vice chairman and managing director Arun Mammen: "This is the first project we are doing at this scale, in an educational institution. MCC is looking at newer and contemporary areas in education, and starting this park will help students come up with newer ideas."

He added that it will benefit a cross section of students and also those corporates looking for newer ideas.

The park, one of its kind in liberal arts and science colleges, will have active learning spaces where workshops can be held. It will also have a writers' café, entrepreneurs' café, design studio and an open-air theatre. "The park is designed taking into account the greenery inside the campus," said architect R. Jerusha Shalini. "The building will have natural light and ventilation, [and will be] heat resistant."

The first floor of the park would

Best of both worlds

A combination of SIP and SWP ensures wealth creation and income after retirement

BY B. PADMANABAN



A systematic investment plan (SIP) is a magical step in the journey of financial planning, in the effort to achieve financial goals spread across timeframes. Here, an investor invests a fixed sum of money every month, on a particular date, and is on the road to see its long-term benefits.

Given the volatile nature of equities as an asset class, it is natural to use this asset class to meet medium- and long-term financial goals, like building a retirement corpus. An investor can choose to systematically invest through the working years to build a retirement kitty. At such a stage wouldn't it be great if there is a mechanism where the corpus continues to generate market-linked return and the investor could withdraw a particular sum every month?

ICICI Prudential Freedom SIP is a

combination of a regular SIP, which ensures growth to the portfolio, along with the advantage of a systematic withdrawal plan (SWP). An SIP + SWP arrangement offers the twin benefits of a wealth creation journey while regular cash flow is ensured to meet necessary expenses as well. In other words, it takes financial planning to the next level where one can see both the active income (salary, business income, etc) and passive income (earnings through investments, savings, etc) grow and enhance the value of the overall corpus.

One may think that such an approach is complicated and risky; but the fact is that it is a simple and easy to understand product and it continues to offer the flexibility that any SIP-based financial planning offers.

It starts with a monthly SIP in an open-ended equity, hybrid or fund of funds scheme for a predefined tenure of eight, 10, 12 or 15 years. Once the SIP tenure is completed, the cumulative units are transferred to another

scheme with a SWP option.

Investors can choose from a pre-defined list of schemes for both for starting the SIP and later switching to the SWP. Based on the investor's risk appetite, one is free to choose the schemes for SIP. The options available for SWP are a tad conservative in nature given that the investors would be at a later life stage.

More importantly, Freedom SIP has been designed in such a manner that the investor would know the exact amount of the monthly pay-out post the switch to the SWP option. This assumes significance as typically the pay-out would begin at a time when the investor may or may not have a steady source of income and having a control on the amount at the time of making the investment can be of paramount importance.

Following are some of the details that an investor needs to be mindful about. If an SIP has been started for eight years, then the monthly pay-out would be equal to the SIP amount. However, if the SIP tenure is 10 or 12 years, then the pay-out would be 1.5 times or two times the SIP amount, respectively. For SIP tenure of 15 years, the monthly pay-out after the switch to the SWP option would be three times the SIP amount.

For example, for an SIP of ₹10,000 for 15 years, an investor would get a monthly pay-out of ₹30,000. The pay-outs would be ₹10,000 and ₹15,000 if the SIP tenure is 8 and 10 years, respectively.

Furthermore, Freedom SIP offers all the other benefits that an SIP offers, such as multiple SIPs, additional purchase, top-up, pause, redemption /partial redemption along with an optional insurance cover as well.

Author is director & personal CFO,
Fortune Planners
Investment Service (P) Ltd.

Installment: 10,000 Start Date: 10-March-2006 15 years Investment= 18 Lakh			Investment= 14.4 Lakh 12 Years SIP Value		Investment= 12 Lakh 10 Years SIP Value	
Fund	XIRR	Final Value	XIRR	Final Value	XIRR	Final Value
IPru Technology Fund	19.76%	₹93,69,202	22.01%	₹60,19,897	22.31%	₹39,11,010
IPru Value Discovery Fund	16.36%	₹69,51,574	16.23%	₹40,86,471	15.72%	₹27,42,700
IPru FMCG Fund	14.96%	₹61,54,657	14.58%	₹36,64,007	12.57%	₹23,18,487
IPru Exports & Services Fund	14.73%	₹60,29,346	16.04%	₹40,36,613	15.95%	₹27,77,588
IPru MidCap Fund	14.61%	₹59,70,788	16.30%	₹41,05,398	16.90%	₹29,21,608
IPru Long Term Equity Fund	14.38%	₹58,50,733	14.88%	₹37,37,648	14.85%	₹26,18,047
IPru Equity & Debt Fund	13.85%	₹55,88,683	14.71%	₹36,95,474	14.70%	₹25,98,243
IPru Multicap Fund	13.18%	₹52,77,002	14.01%	₹35,27,451	14.41%	₹25,58,020
IPru Multi-Asset Fund	13.40%	₹53,78,250	13.52%	₹34,15,909	13.53%	₹24,40,331
IPru Balanced Advantage Fund			12.63%	₹32,20,435	12.48%	₹23,07,290

Ramesh Kalyanaraman
executive director, Kalyan Jewellers

When you have an opportunity to grow, why wait?

BY K. SUNIL THOMAS

For Indian businesses, going digital was one of the biggest takeaways from the pandemic, but not for Kalyan Jewellers. In fact, it has reinforced India's second biggest jewellery brand's belief in the importance of physical stores. With a primary focus on raising capital to open new stores outside its south Indian base, the company went for an IPO on March 16, and is set to get listed on the bourses next week. **THE WEEK** caught up with executive director Ramesh Kalyanaraman. Excerpts from an interview:

Stock markets have been on a volatile spiral these days. And the pandemic has been tough on most companies. Why do you feel this is the right time to go for an IPO?
When does a company go for an IPO? When it needs capital. And when you feel that your company and the industry are performing well. Look at Kalyan Jewellers. We have completed our expansion into all the important markets in the country [and are] present in 21 states. We have done all the work in terms of [building] the brand, in terms of creating the purchasing ecosystem and the customers and now the time has come to leverage what all we have done till today.

Secondly, the post-Covid comeback has been positive for our sector. If you see our Q3 (October to December 2020) figures, they are better than the pre-Covid figures. And for the industry, the momentum [has been] pretty [strong], even in the months of January, February and March, till today.

The business has recovered pretty well. Is that what you are saying?

Not just that. While [the other sectors] are talking about nearing pre-Covid levels, jewellery has been one of those rare industries that are talking about growth [that is more than] the pre-Covid sales.

How did this happen?

Because of the revenue coming from the unorganised segment. The momentum of the shift from the unorganised segment has been accelerated post-Covid.

Because people do not want to go to crowded streets or malls. They want to come to standalone stores because of hygiene and safety. That is why our industry has been doing well post-Covid.

Wedding and wedding-related revenue contribute 60 per cent to our industry, normally. But now the ticket size [of wedding purchases] has increased by 10 to 15 per cent, according to industry reports. This is because wedding-related expenses like F&B and hall rent have come down drastically because fewer people are invited due to restrictions. So that saving is going to jewellery.

When you have the opportunity to grow, when your industry is behaving positively, when you are performing best post-Covid, why should you wait? You have to take your company ahead when you have the scope of growth.

You have been categorical that more stores and getting hyperlocal is the strategy, and not going more digital. Can you explain this?

Let me correct you, I have only said online in our industry cannot replace offline. Online as a business has got organic growth. But it can never replace offline, because shopping for jewellery is not [like shopping for] fashion. It is for functions like weddings or festivals like Diwali, Akshaya Tritiya and Danteras. It is families coming together and spending time at the store and purchasing. Online is predominantly used for gifting.



Even during Covid when people were using all kinds of digital platforms, [we saw] youngsters coming in to the shop and connecting via video call to elders at home or waiting in the car outside.

Regarding your question about the brand focusing on a hyper-local strategy, I'll give you an example. When we opened our first showroom in Thrissur (Kerala) our brand was built on the core values of trust and transparency. We pioneered a lot of fair practices like BIS hallmark and rate tag which showed making charges. We kept repeat inventory available in our store at a time when it was more of a made-to-order business. It was accepted very well.

We opened our second showroom after seven years, in Palakkad. Though just 70km away from Thrissur, there was a marked difference in the type of products the customers preferred, the service levels they expected, the campaign, the grasping and understanding. There we realised that tastes and preferences were quite different. So we revamped the store, brought in local inventory, changed the brand campaign and even the customer-facing staff. From that time, it has been one of our best-performing stores.

So you have to customise yourself to local preferences.

There were a lot of villages in and around Palakkad and we wanted to get through to them, so we started My Kalyan (a grassroots customer outreach network). That was the way we expanded in Kerala, and the same strategy was followed for the Tamil Nadu entry, and then Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. We did the same when we expanded out

of south India. It is a hyperlocal brand, be it in Punjab or Gujarat.

You said the purpose of the IPO was to open more showrooms. You are present in the Gulf countries. Would the next level of expansion include these markets?

No. Now we want to leverage what we have done till today. We will be expanding only in the states we are in.

What else going forward?

First of all, our run rate of opening showrooms have been 10 to 12 every year for the past many years. That was the time we were entering new states. When you enter a new state or a region, you need more time and energy and branding effort. Now since we don't have to enter a new state, the expansion will be easier. The run rate will be faster.

How much of an influence has the use of celebrities had on Kalyan's growth?

Brand ambassadors helped us to be identified as hyperlocal. From [actors] Prabhu to Nagarjuna, these brand ambassadors have been with us right from the time we entered that particular market. Mr [Amitabh] Bachchan has been with us for the past eight years. The brand has a hyperlocal feel because of these celebrities being there as the face of the brand. Even the creatives we do with them have been done with a hyperlocal feel.

What is the future forward for your online presence?

