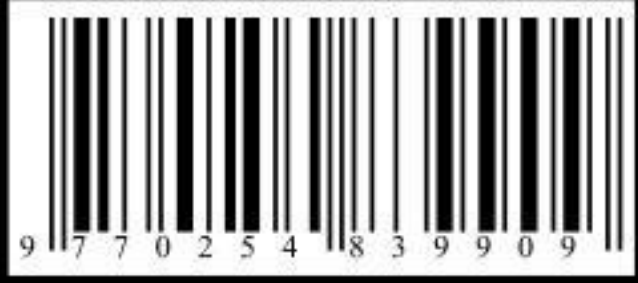


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# INDIA TODAY



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Asha Bhati from  
Ghaziabad have  
been Covid-free  
since the last  
week of May

## THE COVID SURVIVORS

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SCAN HERE TO APPLY



**T**hese days, we are constantly being bombarded with all kinds of grim statistics from across the world and India. The overwhelming narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of fear—the fear of infection and the fear of dying. This is not an irrational sentiment. The pandemic has so far swirled across the globe, infecting close to 7.5 million people, claiming 419,000 lives and, so far, defying worldwide attempts to find a cure or a vaccine. On June 6, India crossed Spain's tally of Covid-afflicted citizens, and took the fifth spot in the hierarchy of countries with the most confirmed cases. As we gradually begin exiting a 70-day nationwide lockdown, the number of cases continues to rise. Worryingly, our two largest metros—Delhi and Mumbai—are the epicentres of this surge, with hospitals in both cities running the risk of being overwhelmed by new cases. This week, the chief minister of Delhi announced terrifying projections of the spread of the virus. He said that by the end of July, there will be 550,000 cases in Delhi alone. Mumbai will probably be worse. This does not bode well for us, and it may not be long before we top the list of Covid-hit countries in terms of total cases.

Even though community transmission hasn't been officially announced, it is clear that we are past the point of eradicating or even containing the infection. Worryingly, even as the nationwide lockdown is slowly being lifted to prevent a complete collapse of the economy, the infections have yet to peak. Currently, around 5 of every 100 individuals tested in India are positive, a rate that is lower than the 9.4 per cent of the US but more than double that of South Korea (2.3 per cent). However, health experts caution that it isn't the rise in infections that should be of concern. Instead, we must keep the death figures low till we reach herd immunity or find a treatment or vaccine.

One heartening aspect of the pandemic in India has been the low fatality rate. Since the time COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, just 8,102 Indians have died compared to some 34,114 Italians as on June 11. India's case fatality rate is just 2.8 per cent compared to Italy's 7.2 per cent and the global average of 5.8 per cent. Of the 286,578 persons infected, 141,028 have recovered, a recovery rate of 49.2 per cent, as on June 11. Many more Indians, it can now be safely said, die because of other common ailments like tuberculosis, malaria and diarrhoea.

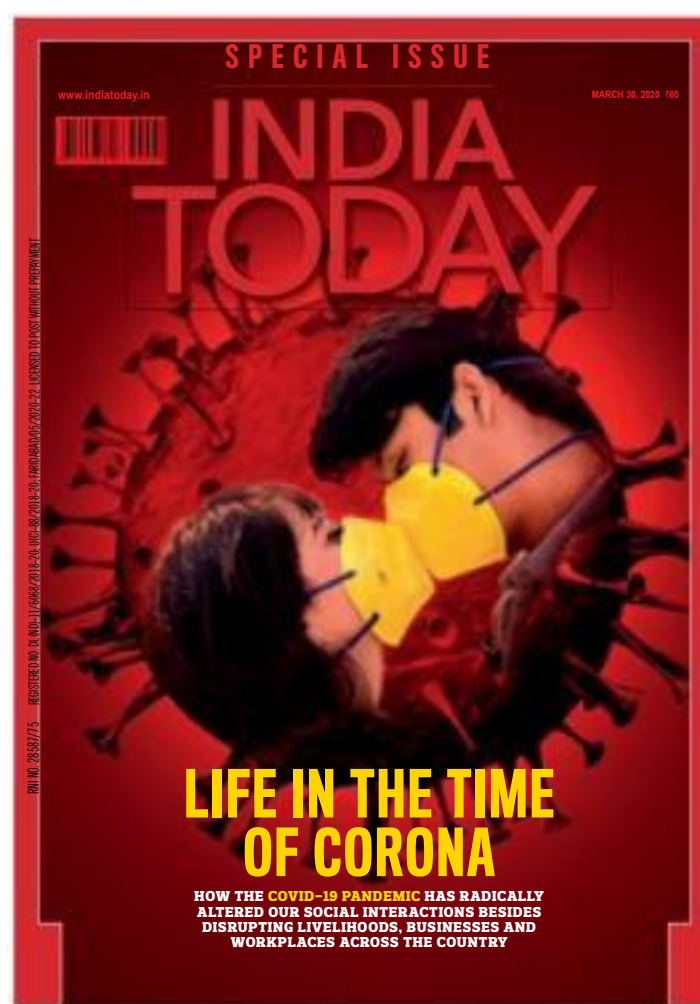
The reasons for India's low fatality rate in COVID-19 cases are yet to be fully understood, but there are several unproven theories doing the rounds. Among these are the hypotheses that we have an advantage because we are rou-

tinely exposed to so many viruses that we acquire enhanced immunity, as well as the fact that a large section of the population has been vaccinated for other diseases. The most credible explanation is that we have a young population—more than half the people are under the age of 25. The estimated median age in India in 2020 is just 28 compared to 38 in China and the US. Another silver lining is that for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak began, the number of recoveries (141,028) has started exceeding the number of active cases (137,448).

**T**he story of COVID-19 in India thus is one of hope and survival. Our cover story, 'The Covid Survivors', our 13th consecutive cover on the pandemic, looks at this aspect. Our bureaus across the country brought in some remarkable stories of people who came back from the brink. It has been a tremendous personal journey for all of them as they tapped into their inner reserves of strength and leaned on their families for support while enduring the worst—of the disease, the lack of access to healthcare and even of social ostracisation. Like the doctor in Mumbai whose family faced WhatsApp harassment after he was infected in the line of duty, the nurse from Kolkata who contracted the virus because her hospital didn't have enough PPE and the heartrending story of the homemaker from Rajasthan who was informed that her newborn baby, like her, was Covid-positive.

Their stories also hold out lessons for all of us—that we need to be careful, but we cannot afford to be complacent. A cabinet minister from Maharashtra, who underwent a life-threatening experience, frankly admits he was negligent. The overarching story, as an NRI and tech start-up entrepreneur diagnosed with COVID-19 told us, is that "a crisis does not make us, it reveals what we are made of". His UK-based firm launched an AI-based chat bot to diagnose Covid symptoms even as the techie himself underwent treatment in Hyderabad. I am sure there are many such stories of survivors who had to brave the disease and our rickety health infrastructure, but there are also tales of heroism and sacrifice.

As the pandemic continues to rage around us, the overwhelming consensus is that we will have to learn to live with the disease. As the great American president Franklin D. Roosevelt said during the Great Depression of the 1930s: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Let not fear overcome you. Be careful. Be safe. Let these stories of hope inspire you.



Our March 30, 2020 cover



Our May 18, 2020 cover

(Aron Purie)