There is an organic growth that is coming and revenue has been growing. A lot of research happens online, but revenue happens offline. ●

■ INTERVIEW

Pankaj Patel,
chairman, Zydus Group

ZyCoV-D will hit markets in May- June

BY NANDINI OZA



COURTESY: ZYDUS GROUP

VACCINES HAVE BEEN a ray of hope in a world ravaged by Covid-19. While India has started mass production of two vaccines—Covishield by Serum Institute of India and Covaxin by Bharat Biotech—a third one, ZyCoV-D by Zydus Cadila, is undergoing trials. Pankaj Patel, chairman of Zydus Group, says the DNA plasmid platform vaccine is expected to hit the market by May-June. Excerpts from an interview:

When did Zydus decide to make a Covid-19 vaccine?

Somewhere in February 2020, we decided to develop a Covid vaccine. We realised that there could be a pandemic. We had experience making a vaccine for H1N1.

When is ZyCoV-D expected in the market?

Currently, we are undergoing phase III study. We have to complete the dosing and then wait for 150 symptomatic Covid patients; then we unlock and come out with efficacy data. Our guesstimate is that we should be completing the trial in May. ZyCoV-D will be in the market between May and June.

Are you not going in for emergency use approval?

In any case, approval will happen for emergency use. As a serious pharmaceutical company, we will have to complete the trial and then go for emergency use.

Will the vaccine be exported?

Yes, if the government allows. We do have a lot of requests from various countries. We would like to supply them, depending upon the government's view at that time. Currently, it is allowing export. So, we will be exporting.

What will be the price of the vaccine?

It will not cost more than the current vaccines.

Has the company lost the advantage of being the first mover?

I do not think there is a race here. We need good science and a good product for the people of India; it should be safe and efficacious at a reasonable price.

Why are there so many concerns about the side effects of Covid vaccines?

It is a communication issue. Many people have been reading articles, news reports. There is a lot of unsubstantiated and false data floating around. It creates apprehensions. Fears can be allayed through education. We did not find any side effects in our

phase II trials.

How many people were covered under phase I and phase II trials?

One thousand.

How will ZyCoV-D be different from the two vaccines approved in India?

Ours is a totally different platform compared with the current vaccines that have been approved in India and abroad. We have a DNA plasmid platform vaccine. This vaccine is given intradermally. It does not go deep inside the body. There is a specific device through which it is administered. It is needle-free, painless administering. People will not suffer side effects that are being seen in other vaccines.

Should Covid-19 vaccination be made compulsory in India?

No, I do not think it will be a great idea to make anything compulsory. It should be voluntary. Increased education will allay the fears of people.

What is the investment that has gone into the manufacturing of ZyCoV-D?

We have put up a manufacturing unit, we have done development and trials. In all, we are estimating (an outlay of) around ₹500 crore. Initially, we will produce 100 million doses and scale up to 250 million doses.

Should people be compensated for the side effects of vaccines?

Vaccines always have some side effects, minor or major. The regulator and the governments in order to simply support the vaccination have taken the responsibility for compensation through a kind of a normative method and the companies are required to support. That is a global practice. In India, we currently do not have any practice.

How did the idea of Zydus Hospital come up?

We often have to go to hospitals and I observed that many a time people face certain issues (on the management side). Being from the field of management, I wanted to minimise this. The idea was to give an acceptable level of service to patients and doctors. Hence, the hospitals.

The first one came up in Anand (my hometown), and the second one in Ahmedabad. The third one will be in collaboration with Maruti Udyog in Bechraji, near Ahmedabad. It is a joint CSR project for both companies. The fourth one will be commissioned in Vadodara in 2022. ●



A country of hurt sentiments

When we were little and our parents taught us manners, a constant humane rationale for decency of conduct was that being unkind would hurt the feelings of the people we were interacting with. We were taught to apologise. If we did inadvertently hurt someone we made 'I'm sorry' cards and wrote sincere notes of apologies to the aggrieved party.

It was only when I was older that I realised that 'hurt feelings' could be a collective community occurrence, and that they could be a public-interest issue. I was in class 12 when I realised that in India the private choices of individuals could hurt public sentiment. Our class teacher, Chitra ma'am, was conducting the daily discussion on current affairs—we had to read and discuss any three items of news reported in the newspapers that day. I remember feeling most indignant with the news that a college in Chennai had banned girls from wearing jeans and skirts saying that it was an 'affront' to the dignity of the institution. I couldn't fathom how a piece of clothing could offend anyone, let alone an entire institution.

But, that was 16 years ago. Since then I have learnt many things:

1 Public sentiments are more often than not extremely fragile and prone to randomly and often being hurt.

2 This may have legal consequences for the accused, often jail.

3 Anyone who has hurt public sentiments should consider themselves vulnerable to the public when it turns into a mob.

4 Anyone can be accused of hurting public sentiment for any reason.

5 If the sentiment that is hurt is religious in nature, then may God save you!

Given the frequency with which public sentiments are hurt in India, it seems now that we are basically a country of 1.35 billion hurt sentiments! Sometimes it is the clothing of women, other times the culinary choices of minorities. Sometimes it is a joke, other times a

college going activist may be too woke. And often times it is love. And, at its worst, this country of 1.35 billion hurt sentiments shows its ire by beating a child of a minority community for the crime of drinking water outside a place of worship of the majority community.

While this scenario may have been harmlessly stupid, George Carlin in a quote attributed to him reminds us to "Never underestimate the power of stupid people in large groups."

And, so, the ridiculous in India today is also the alarming signal of danger—a sign that the rot that had taken root in us as a society is now so deep that its stench cannot be camouflaged—neither by perfume nor by platitude.

A public that is so easily miffed is also a public that is not reflecting enough. It is an intellectually lazy public.

When we examine what it is that we choose to be offended by; and what we choose to condone, we begin to observe the full contours of our moral collapse as a society... as a nation. We are now officially a country that is more offended by a joke, more offended by a kiss, more offended by a fictional scene in a film, more offended by Facebook posts, more offended by food... than we are by the lynching of men over meat, than we are about an eight-year-old child being gang-raped in a temple, than we are by the burning alive of a man over a rumour, than we are of the tampering of evidence and secret forced funeral of the Hathras rape victim. This is nothing but utter moral vacuousness—a dangerous vacuousness, a poisonous vacuousness. And nowhere is it more visible than little Asif, drinking water outside the temple, getting thrashed by a Shringi Yadav and the video going viral. For the last few days Sanghi Twitter has tried all they could to turn the narrative and make Asif and every Muslim child and adult seem un-victim-like, while defending the act of beating a child.

It has made me ask myself—are stupid people in large numbers better than the morally dead in large numbers? I'm afraid so....

The writer is an award-winning Bollywood actor and sometime writer and social commentator.

Strengthening Export Infrastructure for Augmenting Kerala's Exports

Kerala's abundant resources, skilled workforce, and favourable policy environment have positioned the state as an important contributor to the exchequer. It is among the leading exporting states, with a share of nearly 3.2 percent in India's total merchandise exports in 2019-20. Ranked 10th in the Niti Aayog's Export Preparedness Index, Kerala has exhibited robust export growth in the recent years, with merchandise exports from the State registering a CAGR of 18.4 percent between FY16 and FY20. Notwithstanding the strong growth, there is significant untapped export potential, which if harnessed could nearly double Kerala's merchandise exports to US\$ 17.6 billion. Tapping this potential would entail strategic intervention in key areas to strengthen the overall export ecosystem in the State.

One of the important areas of state-level intervention would be trade-related infrastructure. According to an India Exim Bank Study, Kerala has critical gaps in

warehousing and cold storage infrastructure. The total storage capacity for marine products in Kerala is low when compared to the fish production in the state. Moreover, the capacity utilization of the existing seafood processing units in the Kerala is also fairly low. Being among the top producers and exporters of marine products in the country, and with huge untapped export potential, there is a pressing need to address these gaps for realizing greater value from exports of marine products. There is also a need to augment warehousing capacity in the districts of Alappuzha and Palakkad.

The container freight stations (CFSs) and inland container depots (ICDs) in Kerala also face underutilization of capacity, with several critical facilities missing at some of the dry ports. New CFSs/ICDs are required in relatively underserved districts of Thrissur and Palakkad, which have significant contribution to the gross value added of the

state. There is also a need for airport freight stations in the state.

The state needs to enhance its capital investments in trade enabling infrastructure, and also encourage private sector participation in infrastructure development. The state could also leverage central government sponsored schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana for developing cold-storage facilities, and the trade infrastructure for export scheme for developing and strengthening the ICDs, CFSs, warehousing and cold storage facilities, and other essential export infrastructure.

Though plugging in the gaps in export infrastructure can be a capital-intensive exercise, it would be a critical step for nudging the state's exports to a higher growth trajectory and enhancing the overall export competitiveness.

**Ms. Jahanwi Singh and
Ms. Neha Raman**

(Authors are economists with
India Exim Bank)



SAFE JOURNEY

New norms, technology, changing customer preferences and market dynamics are making vehicles safer than ever

BY MAIJO ABRAHAM

A week ago, the ministry of road transport and highways made dual airbags compulsory for all passenger vehicles. Interestingly, except for a few entry-level cars, most manufacturers had already voluntarily included the feature in most models. This shows a departure from the industry's early strategy of sacrificing safety features to keep prices low. It also reflects a change in customer preference—they are willing to pay more for safer cars.

After the latest regulation, the mandatory safety equipment in cars include anti-lock braking system

(ABS), rear parking sensors, front occupant seatbelt reminders and a speed alert system, in addition to dual airbags. The government is deliberating on making active safety devices like autonomous emergency braking (AEB) and electronic stability control (ESC) also mandatory in new vehicles in 2022-2023. ESC counters over-steering or understeering on corners and loss of traction on slippery roads by braking individual wheels and regulating engine power. AEB uses radars and cameras to automatically apply the brakes to prevent an impending collision.

While it will not be much of a trou-

ble for carmakers to include these features in premium cars, the affordable ones will struggle to strike a balance between price and features. "The real challenge is bringing in maximum safety at an affordable cost so that cost of vehicles does not go up steeply," said Abhay Damle, who was joint secretary at the ministry of road transport and highways.

Technologies usually become more affordable with time and by scaling up. AEB has become a common feature in many advanced markets, and in India, economies of scale will reduce its cost significantly. ESC, on the other hand, shares

Ayurveda during covid times

Dr.K.Murali, Chief Editor, Publications Division, Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal

The principles of epidemiology evolved in Ayurveda since the period of Charaka (2nd Cen. AD.) Janapadodhvasaneeya (janapada-human settlements, udhvamsa- that which uproots), a chapter in his text, narrates details of the occurrence of epidemics or pandemics, the causative factors, impact and preventive methods. These concepts are still found to be relevant. Later, other Acharyas added their own inputs to this. Tridosha theory enabled Ayurveda to interpret the disease if it is newer in character.

In the last century when public health systems were not strong, Ayurveda physicians intervened during the times of epidemics. Some of them even formulated specific medicines to remedy the disease. One such example is of Vaidyaratnam P.S.Varier (1869-1944), the torch bearer of renaissance movement in Kerala. Soon after establishing the Arya Vaidya Sala during the cholera outbreaks

in early 1903, he visited the affected areas and distributed leaflets on the dos and don'ts to prevent the spread of the disease. He also distributed medicines to people free of cost. Even during periods of smallpox, several Vaidyas were involved in such activities. This helped to limit the number of casualties to some extent, before the advent of the vaccine. There can be similar instances in other parts of India, which haven't been documented in history.

Another collective public intervention was at Thiruvananthapuram in 1934. This was for malaria. Staff and students of Government Ayurveda College, under the leadership of then Principal Dr.K.G.Gopala Pillai, conducted medical camps at the areas affected with even inpatient facilities. This was appreciated by the public and media.

Coming to the current scenario, the Central AYUSH Department had prepared Guidelines for Ayurvedic practitioners for Covid-19. The All India Institute of Ayurveda also started treatment wards with all safety measures. Even though there were similar efforts in some other States, it is only in Kerala that a massive public health intervention was organized by the State Government. A State Ayurveda Covid-19 Response Cell was formed with experts in the field. Different schemes were designed after elaborate discussions—like the Svasthyam (preventive measures for people below 60 years), Sukhayushyam (for those above 60 years), Amritham (Medications during quarantine period), Bheshajam (treatment for uncomplicated cases) and Punarjani (Post Covid care) projects. There

was an organized implementation framework involving Local Self-Government. The delivery of medicines was streamlined through Ayur-raksha clinics at all Govt. Ayurvedic Dispensaries/Hospitals throughout the state. All these projects are with Public Private Participation. Experts from Arya Vaidya Sala participated in the discussions to formulate the strategy. It also contributed medicines to the project.

Drug research is of utmost importance to establish the efficacy of Ayurvedic medicines. Arya Vaidya Sala could move forward in this direction. Initial Researches at Centre for Medicinal Plants Research (CMPR) of Arya Vaidya Sala have identified certain molecules that have anti-viral (SARS Corona Virus 2) properties in some of the classical medicines like Indukantha ghritha, Mukkamukkadukadi gutika, and Vilvadi gudika, which are widely used in the treatment of Covid-19. The outcome of this research has been included in the U.S. National Health Institute's Public Health Emergency collections (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7799399>). Further research collaborations are being planned with the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad.

The Arya Vaidya Sala also runs Post-Covid Clinics in all of its branches, where trained doctors prescribe medicines to the patients, considering all their general and specific manifestations. Details, including response to the treatment, are being documented for a systematic analysis.



HOUSE OF AUTHENTIC AYURVEDA



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a lot of systems with ABS and can easily be implemented in the existing models.

The trickling down of technology (from upper class to lower) happens quite fast these days in the automobile sector. Compact sedans and compact SUVs in the ₹10 lakh-₹15 lakh segment now offer features that used to be the highlights of luxury cars a while ago. Features like vehicle stability management (helps avoid losing control during sudden braking or acceleration) and hill assist control (prevents the vehicle from rolling back) are being packed into some hatchbacks even. The penetration level of such technologies, however, remains pretty low in India. ESC, for instance, is present in less than 10 per cent of passenger cars.

Just about a decade ago, crash tests were virtually absent in India. In 2013-14, India implemented the UN Regulation 94 crash test standards, which checked the impact of a crash at around 56kmph. It was not as stringent as the European crash tests. The following year, Nitin Gadkari, minister for road transport and highways, said that India would apply UN equivalent crash test standards for front and side impact. A Bharat New Vehicle Safety Assessment Programme (BNVSAP) is also being implemented in a phased manner and cars will be given star ratings based on their safety performance.

Barely meeting the safety standard, however, is not always enough. According to David Ward, secretary-general of the Global New Car Assessment Programme, many Indian cars scrape by on the bare minimum required. "That approach risks completely misunderstanding

SAFETY GUARANTEED

These are some mandatory features in passenger vehicles

DUAL FRONT AIR BAGS

The driver-side airbag was made mandatory in 2019, and now passenger side airbags are also mandatory.

ABS

The anti-lock braking system prevents the locking of tyres in case of braking. It was made mandatory in 2019 under BNVSAP norms.

REAR PARKING SENSORS

These sensors ensure the safety of the pedestrians while reversing the car and help drivers while parking.

SPEED WARNING SYSTEM

All passenger vehicles made after July 2019 are fitted with a speed-warning system that emits a beep at a speed of 80kmph. At a speed of over 120 kmph, the vehicle will beep continuously.

SEAT BELT WARNING

A seat belt-warning lamp and an alarm for both the driver and the front passenger seat are mandatory for all cars made after July 2019.

the reality of a very global industry where India has the potential to be a great exporter of cars if they are as safe as international automobiles," he said.

The application of many modern-day safety features is often hindered by the state of Indian roads. Lane keep assist systems, for instance, can inform the driver of a vehicle veering off its lane and intervene with steering assistance to keep the vehicle in its intended lane. But these systems need clear lane markings, which are rare in India, to work properly.

A bigger challenge, however, is compliance. Indians still need to be prodded to wear seatbelts. A driver or passenger not wearing a seatbelt is as bad as the car not having one. According to the American Automobile Association, wearing seatbelts reduces the chances of death by half.

Data from the ministry of road transport and highways says road accidents kill 17 people every hour. Negligence, the condition of roads and the condition of vehicles contribute to this. The single most important factor that can bring down the number of road accidents and related deaths is safer vehicles. Safety is no longer just a function of vehicles' strength; technology has made them so smart they can even override human error to prevent accidents.

India had been slow in adopting global safety standards, owing to sluggish policy making and unfavourable market dynamics. But it has made up a lot of ground in the past few years. New norms, changing customer preferences and new market dynamics will make this shift quicker. ①

Dear readers, have you ever been in a road accident?
Do you have a story or experience to share with us?
What are your suggestions for road safety?
You can mail us at drivetolive.theweek@gmail.com

THEWEEK

JOURNALISM WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

POWER BETWEEN THE LINES

Parva, a modern retelling of the Mahabharat, amplifies the voices of ordinary women and men in the epic

BY PRATHIMA NANDAKUMAR

**A NEW
TAKE**

Queen Gandhari and
King Dhritarashtra
from the play



For once, she is able to see things with clarity—the devastation of war, the deceit of the throne and the audacity of the lies that surround human life and relationships. Queen Gandhari, wife of Dhritarashtra, the blind king of Hastinavati, is staring at a bleak future as her 100 sons (Kauravas) are now dead. There is gloom, misery, remorse and anger in the Kuru clan.

In Veda Vyasa's epic, the Mahabharat, Gandhari is the virtuous woman who blindfolded herself when she finds out that the man she is going to marry, Dhritarashtra, was born blind. In *Parva*, the latest theatre experiment of Mysuru-based Rangayana, a government-funded repertory, Gandhari yields to Krishna's request and removes the scarf blinding her eyes and confesses her darkest secret before the world. "I blindfolded myself out of contempt for my blind husband as I was coerced into marriage by Bhishma, my father-in-law," admits Gandhari.

Parva, the seven-and-a-half-hour play adapted from the eponymous novel by renowned Kannada writer Dr S.L. Bhyrappa, has been directed by Prakash Belawadi. The audience response has been overwhelming for the long-format drama with three coffee breaks and a lunch break. It is a landmark production, which has witnessed the 800-seater Kalamandir in Mysuru running full house since the first show on March 12.

"In my last four decades in theatre, I noticed Maharashtra, West Bengal, Kerala, NSD Delhi and the Bho-

pal Rangmanch have had a strong presence in Indian theatre with their unique experiments," said Addanda C. Cariappa, director, Mysuru Rangayana. "After I took over as director a year ago, I was keen to produce a play that could draw attention to Kannada theatre. Rangayana has previously produced plays based on legendary Kannada writer Kuvempu's Malegalalli Madumagalu and Sri Ramayana Darshanam. I chose S.L. Bhyrappa's *Parva* for its sheer strength, progressive thought, strong message and appeal."

Bhyrappa readily agreed to Belawadi directing the play. Cariappa said the team started work on the script during the lockdown and Bhyrappa not only approved the script, but also sat through four rehearsals to fine tune it. He added that *Parva* is the first adaptation of a modern retelling of the Mahabharat in Indian theatre. In 1985, British playwright Peter Brooke's *Le Mahabharata* was staged in France.

In a first, the Karnataka government has announced a grant of ₹1 crore to take the play across India. "We plan to tour the country," said Cariappa. "The play has three parts—Adi, Niyoga and Yuddha parvas. It will be staged as separate episodes of two hours each from Thursdays to Saturdays and in the marathon format on Sundays."

The challenge for Belawadi was to transform a 696-page literary work into a play that could be narrated within a few hours, with a small team of 32 actors, 10 technicians and five musicians. Each actor is playing more than 10 roles, as there are more than 120 characters in the script.