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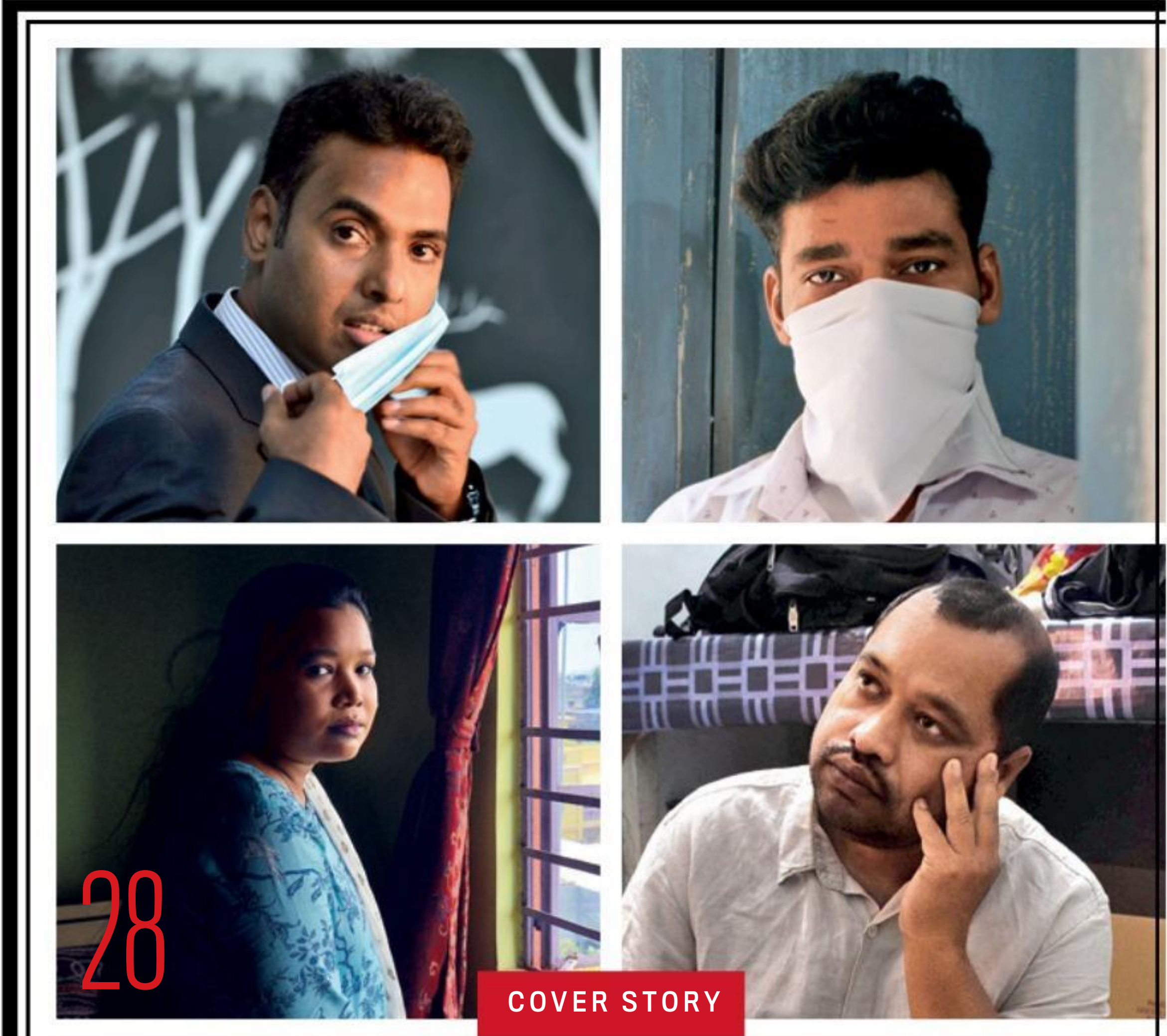
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**COVER STORY**  
**THE COVID SURVIVORS**

## A NOTE OF HOPE

COVID-19 is terrifying, but it can be beaten. These are the stories of some who fought and won that battle—from nurses and medical technicians to politicians, businesspeople and homemakers

**WEST BENGAL**

**22 ON THE WARPATH**

With elections up in 2021, the BJP is doing its damndest to unsettle Mamata Banerjee. She also has to deal with TMC dissidents

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**54 A LONELY PASSING**

Losing a loved one is bad enough, but in these dark times, social distancing is unrelenting even for the bereaved

**MSMEs**

**60 TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?**

The government's stimulus package has failed to enthruse beleaguered small businesses, and their jeopardy also threatens the millions they employ

Cover photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

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**Source: Indian Readership Survey 2019 Q4 (Based on TR)**



## ITC's Initiatives to Fight the COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is a threat of unprecedented proportions. In this hour of national crisis, ITC is making an all-out effort to lend support to the Government's endeavours. Towards this, several initiatives have been implemented leveraging ITC's businesses and value-chains.

ITC set up a Contingency Fund of Rs 150 crore to address and manage the challenges arising out of this adversity. This initial fund has been utilised primarily to provide relief to the vulnerable and most-needy sections of society who have been harshly impacted by the pandemic and have faced significant disruption in their livelihoods. In collaboration with District Authorities, assistance has been provided to the district health and rural healthcare eco-system as well as to the weakest sections of society. Further, the resources under this fund has been channelised towards providing protective personal gear and hygiene products to the ground forces that are doing commendable work to reach medicines, groceries, other essential goods, sourcing of agri-commodities, etc. for people across the country. To make a humble contribution to the Government's efforts in mitigating the crisis, ITC pledged its contribution of Rs 100 crore to the #PMcaresFund. ITC has also contributed Rs 27 crores to CMs' relief funds across states.

### Support to Vulnerable Sections Across Districts

The Company is working closely with local administrations of 23 states across the country to provide essential commodities like food items and hygiene products. More than 28 lakh pieces of soap, 17 lakh packets of Yippee! noodles, 32 lakh packets of Sunfeast biscuits, over 15 lakh packs of B Natural fruit juices, 7 lakh kgs of atta, 10 lakh packets of snacks, over 6 lakh packs of milk shakes and 4 lakh pieces of chocolates are being progressively delivered to district authorities. In several areas, responding to the needs of the administration, including police, hygiene products like Savlon soaps have been provided for their personnel as well as health centres and hospitals. One lakh masks are being distributed to frontline staff and value chain partners. ITC also handed over a 30 bedded hospital to the district Administration in Haridwar to provide immediate care during COVID 19.

### Specific Initiatives by Businesses

The Company's Business Divisions have also initiated programmes to aid vulnerable sections of citizens during the nationwide pandemic. ITC's Foods Division has extended support to children and senior citizens by sending food supplies across the country through its 'Aashirvaad Box of Hope' and 'Sunfeast Box of Happiness' initiative. ITC has joined hands with 3 leading NGOs building a partnership network to deliver such essential food supplies to people severely impacted by the current lockdown.

Similarly, ITC's Paper and Paperboards Division (ITC PSPD) has distributed food packets to the needy in Telangana. Company doctors at the factories of ITC PSPD conducted awareness camps for communities in their catchments. In Bhadrachalam, they distributed masks and hand gloves to truck drivers as well as sanitisers to public health workers in Secunderabad. The Business also disinfected around 18 villages around the Bhadrachalam factory. Awareness programmes were conducted by the Well Being out of Waste Teams in 16



districts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. ITC Classmate has introduced a social media campaign to keep students spirited and engaged creatively during the lockdown period by introducing them to new skills and art form.

**Distribution of Cooked Meals**

Given the urgent requirement to provide cooked meals to migrant workers and needy people across the country, ITC Hotels as well as ITC factories are providing extensive support to Governments across different states, based on the requirements of the local administration as well as hospitals. Over 3 lakh meals have been provided till date. ITC Maurya as well as the Sheraton in New Delhi have been providing over 1500 meals daily for distribution to migrant workers. ITC Gardenia in Bengaluru is lending its support with 1000 food packets daily for 15 days (15000 meals) to the Municipal Corporation. ITC Grand Central in Mumbai has made arrangements to deliver meals to doctors in MG Hospital and has also catered to doctors at the Kasturba Hospital. Fortune Hotel in Lucknow is lending assistance by providing more than 1000 meals per day. This initiative will be progressively rolled out in other metros based on the need. The Paperboards Business has been distributing over 1700 meals to migrant labourers around the Bhadrachalam factory. In addition, ITC factories in Saharanpur, UP and ITC teams in Patna have been providing more than 3500 cooked meals per day in proximate areas.

**Provision of Quarantine Spaces by ITC Hotels**

Several ITC Hotels have been identified as isolation / quarantine space by the different authorities across some States. ITC Hotels is also working closely with the

local administration and embassies and offered space at different hotels to enable stopover of asymptomatic international travellers as and when required.

**Reaching Essential Products to Consumers across the Country**

During the pandemic, it is extremely important to reach essential items like food and hygiene products across the country. ITC's entire supply chain right from agri sourcing to production to distribution has been battling all odds to ensure that consumers are not inconvenienced due to shortages or unavailability. ITC has ensured that manufacturing and distribution of its essential commodities continue uninterrupted with minimum people working in the value-chain. ITC has redoubled its efforts to ensure a heightened level of precaution and have implemented strict protocols for personal hygiene, sanitation and social distancing in its factories that are producing essential commodities. For those who have to work in factories or maintain supplies in markets, every safety precaution including supply of sanitizers, protective gear, masks, regular temperature checks, staggered work timings and availability of 24x7 medical support have been implemented.

ITC has also recently tied up with Domino's to deliver essential goods such as the package of Aashirvaad products like atta and spices by leveraging their zero contact delivery programme.

**Launch of Innovative Hygiene Products and Ramping Up Production of Hand Sanitisers**

On a war footing, ITC repurposed its world class perfume facility in Himachal Pradesh to help produce an additional 1,25,000 litres of Savlon Hand Sanitisers.

ITC has within a record time launched innovative hygiene products including a Savlon Surface Disinfectant spray, Savlon Hexa Hand Sanitizing liquid for quick & persistent action as well as Savlon Hand Sanitiser at half a rupee in a sachet format . It is also working tirelessly to enhance awareness about the importance of hand hygiene through campaigns.