The novel was conceived by Bhyrappa during a casual discussion with a friend. During his travel to the Himalayas, he was intrigued by a village in the Gadhwal region that practised polyandry. The locals claimed it was a tradition since the "Draupadi era". Bhyrappa was engrossed in his research on Vyasa's epic for the next



**GRAND
OPENING**

A scene from the
play *Parva*

five years, as he tried to comprehend the last phase of the Vedic period, its social, economic, religious and political facets. Subsequently, he extended his travel to places that found mention in the Mahabharat. It took him another 14 months to write the novel.

"I tried to imagine the magnitude of the war and the size of the army from the expanse of the battlefield," writes Bhyrappa in the introduction. "Though we believe that Pandavas fought to uphold *dharma* (truth), I realised a sizeable majority fought against the Pandavas in the 'Dharma Yuddha'. So, I decided that my story of the great war will not just focus on the Arya dynas-

ties, but also on the non-Aryan clans, their traits and the impact of war on their lives."

"*Parva* is the extreme of consciousness narrative," said Belawadi. "It is a monologic narrative translated into dialogue, to make it a human drama."

Bhyrappa's novel has seeded new thought and new interpretation of the Mahabharat. The adaptation has a strong narrative that amplifies the voices of ordinary women and men in the epic, who were overshadowed by the powerful heroes. Here, time is the enchantress and the rest mere pawns.

The characters in *Parva*, be it Krishna, Bhishma, Karna or the Pandavas, are more human than divine. *Parva* approaches the Mahabharat as history and not myth. The play opens symbolically with the last scene in the Mahabharat with a blindfolded Gandhari freeing herself to see a post-war Hastinavati, as though hinting at the audience to take another look at the popular story with a new perspective. *Parva* unravels the unspoken travails and tribulations of Draupadi, Gandhari and Kunti, which are missing in Vyasa's Mahabharat.

The stagecraft and the minimalist stage help you transcend time and space even as the play oscillates between the past and present to establish the link, familiarises you with the kings, kingdoms, warriors, landscapes, minds and mannerisms of people, the socio-political hegemony and the politics of discrimination.

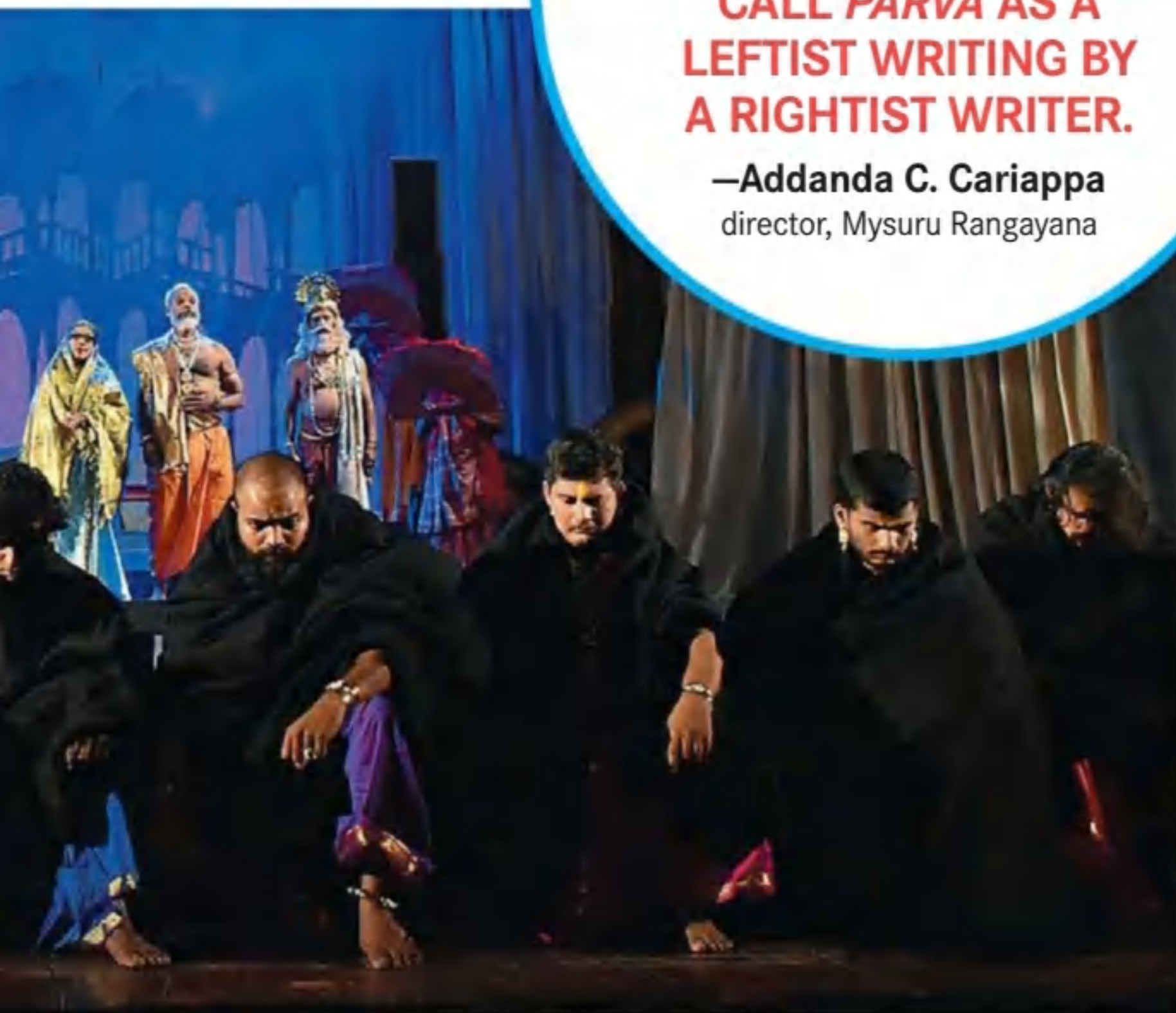
The format of the play engages the audience by stirring debate on ethics, morality and justice. The wavering stance of the allied kingdoms when asked to choose between Pandavas and Kauravas in the war opens up a debate over what is *dharma* (truth) and *adharma* (non-truth). It also mocks the social order that accords high status, power and privilege to the sons of the king and queen but denies dignity to the *sootha putras* (born to the king and his slave).

To accusations of Rangayana propagating the BJP's *hindutva* agenda by promoting the work of a rightist writer, Cariappa responds: "We chose *Parva* for its progressive thought. You may call *Parva* as a leftist writing by a rightist writer. The story has a feminist perspective, a strong voice questioning the social order. It deals with consequences of war as devastating not just to the powerful kings but also to the commons. Art is always democratic." ❶



WE CHOSE *PARVA* FOR ITS PROGRESSIVE THOUGHT. YOU MAY CALL *PARVA* AS A LEFTIST WRITING BY A RIGHTIST WRITER.

—Addanda C. Cariappa
director, Mysuru Rangayana



EVEN STEVEN

The Oscars and an upcoming Spielberg-Netflix project reveal a churn in Hollywood

BY NAVIN J. ANTONY

Size matters for Steven Spielberg. For 40 years, he has been filming leviathans in motion—a monster truck chasing a car (*Duel*, 1971); a great white shark hunting revellers (*Jaws*, 1975); enormous reptiles wreaking havoc (*Jurassic Park*, 1993); mammoth tripods invading earth (*War of the Worlds*, 2005); a big friendly giant saving a girl (*The BFG*, 2016), and so on. Even his ‘smaller’ and supposedly character-driven films—*Lincoln* and *The Post*, for instance—have titans towering over ordinary mortals.

Spielberg’s fascination with size is the reason that he came out against Netflix in 2019. The Netflix model denies filmmakers control over screen size, which auteurs like Spielberg consider unacceptable. Cinema, in their view, is a communal art form in which “people leave the safe and familiar of their lives and go to a place, sit in the company of others, and have a shared experience—cry together, laugh together, be afraid together—so that when it is over, they might feel a little less like strangers.”

At the time, Spielberg was member of the governing board of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, best known as the home of the Oscars. He wanted the academy to stop nominating films made for streaming platforms. “Once you commit to a television format,” he said, “you are a TV movie. If it’s a good show, you certainly deserve an Emmy, but not an Oscar.”

Like many in Hollywood, Spielberg felt that Netflix was gaming the Oscars system, which is a complex network of interest groups whose activities skew more towards politics than art. The academy, for instance, is made up of more than a dozen

TED SARANDOS OF NETFLIX (BELOW, RIGHT) WILL HELP SPIELBERG PRODUCE A DREAM PROJECT—*THE TALISMAN*—AS A MULTI-EPISODE SERIES EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE PLATFORM.



IMAGING DENI LAL/PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

“branches” related to the craft of filmmaking—one branch each for actors, directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, editors, costume designers, visual effects artists, and so on. Each branch sends three members to the academy’s governing board, the apex body that effectively steers the world’s most influential film industry.

Though largely decorous, the power tussles and ego clashes within the academy—branch against branch, member against member, board against executive—would put a pork-barrelling politician to shame. Case in point: Ted Sarandos, Netflix’s co-CEO who oversees all content for the platform, has long been shut out of the board. Sarandos spends more money on movies and employs more academy members than several veteran producers combined, but when it comes to a seat at the high table,

he is quite the Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s court.

Spielberg, close to the head of this table, fears that the Netflix model will wipe out theatres. “The greatest contribution we can make as filmmakers is to give audiences the motion-picture theatrical experience,” he said.

In March 2019, weeks after Netflix’s *Roma* had lost the Oscar race for best picture to a less well-received film that was theatrically released, Spielberg and Sarandos decided to have dinner together. Sarandos, too, is someone who appreciates size—in terms of budget, if not screen size. He spends around \$20 billion a year on content for Netflix—a sum adequate to send 300 spacecraft to Mars, and several times more than what traditional Hollywood studios spend on their films. After the meeting, Spielberg issued a statement “clarifying” his position. “I want people to

find their entertainment in any form or fashion that suits them,” he wrote. “Big screen, small screen—what really matters to me is a great story.... But I want the theatrical experience to remain relevant in our culture.”