**Working with Farmers**

At a time when supply of agri-commodities in the markets is a challenge, ITC's Agri Business Division is also leveraging its institutional capabilities and other structural advantages to explore the options of engaging its farmer network and initiating purchase of farm

produce with help from Government authorities. ITC is also making focussed efforts to educate farmers and their family members to adopt preventive measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 in their communities. The Agri Business is also leveraging mobile technologies such as ITC e-Choupal 4.0 and local field staff strength to ensure continuity of farming by handholding farmers on best practices and deploying relevant technology with safety measures.

**Saluting the Frontline Warriors in ITC**

To boost the morale of ITC's frontline warriors who are ensuring supply of essential products such as Aashirvaad range of staples, Sunfeast biscuits or Savlon sanitizers, to name just a few, several campaigns, including video messages, have been initiated. Through inspiring communications, Chairman Mr. Sanjiv Puri, on behalf of the entire Team ITC, has saluted the undying spirit and dedication of the ITC Bravehearts who are battling it out in the frontline to serve the Nation during these challenging times.

**Ensuring employee well-being and safety**

To ensure wellbeing of its employees, the entire ITC leadership has been closely monitoring the situation on a daily basis. Contingency Management Teams have been put in place both centrally and within each Business for monitoring and providing support. A team of Company doctors have been made available 24x7 for any advice or assistance.

For those who have to work in factories or maintain supplies of essential products, detailed safety precautions including supply of Savlon sanitizers, protective gears, masks, regular temperature checks, guidelines on social distancing and staggered work timing have been implemented.

Regular communications are being sent to all employees including thousands working from home are regularly being informed of the preventive measures that need to be taken as per established guidelines. Detailed 'work from home' guidelines have also been shared with employees to streamline their efforts in a meaningful way to contribute to the Company's goal of serving the nation. Employees are also being encouraged to set their own self-development goals apart from looking after their well-being and that of their families. ITC remains committed to support the Government's efforts and play its part in fighting this pandemic with compassion and resilience.

**ITC's 12 ways to fight COVID19 Pandemic**

- Rs. 150 Crore Covid Contingency Fund created** (Icon: Money bag)
- Rs. 100 Crores pledged for #PM Cares Fund** (Icon: Hand holding heart)
- Reaching essential products across India** (Icon: Truck)
- Ramping up Savlon Hand Sanitizer production** (Icon: Factory)
- Providing food & hygiene products to the vulnerable** (Icon: Hand holding bowl)
- Distributing cooked meals to the needy & migrant workers** (Icon: Plate with fork)
- Working with farmers through ITC's farmer network** (Icon: Farmer with hat)
- Collaborating with NGOs to supply essential food items to the elderly & children** (Icon: Handshake)
- Ensuring employee well-being & safety** (Icon: People walking)
- Supporting partners & encouraging the frontline warriors of ITC** (Icon: Running person)
- Generating awareness through brand & business campaigns** (Icon: Megaphone)
- Providing food to the distressed & provisioning quarantine spaces - ITC Hotels** (Icon: Building)

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Q&A WITH SHIVRAJ  
SINGH CHOUHAN  
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WHAT LIES UNDER:  
DELHI'S SEISMIC  
PROFILE PG 16

# UPFRONT

CAMPAIGNING  
GOES VIRTUAL  
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R.C. BHARGAVA  
ON THE ART OF  
COMPETITION PG 18



< **UNBOXED**  
Dhaman-1 goes  
through trials in  
Rajkot, April 22

VENTILATOR SCAM

## GASPING FOR AIR

By Uday Mahurkar

Last month, after an investigation in a local newspaper, the Gujarat government was forced to defend the purchase of locally-made ‘Dhaman-1’ ventilators that bureaucrats and doctors alleged were substandard. Critics allege the machines were rushed into production and inadequately tested because Parakramsinh Jadeja, MD of Jyoti CNC Automation, the manufacturer, comes from Rajkot, the same town as Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, and the

two know each other well.

On June 9, state Congress president Amit Chavda called for the BJP government in the state to provide answers. “We want to know how many critical patients are being treated using the Dhaman-1 ventilator, and how many of them have died?” he asked. The Gujarat health secretary, Jayanti Ravi, claims the “issue is being stretched out of proportion”. A doctor at the embattled Ahmedabad Civil Hospital—where hundreds have died in conditions the

state high court once described as “pathetic”—claims “not a single person has died due to Dhaman-1, which is a good ventilator for less serious Covid patients”. It’s not entirely clear what the doctor, who asked to remain anonymous, means by “less serious”, given that a patient requiring a ventilator is already in acute respiratory distress.

“The Rupani government,” says Chavda, “has played with the lives of people. This is a case of not just criminal negligence but the govern-



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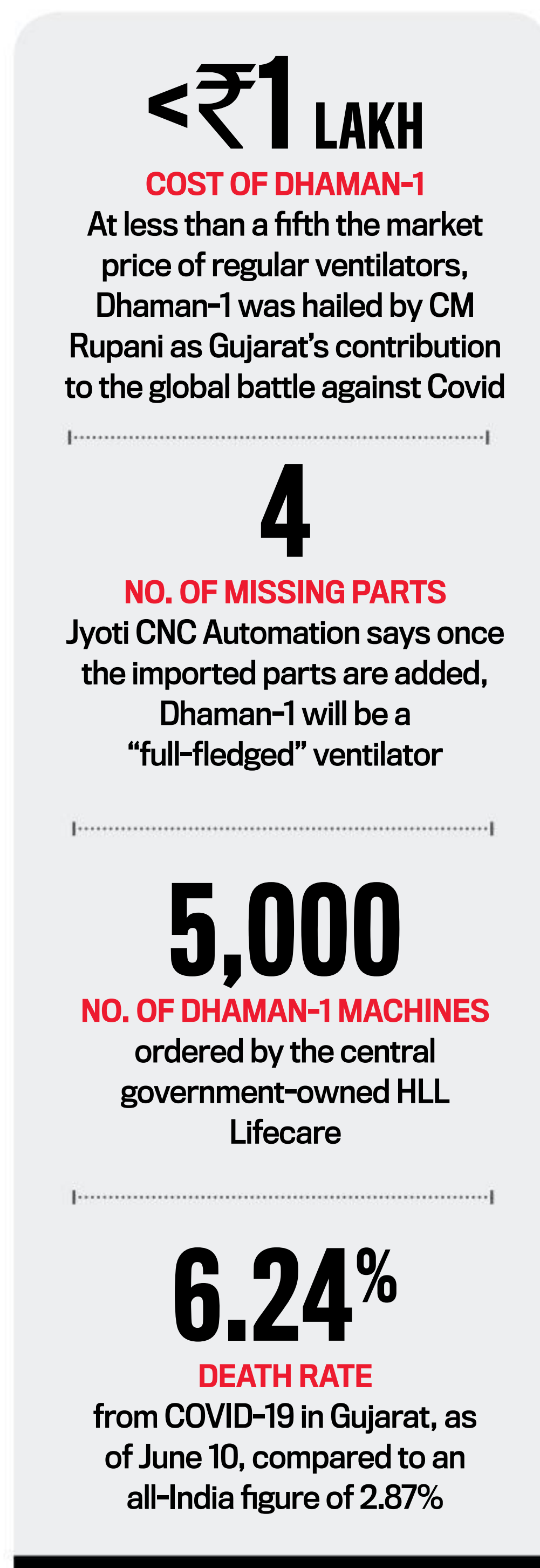
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ment putting quality control aside to favour the chief minister's friend." The BJP spokesperson, Bharat Pandya, in turn, accuses the Congress of "stooping so low as to play politics over a global pandemic". Some of the elevated political rhetoric may be motivated by the Rajya Sabha elections, due to be held on June 19. Four seats are up for grabs in Gujarat. The Congress recently lost three more legislators to the BJP and with the former's strength in the state assembly dwindling from the 77 seats it won in 2017 to 65, it has packed its remaining legislators off to resorts to ward off further defections.

Political expediency aside, the Congress has raised questions the Rupani government has failed to convincingly address. Why was the ventilator rushed from the factory floor to the hospitals when the manufacturer itself had said the product was not up to scratch? More specifically, that it needed four more parts to upgrade its performance. How many of those parts are crucial to functioning ventilators around the world? How were the Dhaman-1 ventilators passed by the state's Electronics and Quality Development Centre when the management at a major Ahmedabad hospital, in a letter, described the machines as unable to give the "desired results"? At the city's Civil Hospital, senior staff told the media that the use of Dhaman-1 could only be countenanced in the direst of emergencies if no other ventilator was available. At least 236 Dhaman-1 ventilators were provided to the hospital, though it's not clear how many were ever used.

According to sources, the idea for Dhaman-1 emerged on March 26, just a day after the nationwide lockdown was clamped. An unnamed government official reached out to Jadeja, whose factories in India and France manufacture specialised machine tools for a variety of industries, including defence, aerospace and automobiles, with the suggestion that it turn its hand to the manufacturing of ventilators. With a worldwide run on ventilators, the Gujarat government



believed there might come a time when it would need more but would be unable to source enough from global markets. Jadeja was enthused by the prospect and Jyoti CNC was able to manufacture ventilators in just 10 days. Early in April, Dhaman-1 was already being celebrated as an indigenous triumph. On April 4, an article on the website of the chief minister's office quoted CM Rupani as saying that the "achievement of developing this cheap ventilator" would make Gujarat "a pathbreaking leader in the [global] fight against the deadly disease". He also said Dhaman-1 would "add a new feather to Prime Minister Mr Narendrabhai Modi's dream campaign of 'Make in India'".

Government sources, who requested anonymity, say Rupani's desire to earn brownie points with the prime minister explained the speed with which Dhaman-1 was presented to hospitals. A source close to Rupani, though, insists that despite "minor lapses, the quality of Dhaman-1 is nowhere near as bad as the opposition is making it out to be", and that the ventilator has "already been upgraded and is ready for use on all Covid patients".

But then Jadeja himself has told the media that his company never described Dhaman-1 to the Gujarat government as a "full-fledged ventilator", and that the parts necessary to upgrade the machine would only be available once imports were possible. The Gujarat government, too, has officially used this as a defence. But without the necessary parts, why did Jyoti CNC give the Gujarat government 1,000 Dhaman-1 machines? What purpose beyond publicity could it have served?

Even if upgrades have been made, it does not explain why the Gujarat government has cleared an unfinished product, and why orders for a poorly tested machine were placed by the central government-owned HLL Lifecare. Shortly after the controversy broke, the government of Puducherry, cancelled its order for the ventilator. Meanwhile, the PM-CARES Fund announced in May that it had earmarked Rs 2,000 crore to be spent on 'Made in India' ventilators. The announcement was made just two days before news broke of the medical fraternity's reservations about the quality of Dhaman-1.

If indeed the upgrades have been made and it is now a "full-fledged" ventilator, safe to use on critically-ill Covid patients, the state government should issue a reassuring notification to that effect. With cases still rising in India, by upwards of 9,000 per day, and with 3,569 active cases in Ahmedabad alone (as on June 10), ventilators may still become necessary as hospitals run short of beds and equipment. Can Dhaman-1 be relied on to fill the breach? We won't know until the government provides some answers. ■



ANI

INTERVIEW

# 'There is no threat of cross-voting in RS polls'

*Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has had an eventful two-and-a-half months on the job after his party, the BJP, overthrew the Congress government just before the lockdown was clamped on March 25. Excerpts from an interview with Rahul Noronha:*

**Q.** Were the first 75 days of this term the toughest of all your days as chief minister? Challenges bring out the best in a leader. The coronavirus had already spread in Indore before I became CM, and there were no arrangements in place to deal with it. And it wasn't the only challenge, the finances of the state had collapsed. In these 75 days, I have attempted to pull Madhya Pradesh out of the morass. Today, the virus is under control, active cases are down and the lockdown has helped us set up systems to deal with the situation

right down to the base level. The Nisarga cyclone led to rainfall in the state and posed a challenge for the record 12.6 million tonnes of wheat we have procured. There were all sorts of adversities but we were equal to the challenge.

**Q.** How does the state plan to tide over the financial crisis? Should citizens brace themselves for new taxes or will the state cut back on its schemes?

We will have to find ways to do both, boost resources and continue with our schemes. An exercise is on to find new sources of revenue. Budgets have limits and we will have to find resources outside it to finance public works. The Centre has increased borrowing limits, but with riders linked to reforms. As far as state schemes are concerned, we will have to continue with many of them. When I took over, I was told there was no money, but we have spent Rs 26,000 crore

on issues involving students, women and migrant workers. We will also have to invest in infrastructure to ensure employment.

**Q.** There are allegations that the lockdown was delayed so that the BJP could pull down the Congress government in MP?

The lockdown was announced in the country on March 24 and it was announced the same day in MP too; there were no different dates involved. MP's problem was the lack of preparations by the earlier

**"(Jyotiraditya) Scindiaji is a very popular leader... but in the BJP, individuals do not decide their own roles, the organisation decides"**

government to deal with critical issues. There were preparations for the IIFA film awards but no meetings to tackle Covid.

**Q.** When is the cabinet expansion happening? Is it being delayed because the BJP is worried about cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha elections on June 19?

After the Covid outbreak in the state, we decided not to rush into cabinet expansion. I myself was told on the evening of March 23 that I would have to take oath later that day as the lockdown was to be enforced. The party will decide and the cabinet expansion will take place soon. The central leadership has told me the expansion will be done after a round of discussions. Everyone in the BJP is committed to the party and there is no threat of any kind in the Rajya Sabha elections.

**Q.** There are 24 assembly byelections due in MP. Will these be contested under Brand Shivraj or Brand (Jyotiraditya) Scindia? Could he be a future CM candidate for the BJP in MP?

The elections will be held in the name of the BJP. Scindiaji is a very popular leader. All of us in the BJP, Narendra Singh Tomar, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Narottam Mishra, Prabhat Jha, state president B.D. Sharma and the organisation will contest the bypolls together. There is no doubt that there will be an advantage with Scindiaji's entry. As for the future, in the BJP, individuals do not decide what role they will perform, it is the organisation that decides. ■



BRENDAN O'FLAHERTY



RAJIV SETHI

GUEST COLUMN

# AMERICAN UPRISING

The great American writer James Baldwin wrote an essay in 1966 in which he spoke of black neighbourhoods being “policed like occupied territory”. Since the police know that they are hated, he wrote, “they are always afraid. One cannot possibly arrive at a more surefire formula for cruelty”.

Much has changed in America since then, but evidence of unspeakable cruelty continues to emerge. The latest instalment was the brutal murder of George Floyd, whose neck was pressed down by a police officer’s knee for almost nine minutes as he begged for breath, and a crowd of appalled onlookers pleaded in vain for his life.

Atrocities of this kind have led to protests in the past, eventually to subside and give way to a return to normalcy. But this time feels different. America is going through convulsions the likes of which have not been seen in decades. Hundreds of thousands have marched and chanted and knelt in the streets, in large cities and small towns alike, demanding an end to police brutality. In some instances, officers have marched and knelt alongside them.

Elsewhere, police and military units have responded with exactly the kind of mindless aggression that is being protested: slashing tires of parked vehicles, attacking journalists and demonstrators with batons and shields, firing rubber bullets and chemical irritants into crowds, swooping down on them in low-flying helicopters and pressing into them with vehicles. At least one person was killed after police fired into a crowd, believing themselves to be under attack. While most protests have been peaceful, and even festive, some individuals have taken advantage of the chaos to engage in looting, vandalism and arson. And this, in turn, has been used as a rationale for the heavy-handed police response.

All this comes amid the backdrop of a pandemic that has claimed more than a hundred thousand lives, and an economic collapse not seen since the Great Depression. Over the past 10 weeks, more than 40 million Americans have filed initial claims for unemployment insurance. The

nation’s production of goods and services is set to contract by 12 per cent during the second quarter, with 2.5 trillion dollars in lost output. And the effects of both the pandemic and the economic collapse have been felt very unevenly across communities, with fatalities and job losses disproportionately affecting those already most vulnerable.

Under the momentum of this confluence of forces, it appears that we may be on the threshold of lasting change. Democrats in Congress have proposed measures to curtail, track and punish excessive force, and their Republican counterparts in the Senate are preparing their own legislation. Public support for the protests appears to span traditional cleavages based on ideology and party affiliation. And Senator Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee for president in 2012, has marched with protesters and voiced the words “Black Lives Matter”.

Policing in America is largely a local effort, however, with about 18,000 distinct law enforcement agencies nationwide. This is where the battle against brutality will have to be fought and won. The Minneapolis City Council has voted to dismantle its police department entirely, and others are facing calls to defund theirs. The city of Camden, which disbanded its police force and set up an entirely new one, is being held up as an example for others to follow.

Echoes of the American uprising are also being felt worldwide, with throngs of protesters filling streets from London to Auckland. Here, too, there are neighbourhoods that feel like occupied territory, and residents who feel the weight of knees on necks. India is clearly not exempt from such conditions, and ought not to view them as a distant spectator. This may be a very good time for some introspection and preemptive change. ■



**America has some 18,000 local law enforcement agencies. This is where the battle against brutality will have to be fought and won**

*Brendan O’Flaherty is a professor of economics at Columbia University and Rajiv Sethi is a professor of economics at Barnard College. Their book *Shadows of Doubt: Stereotypes, Crime, and the Pursuit of Justice* was published by Harvard University Press in 2019*



GLASSHOUSE

# NET PROFIT

Broadband rates in India are among the lowest in the world, yet remain out of reach of many. Union minister of electronics & IT Ravi Shankar Prasad plans to roll out an initiative to bridge this digital divide. Under the 'Vani' scheme, which will come up for the Union cabinet's approval soon, affordable broadband connections will be sold through local grocery stores. Any public or private internet service provider will be able to sell broadband through it. Rates could be as low as a hundred rupees or even less, with the option to take a connection for even a few hours. Connections going viral?