A year later, as the pandemic forced theatres into hibernation and Netflix subscriptions boomed, Sarandos was elected chairman of the board of trustees of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. His flagship project in that position: overseeing the construction of a 3,00,000-sqft museum dedicated to the history, technology and business of filmmaking. The irony is quite delicious. Thanks to streaming platforms, changes in filmmaking are coming so thick and fast that the academy will have no shortage of additions for the museum.

This year’s Oscar nominations are the most visible sign of the ongoing

IIFL Foundation: Ensuring continuity of education, social and emotional connect during the pandemic

INFOCUS

IIFL Foundation, under the leadership of Ms. Madhu Jain, continued to promote education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The foundation runs one of India’s largest girl child literacy initiative – Sakhiyon Ki Baadi - which has brought 36,000 out-of-school girls into education fold in rural Rajasthan.

Prevention of Child Marriages

During the early days of lockdown, there was significant increase in child marriages. Our team of 1,200 teachers spread awareness in communities about the evils of child marriage. It’s heartening to note that there have been no instances of child marriages in our community centres.

No Disruption in Education

Education of the girls belonging primarily to the indigenous communities con-

tinued seamlessly. Our teachers started taking classes in small batches of 5 instead of 30 following the Social Distancing, Masks and Sanitisers (SMS) strategy. We ensured that masks were worn properly and conducted classes in open ground.

Train the Trainer

English and financial literacy training of 1,200 teachers was conducted by an organisation Kalaakshar, founded by Ms. Harshita Jain, a Stanford management graduate. Kalaakshar facilitated online education of our teachers by students of Ivy League global institutions.



Joining Hands with the Government

IIFL Group contributed Rs. 5 crore to the PM Cares fund and supported health department and police department with PPE gears and distributed food kits, masks and sanitisers to migrant workers and other underprivileged sections of the society.



STREAMING
ACCOLADES

(Clockwise from above)
Stills from Netflix films *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Mank*
and *The Trial of the Chicago 7*,
which together received 20
Oscar nominations

paradigm shift in Hollywood. Artistically, the Oscars have transformed itself from a “very local” event (as a prominent South Korean director once described it) to a truly ‘international’ one. The nominations have led to a playing field that is unprecedentedly diverse and inclusive—so diverse that only one white American has been nominated for Best Director (David Fincher, *Mank*).

There are other remarkable firsts: A Muslim and an Asian American are up for Best Actor (Riz Ahmed and Steven Yeun); a woman of colour has been nominated for Best Director (Chloe Zhao, *Nomadland*); more than one woman is up for Best Director (Zhao and Emerald Fennell, *Promising Young Woman*); a black woman has received a second Best Actress nomination (Viola Davis, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*); a black actor has been nominated posthumously for Best Actor (Chadwick Boseman, *Ma Rainey's*); and an all-black team of producers has been nominated



PHOTOS COURTESY NETFLIX

for Best Picture (*Judas and the Black Messiah*). There is even a Danish drama in contention in a main category.

The biggest change, though, is something that Spielberg would have balked at in 2019: Netflix, and not a traditional Hollywood studio, has bagged the most nominations (35). Ten of these are for *Mank*, which only had a limited theatrical release—that, too, mostly for critics.

But the times are so changing that Spielberg is unlikely to complain. In fact, Netflix has just given him reason to smile, by helping him realise a long-pending dream. In 1982, Spielberg had bought the film rights to *The Talisman*, an acclaimed fantasy novel

by Stephen King and Peter Straub. He has for decades been wrestling with the book's length and complexity to make it into a feature-length film. “I am hoping to get this movie made in the next couple of years,” Spielberg said in 2018. “It is something that I have wanted to see to come to theatres for the last 35 years.”

Netflix will now help Spielberg produce it lavishly—not as a film for theatres, but as a multi-episode series exclusively for the platform. Work on it will begin sometime later this year, perhaps just in time when Sarandos will be ready to welcome Hollywood nobility into the academy's new museum. ❶

THE FRIENDLY COUSIN

Renault Kiger is the new value king among small SUVs

BY MAIJO ABRAHAM

The Kiger has an unenviable job—compete with some well-liked vehicles in a segment which has started getting crowded. The Venues and the Sonets are selling like hot cakes; the Magnite has a six-month waiting period in many cities; the Nexon has made a good impression; and the Brezza, despite its age, still leads the pack.

Renault, however, has given enough ammo to its new launch to take on them all. For instance, the price—₹5.45 lakh for the base model—undercuts not just the competition in the segment, but also some hatchbacks. Then the features—the top variant is equipped with stuff like wireless Android Auto/Apple CarPlay, wireless mobile phone charging and drive modes that are hard to find even in higher segments.

On the outside, the Kiger looks like a beefed up Kwid. And inside, it is a more polished Triber. Neither turned out to be a bad thing. It is a decent-looking vehicle with an agreeable cabin. There is a 7-inch instrument cluster with nice graphics and an 8-inch touchscreen display. The seats and the sitting position are comfortable, and the steering wheel is nice. The gear is a bit notchy and the driver's leg space is a bit cramped.

The Kiger offers two engine

options—both three-cylinder, 1.0 litre petrol—a naturally aspirated unit (72hp) and a turbo (100hp). While the first one just does its job, the turbo version is quicker and more responsive. They are mostly quiet, but some vibrations in the cabin will not go unnoticed. There are three driving modes (normal, eco and sport) that can be selected by a rotary dial. They are no gimmick and make a noticeable difference in the throttle response and steering.



ENGINES:

1.0 litre naturally aspirated petrol and 1.0 litre turbo petrol

LENGTH: 3,999mm

WIDTH: 1,750mm

HEIGHT: 1,600mm

BOOT SPACE: 405 litre

PRICE: Starting from ₹5.45 lakh



Renault has built the Kiger well, and it shows on the road. It does not shake even in high speeds and is firmly rooted. The flip side is, you can hear all the hard work the car does inside the cabin. A little more refinement would have been great.

The Kiger's closest rival in the market is its cousin, Nissan's Magnite. Both share the Renault-Nissan alliance's CMF-A+ platform. While the Magnite has made full use of its early arrival with strong sales, Renault has used the extra time it got to make the Kiger a slightly better offer. And it costs a few thousand rupees less.

It is not just the fantastic value that it offers, but also the features it has been packed with and the good ride quality that make a strong case to buy the Kiger. **1**

Wacky in vogue

Say goodbye to the pajama couture that all of us have been sporting during the lockdown. The age of the exaggerated has finally arrived in fashion. From Versace bathrobes to Barbie doll fluff, the Grammys

this year celebrated all things exotic and quixotic in fashion. Taylor Swift radiated floral energy in an outfit that looked like summer had arrived early. Lizzo was a walking meme in her candy-wrapper dress. Bad Bunny was dressed like Neo from *The Matrix* had been accidentally beamed into Alice's Wonderland,

with his Goth outfit accessorised with a sunflower and an animal beanie. Phoebe Bridgers was quite the bone of contention in her skeleton dress. There was even some protest fashion, with

YouTuber Lilly Singh wearing a mask showing her solidarity with the farmers' protests here. But with all the post-pandemic wackiness on display, the 'masked crusader' failed to make a splash.



AFP



DHEE, singer

Nature's symphony

It is hardly a surprise that the Tamil song 'Enjoy Enjaami' has clocked in more than 25 million views since its release last week. It is the independent single of Dhee, the singer who was behind the 'billion big' 'Rowdy Baby' from 2019. Colombo-born Dhee, who currently lives in Chennai, is the first core artist to release a song under A.R. Rahman's new-age label, maajja. Shot in collaboration with rapper and lyricist Arivu, known for his deeply political work, 'Enjoy Enjaami' pays homage to our ancestors. Pegged for big things, the 22-year-old talks to THE WEEK.

Q\ How did 'Enjoy Enjaami' happen? Who came up with the idea?

A Maajja asked if I'd be interested in doing a song for YAALL festival prior to my album that maajja was also producing. I was super excited about the idea, and thought it would be amazing to do my first independent song in Tamil. Meanwhile, Arivu and I had spoken about collaborating and this felt like the perfect opportunity for us to work on a song together along with Santhosh appa (Santhosh Narayanan, film composer). We discussed with Manikandan sir (director), who inspired the song immensely. This song has a piece of all three of us. We wanted the song to celebrate nature, our roots, ancestors and all life forms, not just humans.

Q\ How do you feel about the state of Tamil independent music? Who are the artistes you are excited to work with?

A There is an abundance of talent here. It is true that it is not big at the moment, but the potential is huge. The hope is that a platform like majjaa can start transforming the scene and, we also hope, create opportunities for artistes and producers. Right now, I am particularly excited by ofRo's work; he is a music producer based out of Chennai. Aditya

Ravindran's an amazing musician. I have always loved and admired [playback singer and music director] Pradeep Kumar's work. I think his albums *Yodhaka* and *Poorvaa* are monumental in world music.

Q How do you look back on the success of 'Rowdy Baby'? Did you have any inkling when you recorded the song of what was in store for it?

A I did not have any expectations! It is amazing and surreal. It was a catchy song, but I did not expect it to be a billion big. I am always surprised when I see how much children adore the song. Again, I just feel really lucky and grateful to be a small part of 'Rowdy Baby'.

—By Sneha Bhura



NIRMAL VEDHACHALAM



AFP

Farewell to pretense

'Mirror, mirror, on the wall. Who's the snazziest of them all?' Answer: Check Instagram. The number of followers a celebrity has on social media might be the most quantitative, if not qualitative, barometer we currently have to judge their popularity. That's the reason why those like Shruti Haasan hold pajama parties when they hit the milestone of 16 million followers on Instagram. That's also the reason why someone like Aamir Khan quitting social media is important news. It was his big announcement following his 56th birthday on March 14. Some kudos might be in order. After all, it takes guts to get off the social media escalator constantly endeavoring to take you to new precipices of popularity.