Illustrations by SIDDHANT JUMDE

## Breakfast Bonhomie

Madhya Pradesh chief minister **Shivraj Singh Chouhan** recently landed at state home and health minister Narottam Mishra's house for breakfast. The meeting set off intense speculation as Mishra is the only cabinet colleague Chouhan has called on. Their interactions were presumably to break the deadlock over Chouhan's decision to overrule postings of Mishra's choice in state vigilance agencies. The two leaders have had a history of frosty ties, but what can't be resolved over a session of good *chai-naashta*?

## Pass Time

The national lockdown may have disrupted term-end and board examinations and caused students much anxiety across India, but not in Telangana. Chief Minister **K. Chandrashekar Rao** has decided to promote all 530,000 Class 10 students without appearing for exams. The students will get grades based on internal assessments. Similar good fortune awaits universities in the state. Today's students are, after all, tomorrow's voters.



-Sandeep Unnithan with Shweta Punj, Rahul Noronha and Amarnath K. Menon



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**▲ FULL VOLUME**  
The BJP's Amit Shah during the Bihar 'Jan Samvad' virtual rally, New Delhi, June 7

VIRTUAL CAMPAIGNS

# CAMPAIGNING GOES VIRTUAL

By Amarnath K. Menon and  
Amitabh Srivastava

Is electioneering in India set to go all virtual in the time of the pandemic? Well, all eyes are on Bihar, which goes to the polls in October-November, and where a physical campaign seems an impossibility, at least for the next few months. Standard poll practices like gathering crowds for rallies, door-to-door campaigning or even a street corner meeting will be a challenge now, given the new physical dis-

tancing norms. Alive to this emerging situation, political parties have started gearing up for virtual campaigns.

The BJP, with its vast IT cell, was first off the blocks. Union home minister and BJP chief strategist Amit Shah addressed the party's first virtual rally, the 'Bihar Jan Samvad', on June 7, coinciding with the first anniversary of the Narendra Modi government 2.0. Shah's virtual address underlined his

"trust in the Nitish Kumar-led NDA registering a two-thirds majority in the assembly polls", an assertion meant to tamp down media speculation of a rift among the alliance partners in the state. The past couple of weeks had seen some muscle-flexing among allies Janata Dal (United), the BJP and Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (LJP). Polls are due in less than four months and the BJP, like all other political parties,

insists their focus is on rehabilitating the nearly three million migrant workers, who have returned to Bihar after losing jobs in the COVID-19 crisis. But the meticulous planning of the videoconference from Delhi, with flags and festoons in the backdrop, showed the party was keen to make even its virtual campaign come alive like the real thing. For a touch of reality, a small stage was also erected at the party office in Patna, where senior state BJP leaders sat through, clapping at strategic points, as is the practice on election battlegrounds.

Party spokesman Nikhil Anand claims the Shah show was viewed live by 10 million people. "We collected data from Facebook Live, which registered the maximum hits, besides traffic on our party's home page, YouTube, Twitter and clicks on our links to arrive at this estimate," he said. For perspective, some 40 million votes were cast in Bihar during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, with the NDA winning 39 of 40 seats in the state.

The Bihar chief minister has also been busy. Nitish connected through a videoconference with JD(U) workers in five districts on June 7, and is to repeat this in the remaining districts. He is also said to have impressed upon partymen the benefits of digital communication during the current Covid crisis. Earlier, on June 3, he addressed elected representatives of panchayati raj institutions, women's self-help and other state beneficiary groups in a 50-minute speech. Close to 1.3 million people viewed the webcast live, says the Bihar information and public relations department.

Other parties are also bracing for change. The RJD's chief ministerial candidate Tejashwi Yadav has also been connecting with his MLAs and district presidents through video chats. "We are concentrating on getting relief for the migrants now, but the BJP is mistaken if it thinks they are ahead of us in terms of a video campaign," says RJD spokesman Mrityunjay Tiwari. Part of a five-party alliance, including the Congress, Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM), Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP) and the Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP), they have already rigged up digital

infrastructure down to the district and block levels. Professionals have been hired to collate phone numbers and other contact details to enable the parties to reach out to voters swiftly on digital platforms. According to BJP's Anand, every party is trying to enlist supporters from among the estimated 12.5 million Facebook accounts in the state.

In April-May 2021, a few months after Bihar goes to polls, neighbour state West Bengal will witness what many political observers see as a defining state election. Shah, despite the communication constraints imposed by the recent cyclone that ravaged the state, kicked off

## THE BIHAR ELECTIONS WILL BE A TEST CASE FOR HOW A PANDEMIC AFFECTS THE EXERCISE OF ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

the campaign on June 9 by connecting with 1,200 old and new office-bearers and observers. For good measure, it was also beamed live on several digital platforms for a much larger reach. But rural internet connectivity is still poor in the state and banking on local cable networks is daunting as they are controlled by the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) supporters. The BJP has launched a social media drive against the chief minister, under the rubric *'Aar Noi Mamata* (No more Mamata)', and also released a nine-point 'chargesheet' to mark nine years of her rule. Party sources say around 1,000 'virtual rallies' at the booth and district levels will be streamed online to rally supporters as part of the propaganda war.

The state administration may be struggling with the twin blows of Covid and the cyclone, but Mamata knows she

can't cede any ground to the BJP at this stage. She has also begun engaging with party leaders and workers through video conferences. The TMC is also holding weekly video conferences, where Lok Sabha MP Abhishek Banerjee, poll strategist Prashant Kishor, party secretary-general Partha Chatterjee and president Subrata Bakshi guide partymen on public outreach programmes.

Another state that will see a new government in May 2021 is Tamil Nadu. Social media platforms are already heating up the political discourse, and recognising this, the ruling AIADMK (All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) has divided the state into four regions and assigned IT teams to each area. Both the AIADMK and its main rival, the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), have lost their big leader mascots (J. Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi, respectively), and will be banking heavily on digital platforms to influence voters. The pandemic and its aftermath could also prove fortuitous for the two superstars-turned-politicians—Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan. Their legendary communication skills and social media presence could turn them into formidable rivals now.

Assam, Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, also due for polls in 2021, are in wait-and-watch mode. What happens in Bihar will be a trendsetter. For political parties everywhere, and especially those in the opposition, who no longer have sizeable war chests at their disposal, an election campaign that must perforce focus on digital strategies will be a welcome leveller. It will be much cheaper than sending star campaigners on barnstorming tours. Whether the voter will be swayed by their screen presence as much as s/he might have been by the buzz of a physical rally appearance is hard to foretell. But for political parties, especially those not so well endowed financially, a digital battleground has some obvious merits: data and analytics are available cheap for all those alive to its potential. If claims and appearances are anything to go by, their learning curve has been steep. ■

—with Romita Datta

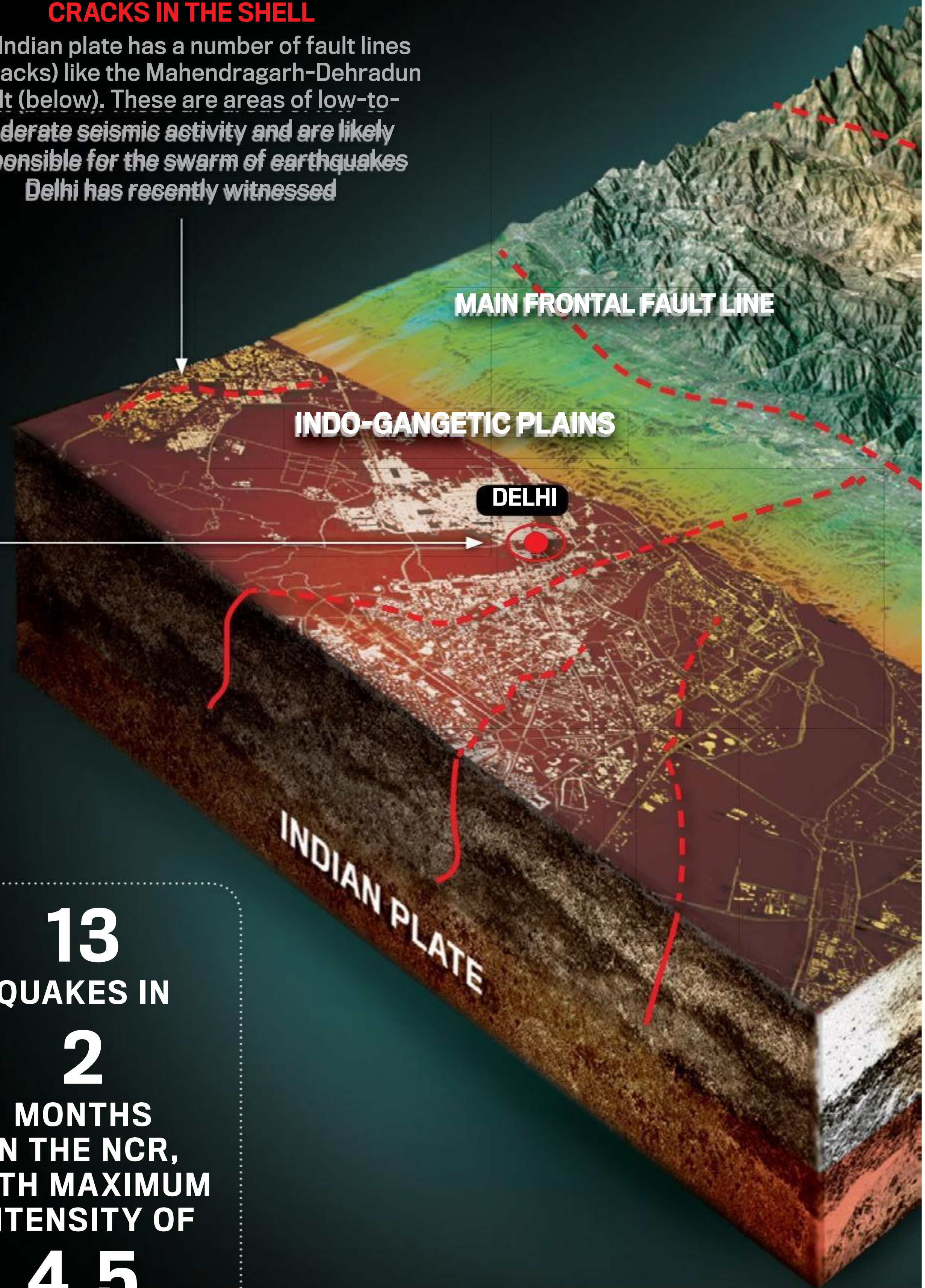
# WHAT LIES BENEATH

Over the past two months, the National Capital Region has had at least 13 minor earthquakes. This isn't unusual—the region has seen over 600 recorded seismic events in the past 20 years

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS

## CRACKS IN THE SHELL

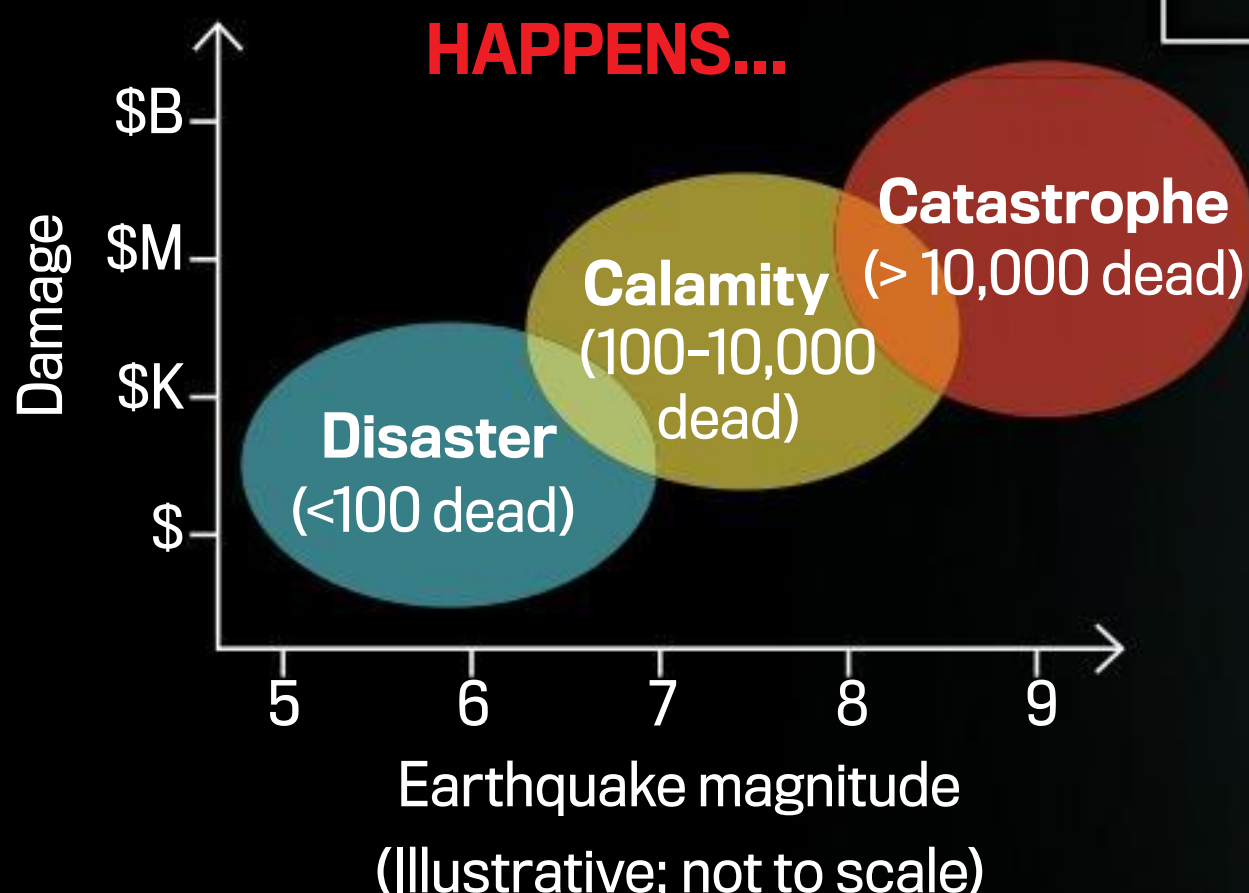
The Indian plate has a number of fault lines (or cracks) like the Mahendragarh–Dehradun fault (below). These are areas of low-to-moderate seismic activity and are likely responsible for the swarm of earthquakes Delhi has recently witnessed



## A PROBLEM OF PLENTY

One reason for the sheer number of earthquakes recorded around Delhi is that 16 of the 115 seismometers in the country are installed in and around the NCR. There have been over 600 recorded seismic events around Delhi in the past 20 years; only 6 of them measured over 4 on the magnitude scale

## WHEN IT HAPPENS...



## RUMBLES FROM THE DEEP

**13**  
QUAKES IN  
**2**  
MONTHS  
IN THE NCR,  
WITH MAXIMUM  
INTENSITY OF  
**4.5**

**1** April 5  
Rohtak, Haryana  
Magnitude: 2.5  
Depth: 8 km

**2** April 9  
Noida, Uttar Pradesh  
Magnitude: 2.4  
Depth: 15 km

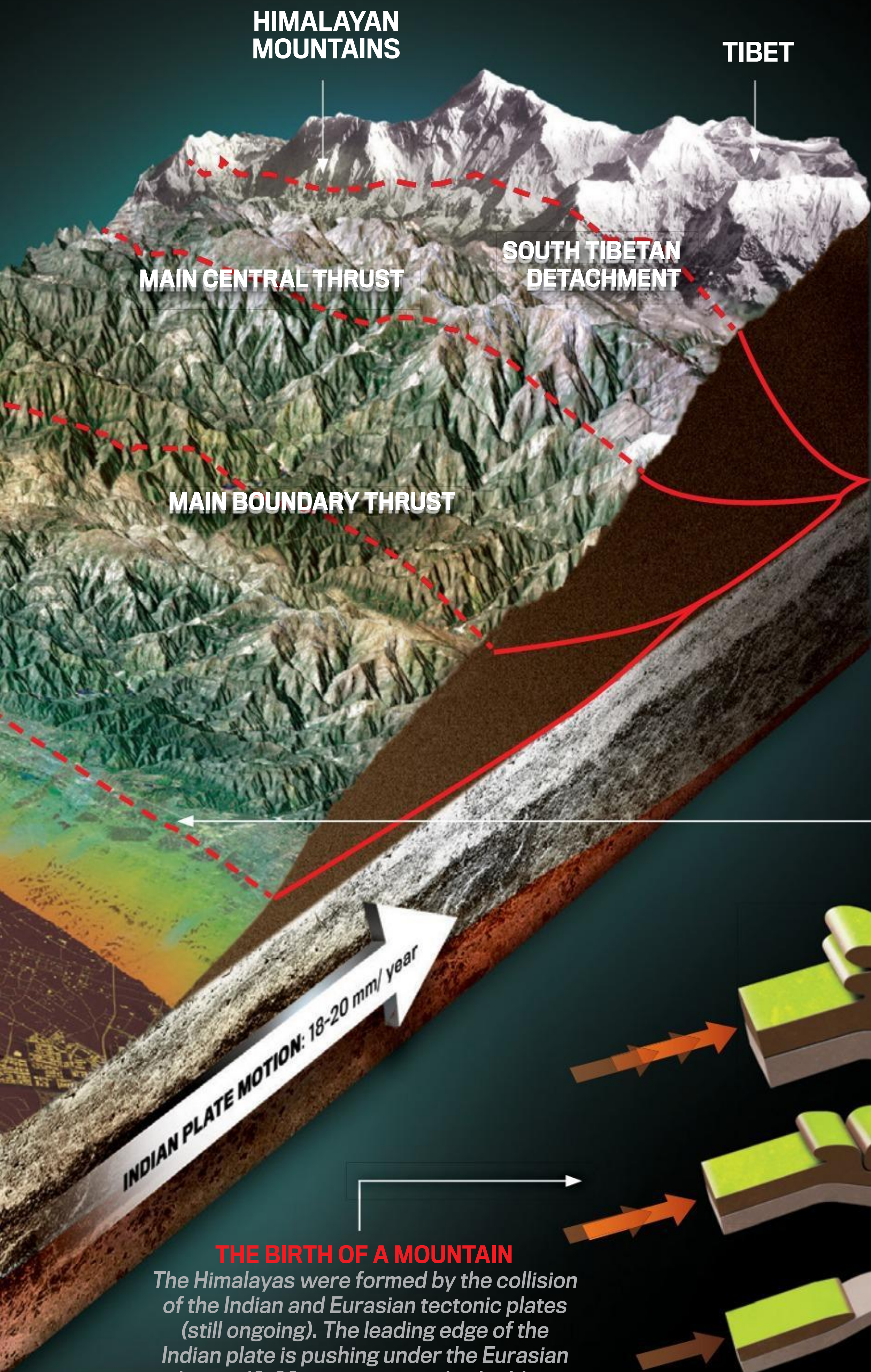
**3** April 12  
New Delhi  
Magnitude: 3.5  
Depth: 8 km