DFREE

COMPILED BY
ANJULY MATHAI

Being Britney

In the 1990s, **Britney Spears** was the sex siren we all loved to hate. Now, with *The New York Times*' new documentary, *Framing Britney Spears*, digging up details of her legal battle with her father over her conservatorship, she is the damsel-in-distress we all love to rescue. This U-turn has little to do with her

and much to do with the culture we live in. With #MeToo and social media giving women a voice, the toxic masculinity of the noughties has given way to a more layered narrative. But social media might have unleashed another kind of Frankenstein.

If we sexualised her body earlier, we are trying to psycho-analyse her mind now. Supporters of the #FreeBritney movement have been combing through her Instagram feed for evidence that she is the trapped princess we all want her to be. They cite things like the "call 911" apparently stamped on her lower lashes as Exhibit A. The times might have changed, but Britney still lives inside the hashtag of her fans' desires.



Hi, I'm Supreme Imperium

What's in a name?" This is a clichéd quote from *Romeo and Juliet*. There is quite a bit to a name. I mean first names. Surnames are different. In any event, in every country, a few centuries ago, there were no surnames. When surnames became customary, they were sometimes indicative of profession, or caste. Hence, there are people who have deliberately discarded caste-based surnames. Lal Bahadur Shastri is an example of this and not the only one.

If one looks at lists of most popular names in the US, irrespective of gender, they are familiar names and have not changed much in decades. Much the same for Britain. But similar lists for India show some churn in the last few decades, reflective of globalisation and import of names from other cultures.

In the process, grammar and etymology, if the name has been derived from Sanskrit, are often murdered. I think, at least for India, some metric based on diversification in naming would be a very good indicator of globalisation.

Decades ago, names were not that innovative. In old texts, names were sometimes derived from names of the father or the mother—Partha,

Kaunteya, Pandava and Draupadi. Sometimes, they were based on what the person did—Dhananjaya, Abhimanyu and Ashvatthama.

As a Bengali, I have a right to be snide about Bengal, meaning West Bengal. I said West Bengal, but I really mean Kolkata. Most popular baby names for West Bengal are not that unusual and reflect that all-India trend of importation and globalisation. But names in Kolkata have been really innovative and strange, suggesting parents thought offspring would not distinguish themselves through what they did in the future. Instead, distinction would have to be brought in through the name.

When we were students in Kolkata, two brothers and a sister were more or less contemporaries in college and bore the rather pedestrian surname of Sen. The

brothers were named 'Makaradhvaja Marakatavaksha' [with a makara on the banner (Madana, god of love); with emeralds on the chest] and 'Kapidhvaja Kapatavaksha' [with a monkey on the banner (Arjuna); with a chest as wide as a door]. The parents were obviously fond of Kalidasa's poetry. The sons though must have cursed their parents for the rest of their lives. But hold your breath—the sister was named 'Sandhya rater ekti tara.' That translates as, 'A star in the evening sky.' If you think I am kidding you, another family I know has named the son 'Shuddam Apapavidham' (pure, without being pierced by sin). These are names given at the time of birth.

Those names can be changed, through an affidavit

before a magistrate. Newspapers are full of such notices and they can be educative. People change names because of conversion, or because a numerologist has given them a more fortunate spelling of the name. Sometimes, they simply do not like the name given at birth. One such recent newspaper notice (March 1, 2021) caught my eye, triggering this column. The lady was named Anamika Mazumder and she is the daughter of Azit and Jayanti Mazumder. Anamika resides

in East Medinipur. Anamika is a perfectly decent name, evoking memories of Hindi films and songs. It is a name that features prominently in Bengali literature.

But you could argue, the parents, reasonably named Azit and Jayanti, did not quite give the daughter a name. Anamika means someone who does not have a name, and by implication, someone who cannot be named. According to the affidavit, Anamika has changed her name to 'Supreme Imperium.' That's right. Anamika Mazumder will henceforth be known as 'Supreme Imperium.' It is possible for a lady in East Medinipur to be familiar with Roman history, explaining 'Imperium.' It is also true that names can influence an individual's behaviour. Nevertheless, Supreme Imperium had me stumped.





Bringing the **LIGHT OF LITERACY** in the lives of girls in Rajasthan



Under the **"Sakhion Ki Baadi"** programme of IIFL Foundation, almost 36,000 out-of-school girls in Rajasthan now receiving education through a network of 1164+ community-based non-formal learning centres.

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Responsible leadership is deep rooted in The Muthoot Group's conscience. A legacy inspired by our founding fathers to stand up to the cause of humanity whenever the need arises. So, when the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged human lives, we reached out to **millions of people across the nation** with timely assistance.



Aashiyana is our commitment to support needy families with newly built houses. 189 houses of the 200 planned, have already been handed over to families in various parts of Kerala. Remaining 11 houses shall also be handed over shortly, in the coming months.

UNCHANGING VALUES... IN CHANGING TIMES

WE TOUCHED THE LIVES OF **MILLIONS** OF PEOPLE DURING COVID TIMES WITH:



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Packaged Foods



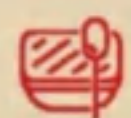
Face Masks



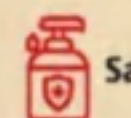
Ration Kits



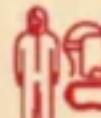
Hand Gloves



Ready-to-eat Food



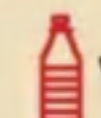
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PPE Kits



Community Kitchens



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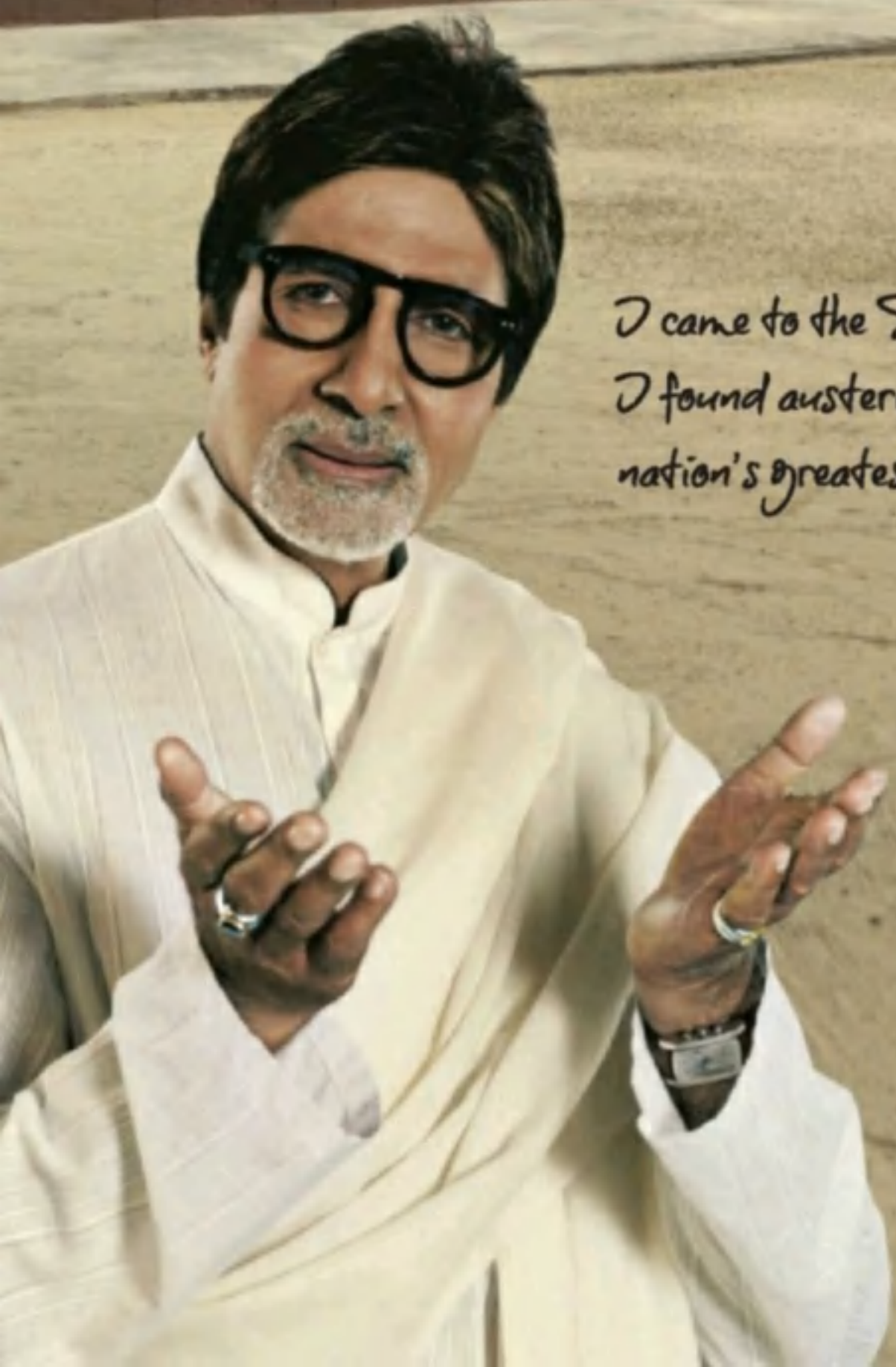
THE WEEK

MARCH 28, 2021

Plus

Glorious Gujarat

A treat for your senses



I came to the Sabarmati Ashram expecting to find a grand legacy; instead I found austerity and humility. As I walked barefoot in the footsteps of the nation's greatest hero, I was transported to my own place of birth.

Amitabh Bachchan



Khushboo Gujarat ki

SABARMATI
www.gujarattourism.com



With the lifting of lockdown, the Gujarat tourism sector made a remarkable, speedy recovery. Now, people have started travelling confidently within the state and to nearby locations.