**4** April 16  
New Delhi  
Magnitude: 2  
Depth: 10 km

**5** April 18  
Rohtak, Haryana  
Magnitude: 2.9  
Depth: 10 km

**6** May 3  
New Delhi  
Magnitude: 3  
Depth: 5 km





HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS

TIBET

MAIN CENTRAL THRUST

SOUTH TIBETAN DETACHMENT

MAIN BOUNDARY THRUST

INDIAN PLATE MOTION: 18-20 mm/year

**THE BIRTH OF A MOUNTAIN**

The Himalayas were formed by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates (still ongoing). The leading edge of the Indian plate is pushing under the Eurasian plate at 18-20 mm per year; this builds up enormous stresses underground, often released as earthquakes

**IS A BIG ONE COMING?**

- 1 Short answer: nobody knows. Earthquakes, unlike cyclones, are very hard (if not impossible) to predict. There are two narratives doing the rounds, neither of which is robust
- 2 One argues that the recent earthquakes in Delhi are 'foreshocks of a big one'. The term 'foreshock' is used to describe earlier, smaller earthquakes before a big one hits. It is possible for several small earthquakes to occur without a larger one following, or for a large one to hit without smaller ones preceding it
- 3 The other theory argues that these small earthquakes are 'venting' the energy locked in the ground, preventing a major earthquake. This is also shaky—it would take 1,000 earthquakes of magnitude 4 to vent the energy of a single earthquake of magnitude 6

**SEVERELY STRESSED**

The active Himalayan plate boundary, a region of tremendous geologic pressure. If the Indo-Gangetic plain witnesses a major earthquake (8+ magnitude), it will likely originate here

- |                                                                                  |                                                                          |                                                                                   |                                                                                 |                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>7</b> May 6<br/>Faridabad, Haryana<br/>Magnitude: 2.3<br/>Depth: 10 km</p> | <p><b>8</b> May 15<br/>New Delhi<br/>Magnitude: 2.2<br/>Depth: 22 km</p> | <p><b>9</b> May 28<br/>Faridabad, Haryana<br/>Magnitude: 2.5<br/>Depth: 10 km</p> | <p><b>10</b> May 29<br/>Rohtak, Haryana<br/>Magnitude: 4.5<br/>Depth: 15 km</p> | <p><b>11</b> June 1<br/>Rohtak, Haryana<br/>Magnitude: 1.8<br/>Depth: 5 km</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

- |                                                                                 |                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>13</b> June 8<br/>Rohtak, Haryana<br/>Magnitude: 2.1<br/>Depth: 19 km</p> | <p><b>12</b> June 3<br/>Faridabad, Haryana<br/>Magnitude: 3<br/>Depth: 4 km</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

# ZEN AND THE ART OF COMPETITION

By Prosenjit Datta

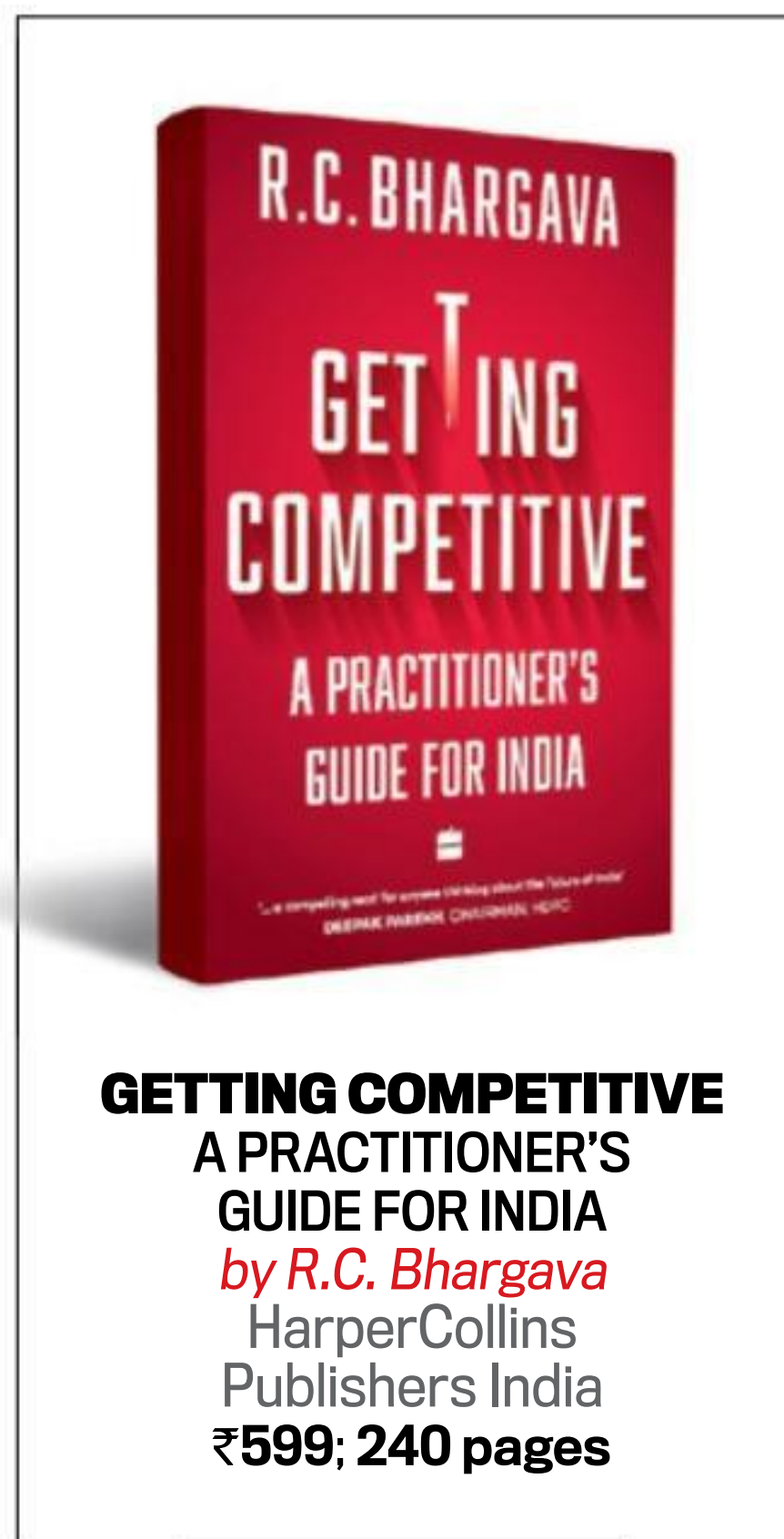
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for an *'Atmanirbhar Bharat'* that would also serve as a factory to the world raises the all-important question: how did India fail to become a manufacturing powerhouse like China, Japan or Korea despite our natural advantages and the stated goals of several prime ministers? That is the query R.C. Bhargava's new book, *Getting Competitive: A Practitioner's Guide for India*, seeks to answer.

Bhargava, chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, has excellent insights. He was in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), had a stint as director (commercial) of Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and then joined what was Maruti Udyog Ltd when it had just been formed. He was its second managing director, playing a hands-on role in setting up the supply chain ecosystem and handling worker-management issues. He has both the policymaker's perspective as well as the practical insights that come from building a giant manufacturing firm. He points out that despite our first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision for India as an industrial powerhouse and equitable society, the country could manage neither. The issue was the way the goal was pursued—centralised planning, a minimal role for the private sector, the infamous Licence Raj and giant public sector undertakings that did not function on commercial principles.