JENU DEVAN,
MD, GUJARAT TOURISM

THE WEEK
Plus

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THE WEEK PLUS IS A MARKETING INITIATIVE

T
BY NANDINI OZA

The year 2020 was bad for most of us. Not only did people have to stay indoors, but in the back of their minds there was the fear of Covid-19. The economy was hit badly, too. The tourism industry was no exception as travel was restricted even after the national lockdown was lifted.

Though the fear of Covid-19 persists, people have started to travel. The hospitality industry is following SOPs to facilitate good and healthy stay for tourists.

Gujarat, too, has opened its doors. "With the lifting of lockdown, the Gujarat tourism sector made a remarkable, speedy recovery," said Jenu Devan, managing director, Gujarat Tourism. "Now, people have started travelling confidently within the state and to nearby locations."

"Owing to correct strategy and stringent implementation of all precautionary measures—including social distancing, wearing of masks, frequent washing of hands and other measures of sanitisation of places and utility items—the state attracted domestic tourists."

"The department has launched several online campaigns to present the uniqueness of Gujarat's tourist spots to domestic tourists. All the campaigns have gathered immense response," he said.

Devan added that under these campaigns, tourists are being encouraged to visit several significant natural, religious and historical places in the Gujarat. The campaigns, he said, were run on social media platforms in coordination with popular local artists.

If you want to spend some time vacationing, Gujarat has a diverse offering.

Ahmedabad

A great place to start. This 610-year-old city, founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah, boasts several places that would appeal to tourists, regardless of their age. You have the Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket stadium, for the sports enthusiasts and the Sabarmati Ashram, founded by Mahatma Gandhi, on the banks of river Sabarmati for those who seek a serene atmosphere. You can also lay your hands on Gandhiji's charkha (the spinning wheel). The Kochrab Ashram and Sardar Patel Memorial are the other attractions here.

One can spend hours on the 11km Sabarmati riverfront—go on walks, take a bicycle ride, stroll on the garden, go boating and, if you are adventurous, try



ziplining across the river.

Sarkhej Roza and the famous Sidi Saiyad Ni Jali, which have become iconic symbols of Ahmedabad, display the best of Muslim architecture.

When you visit Ahmedabad, keep in mind that it was the first Indian city to be on the list of UNESCO's Heritage Cities. The tag was conferred on it for the brilliant and intricate carvings in Hindu and Jain temples and for the Indo-Islamic art. It is also for the numerous '*pols*' (narrow lanes) in the Walled City, where people live in close proximity. The houses are a treat to visit. It is interesting to see how water is still preserved in underground water tanks. The houses are designed in such a manner that the temperature remains cooler than usual.

You can get the best feel of the *pols* on the kite-flying day (Uttarayan), when people go on the terraces to fly kites. The Shah Rukh Khan-starrer *Raees* captured the mood of Uttarayan in the *pols*.

The shaking minarets, Kankaria lake and zoo and the Calico Museum add to the city's charm. There are also guided walking tours in the mornings that take you through the Walled City.

Manek Chowk is a gastronomic delight, both for vegetarians and non-vegetarians. While Ahmedabad



**A** SARKHEJ ROZA, AHMEDABAD**B** AHMEDABAD ARCHITECTURE**C, D** RANI KI VAV, PATAN

is a delight for foodies, a visit to Rajwadu will give you a village ambience and at Vishala, one would get to experience a village setting and a display of a whole range of old utensils.

On the outskirts of the city, one can also take a look at the Adalaj stepwell and vintage car museum at Kathwada. The famous Akshardham Temple is located in Gandhinagar, about 30km from Ahmedabad.

The eastern and western parts of the city have vastly different architectural styles, which is sure to interest architecture students and connoisseurs.

Ahmedabad is the home to many corporate giants like Adani, Zydus and Torrent, and also of the late space scientist Dr Vikram Sarabhai.

Patan

When you talk of Patan, the two things that come to mind are the majestic Rani Ki Vav stepwell and the famous Patola sari.

Established by the Chavda ruler in the eighth century, Patan was originally called Anahilapataka. Between the 10th and the 13th century, it served as the capital of the Chalukyas. It also has a history of being ruled by Muslim rulers.

Rani Ki Vav is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was built by queen Udaymati of the 11th century in the memory of her husband, Bhima. The architectural structure was silted and rediscovered in the 1940s, and restored in the 1980s by the Archaeological Survey of India.

One can spend hours together at this architectural marvel. It is designed as an inverted temple and it highlights the sanctity of water. Divided into

seven layers of stairs with sculptural panels, it has more than 500 principal sculptures and some 1,000 minor sculptures depicting secular, religious and mythological imagination.

Described as a Nanda-type stepwell, it is about 65m long, 20m wide and 28m deep. The structure is a matter of study for the students of design and architecture. A well-maintained garden, just adjacent to the stepwell, gives an opportunity for the young and old to relax and for children to play.

Though Patola is now available in different parts of the country, it is a charm in itself to buy it from Patan, the place where it belongs. Patola is an Ikat woven saree, usually made from silk but is also from cotton. The Patolas are known for its geometrical designs.

The Salvis of Patan are famous for making Patolas from natural colours and there is a Museum near the Rani Ki Vav. Whether you buy or not, a visit to the Museum is a must for it showcases how the art form progressed over the years and it also shows how it is made. While Patola is traditionally a sari, over time, there have also been Patola stoles, purses and bags.

And when in Patan, do not forget to carry back home some Devda, a famous sweet dish of this place. It is delicious and rich in ghee.

Modhera

A 45-minute drive from Patan will take you to Modhera, famous for its Sun Temple. Situated on the banks of river Pushpavati in Mehsana district, north Gujarat, Modhera is dedicated to Lord Surya.

The Sun Temple was constructed during the reign of Bhima I of the Chalukya dynasty, and is an ASI-protected monument. It has a Chalukya style of

architecture. There are intricate carvings all over the temple.

Gujarat Tourism organises a three-day dance festival every year called "Uttarardha Mahotsav", in which noted dancers from all over the country come and take part.

To visit Modhera, tickets can be purchased online as well. The temple, where offerings no longer take place, is a photographer's delight like Rani Ki Vav. For the best photographs, make sure that you are there in the mornings and evenings. Away from the hustle and bustle of the city, it is very good place to visit.

Champaner

Champaner is yet another historical UNESCO site in Gujarat. Less than 50km from Vadodara, it was founded by Vanraj Chavda in the eighth century. He was one of the key rulers of the Chavda dynasty and



A, B MODHERA SUN TEMPLE

E, F NAGINA MASJID, CHAMPANER

C, D KEVDA MASJID, CHAMPANER

G SOUTH GATE, CHAMPANER



PLUS





he named the place after his close friend Champaraj.

History has records of the movements of Sultan Begada and Humayun at this place.

The Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park has ancient architectural buildings, mosques, a fortress and a large number of ruins.

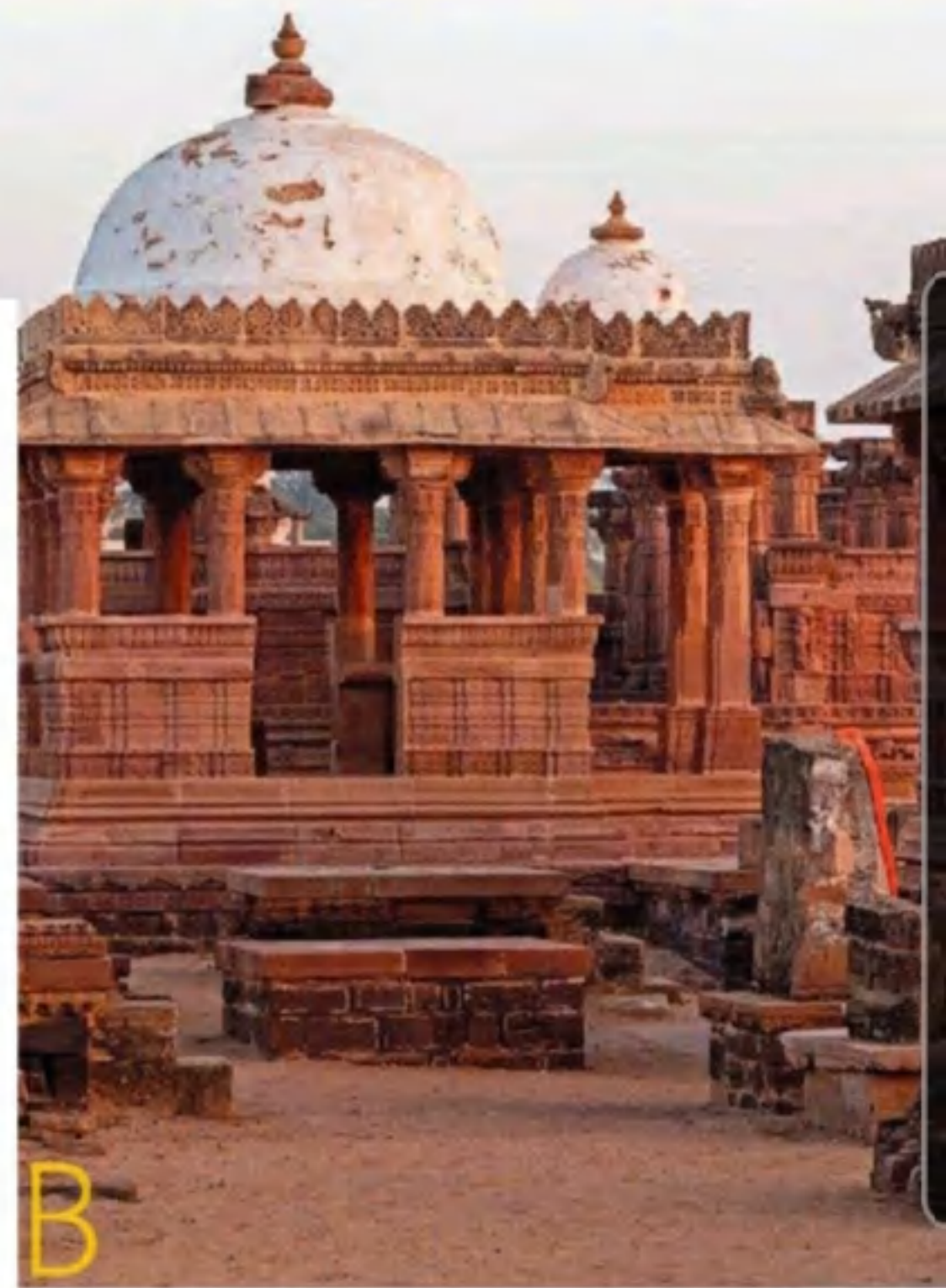
Adjacent to Champaner, is the Pavagadh hilltop where goddess Kalika resides. The view of Champaner from the hilltop is simply splendid.

Some of the most impressive features of Champaner are the superb stone carvings, multiple domes and several mosques where offerings no longer take place. The picturesque Champaner becomes all the more beautiful during the monsoon.

When you have planned a trip to Champaner, do not forget to visit a couple of places in Vadodara like the Luxmi Vilas Palace and the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery. The Luxmi Vilas Palace is where the royal family of Gaekwads resides. It is bigger than London's Buckingham Palace.

In Gujarat what eases your worries is the fact that the roads are good and there is no dearth of good food to eat anywhere in the state.





A, E, F ARTEFACTS AT AINA MAHAL, BHUJ

B ROYAL CENOTAPHS, BHUJ

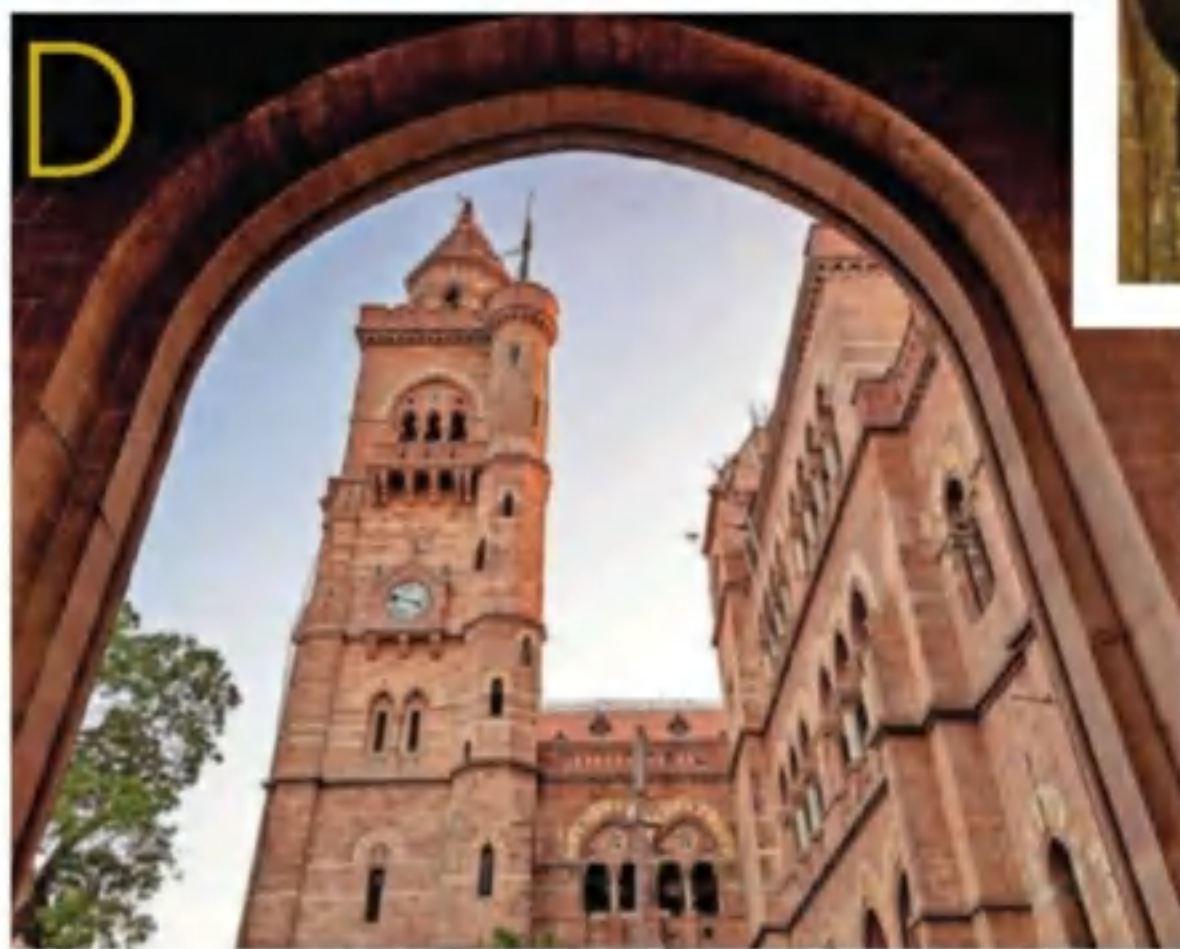
C, D PRAG MAHAL, BHUJ



Bhuj

Not many had heard of Bhuj before the devastating earthquake of 2001, the epicentre of which was in Kutch. All that some would know is that it is famous for its crafts and craftsmen and that it had an airbase. But thanks to the indomitable spirit of the Kutchi people and the efforts of the government and several NGOs, the district has literally risen out of the debris.

The bandhani (fabric made using tie and dye method) is world famous. Kutch embroidery, too, is world famous and is known by Suf, Khaarek, Pakko, Garasia, Jat and Mautava styles of work done by different communities in the arid land. There are numerous stores and organisations selling bandhani as well as fabrics and garments having Kutchi embroidery.



Several movies have been shot in this district that touches the Indo-Pak border. Among the notable one is the Amir Khan-starrer *Lagaan*.

Aina Mahal, Hamirsar lake, Swaminarayan Temple and Kutch Museum are some of the important places one should not miss out. Making Bhuj as the base, one can go to Narayan Sarovar and Mandvi beach.

But the jewel in the crown these days is the Rann Festival, organised by the Tourism Department in Dhordo, near Bhuj. The guests can stay in traditional bhungas and tents set up in Dhordo. The festival that lasts for a couple of months is organised during peak winter season and the white desert is a treat for the eyes. Several packages are available for the Rann Festival. Apart from the tour of the desert, you also get to relish Kutchi food.

Lothal-Dholavira

Lothal and Dholavira are two of the most important Indus Valley civilisation sites. They are a must-visit for students of history, archaeology and geography. These sites are best experienced in small groups.

Lothal is just 80km from Ahmedabad and provides deep insights into the town planning done some 45,000 years ago. Archaeologists have found canals and dockyards, thereby signifying as to how important Lothal was a trading centre. An archaeological museum at the site showcases artefacts like jewellery, pottery, seals and religious symbols. In Gujarati, Lothal means mound of the dead.

Located in Kutch, Dholavira gives you an insight into the pioneering Harappan mind with one of the world's earliest and best-planned water conservation systems. It also has probably the world's first signboards, written in Indus script.

Dholavira has about seven stages of civilisation, from the times of development and maturity to decay. The ASI unearthed the site in 1967, but it has been systematically excavated only since 1990. The artefacts present there include terracotta pottery, gold and copper ornaments, beads, urns, tools and seals among a host of other things.

Satellite pictures of Dholavira show an underground

**A** MOHABAT KHAN MAQBARA, JUNAGADH**B** DUTCH CEMETERY, SURAT

reservoir, an expertly constructed rainwater harvesting system. To visit Dholavira, tickets can be purchased online.

Junagadh

Damodar Hill, Mohabat Khan Maqbara and the Girnar Hill are must visit places when you go to Junagadh. Located on the foothills of the Girnar Hill, Junagadh has a long history from the times of Chandragupta Maurya and the Chudasamas to Mohammad Begda. Junagadh was one of the last few states that acceded to India.

The Sakkarbaug Zoo of Junagadh is a place that is worth visiting. The city has a few good wells and Buddhist caves.

Just a few kilometres away from Junagadh is the Gir National Park, the only abode of the Asiatic Lion. A number of hotels and guided tours of the Gir Forest ensure that your stay to see the king of the jungle is comfortable.

The Somnath Temple, which has one of the 12 *dyotirlingas*, is near Junagadh. Those who are religious, would love to spend a couple of days in the area with good hotels having come up in the region.

Dutch cemetery in Surat

Peace and tranquillity are what one experiences on a

visit to the Dutch cemetery in Surat. Also known as Armenian cemeteries, these are situated in an area called Gulam Falia. It is on the road leading to the famous Katargam Gate.

There are numerous tombs of different sizes and shapes. However, the one that stands out is the grand mausoleum of Baron Adiran Van Reede.

Photography is strictly prohibited at this site. Though declared as protected monuments, the structures are showing signs of deterioration due to weather conditions and misuse.

It is not easy to locate them. However, if you take the help of locals near Katargam area and some professors of history in Surat, it can be seen.

When in Surat, do not forget to pay a visit to its textile and diamond market, for the city is known as the diamond capital of India.

The city that has braved many disasters continues to grow and expand. Enjoy its flyovers, as Surat has the highest number of flyovers in India. ●

Simply standing within the ancient remains at Dholavira and Lothal, I felt like I was reading a page of history written in stone and brick.

Dholavira & Lothal gave me a sense of heritage.
Where else can you leave your fingerprints on the past?

Ranatah Sachcha



Incredible !ndia



Khushboo Gujarat ki

In the land of Lord Krishna they say you attain enlightenment. As I climbed the 56 steps towards mine, there were so many questions I wanted to ask. But as I reached the top, I received the only answer I will ever require - Salvation.

There is still one question that remains though. Why aren't you at Dwarka?

Antony J. Sacchan



DWARKA

www.gujarattourism.com