In April 1948, the first Industrial Policy Resolution had envisaged a mixed economy with a sizeable role for the private sector. But by 1951, the Industrial Policy Resolution had brought in licensing to regulate the growth of the private sector and police its role. Businessmen were looked upon with suspicion lest they became too powerful.

The government treated manufactured goods as luxuries, to be produced in limited quantities. The idea that competition would allow cheaper and better goods for customers never occurred to the government. This led to long waiting lists, shoddy products, shortages and corruption.

PSU chairmen had no incentive to run their companies competitively. Nor did civil servants. The approach was to avoid mistakes and follow precedents rather than try out



anything new.

Foreign capital was also frowned upon. There was a focus on saving jobs rather than creating new ones. Though it had become apparent by 1960 that the plan was not working, no one wanted to disturb the status quo. In Indira Gandhi's era, in fact, the government was all-pervasive in business.

The biggest problem, Bhargava points out, was the throttling of competition (the Chinese allowed competition despite being a communist country and that was one reason for their better and cheaper products). Rajiv Gandhi tried to bring in domestic competition, but things would change only in 1991, when India opened up the economy after the balance of payments crisis. Even then, India did not become an easier country to do business in. The number of permissions required at central, state and district levels would drive manufacturers mad.

Bhargava looks at the current problems that hamper manufacturing despite efforts to improve the ease of doing business. States have a big role in local regulations, incentives and labour and the Union government can only do so much. He talks about his experiences in building Maruti and its vendor base. He is inspired by the Japanese and advocates that the government and Indian society at large adopt some of their best practices, not the least their disposition to shun ostentation and create a more equitable society. He recognises that it might be difficult: Indian businessmen do love to flaunt the good things in life.

The book's main weakness is that it skips the role of many leaders between Nehru and Modi. Also, Bhargava barely touches upon the various models adopted by manufacturing powerhouses outside Japan.

It is an interesting book. But it could have done with more examples, better editing and an exploration, even if tangential, of whether and how our national character affects productivity. That said, it contains some good suggestions and insights that the government should consider. ■

Prosenjit Datta is a former editor of Business Today

# “It will now truly be ‘one nation, one market’”

Union agriculture secretary **SANJAY AGARWAL** spoke to **INDIA TODAY** group editorial director **RAJ CHENGAPPA** about the significance of three major ordinances passed by the government: the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance and an amendment to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. Excerpts:



TWITTER @DRRONMALKA

**Q. How does the ordinance amending the rules of trade and commerce help farmers?**

**A.** The ecosystem that developed after Independence was tailored to produce enough and more foodgrains to ensure food security. That drive made India self-sufficient in foodgrains. We owe a lot to India’s farmers, who showed that they are competent, knowledgeable and capable. But while they had the choice of producing whatever they wanted to, marketing was regulated—farmers had to sell their produce to traders licensed by the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) and other state entities. Over a period of time, that ecosystem proved to be disadvantageous—especially to small farmers—and needed correcting. This ordinance allows farmers to sell their produce to any person or institution in the country (including the APMCs). It is now truly a one nation, one market—farmers can sell their produce at the farm gate or to trading platforms anywhere in the country. As a result, farmers’ incomes will increase, as they will be able to get the best price available. It

**“Commercial farming will lead to higher production, higher value and higher incomes for farmers”**

will cut down wastage and expenses incurred on transport to mandis, improve efficiency and quality of production and give the entire rural economy a big push.

**Q. Some states, particularly Punjab, feel this ordinance violates the federal structure as agriculture is a state subject.**

**A.** The central government will never venture into an area outside its legally sanctioned limits. Section 33 of the concurrent list covers both interstate and intrastate trade and commerce, including the production, supply and distribution of food stuffs apart from cotton, jute and other items—so the ordinance is within the Centre’s purview.

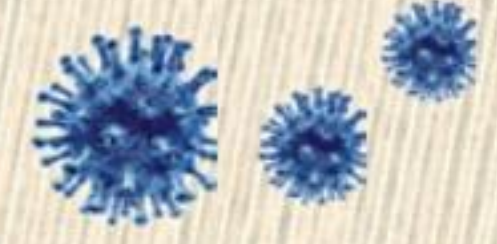
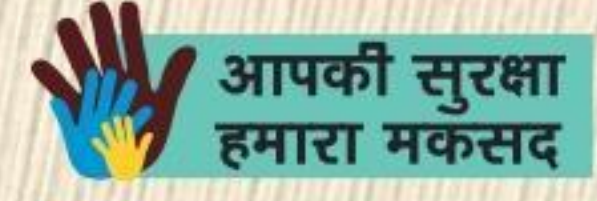
**Q. What effect will the ordinance enabling contract farming have?**

**A.** [Commercial] farming agreements are the need of the hour, especially for small and marginal farmers who want to grow high-value crops but bear the risk of production and face losses. This ordinance will enable farmers to benefit by transferring the risk to the corporate buyer. Industry partners could also provide farmers with seeds, technology inputs and pesticides at wholesale prices—this will translate to

higher production, higher value, and therefore, higher incomes for farmers. The government is also establishing 10,000 farmer-producer organisations across the country, which, along with the Kisan Credit Card scheme, will provide marketing and logistic support. The Centre is also creating a Rs 1 lakh crore financing facility for post-harvest management, including warehousing, storage and packaging units. We are looking to establish processing industries at the cooperative society and village level. We have also established a dispute-resolution mechanism for speedy reconciliation that ensures that farmers are not exploited, by imposing heavy penalties on industries and traders for such violations.

**Q. How will the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act make a difference?**

**A.** It will free up the food processing sector by removing cereals, pulses, edible oils, potatoes and onions from the list of essential commodities. This gives confidence to private entrepreneurs and encourages them to invest in the sector, thereby enabling farmers to get better value for their produce. All these ordinances will enable the government to meet its target of doubling farmers’ incomes by 2022. ■



## कोरोना संक्रमण से बचाव एवं लॉकडाउन में राहत पहुंचाने को लेकर बिहार सरकार के महत्वपूर्ण कदम :

### राज्य के स्वजाने पर पहला हक आपदा पीड़ितों का है:

- राज्य सरकार Covid-19 को आपदा मान रही है तथा इसी परिप्रेक्ष्य में कोरोना संक्रमण से बचाव एवं लॉकडाउन में लोगों को राहत पहुंचाने के लिए बिहार सरकार द्वारा अबतक 8538.62 करोड़ (आठ हजार पांच सौ अड़तीस करोड़ बासठ लाख) रुपये व्यय किए गए • इसके अतिरिक्त फसल क्षति हेतु किसानों को कृषि इनपुट अनुदान वितरित करने के लिए 730 करोड़ रुपये जारी • कोरोना उन्मूलन कोष में 180 करोड़ रुपये की उपलब्धता।

### बिहार के बाहर रह रहे एवं वापस आने को इच्छुक लोगों को वापस लाया गया :

- बिहार वापस आने के इच्छुक अन्य राज्यों में फंसे बिहार के लोगों को बिहार वापस लाया गया। • अब तक विभिन्न राज्यों से कुल 1508 ट्रेनों से कुल 21 लाख 11 हजार 353 श्रमिकों को बिहार वापस लाया गया • श्रमिकों को गंतव्य तक पहुंचाने हेतु लगायी गयी 4500 से अधिक बसें। • दूसरे राज्यों से आने वाले बिहार के लोगों के लिए राज्य के अंदर चलाई गई 26 श्रमिक स्पेशल ट्रेनें।

### प्रखंड स्तरीय क्वारंटाइन सेंटर की व्यवस्था, प्रति व्यक्ति 5300 रुपये का व्यय :

- वर्तमान में लॉक डाउन के कारण बिहार के बाहर फंसे लोग जो विशेष ट्रेनों से लौटे हैं उनमें से गंभीर रूप से संक्रमित शहरों सूरत, अहमदाबाद, मुंबई, पुणे, दिल्ली, गाजियाबाद, फरीदाबाद, गुरुग्राम, नोएडा, कोलकाता एवं बंगलोर से आये लोगों को प्रखंड क्वारंटाइन सेंटर में आवासित किया जा रहा है, जहां उन्हें निर्धारित अवधि तक क्वारंटाइन में रहना है एवं शेष स्थानों से आये लोगों को होम क्वारंटाइन में भेजा जा रहा है। क्वारंटाइन केंद्रों में सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करते हुए गुणवत्तापूर्ण भोजन, आवासन तथा पर्याप्त संख्या में शौचालय, स्नानागार एवं साथ ही चिकित्सकीय जांच की सुविधा उपलब्ध है। साफ-सफाई पर विशेष ध्यान दिया जा रहा है। बर्तन, कपड़ा, तेल-कंधी, दूध-पेस्ट, दूध-ब्रश, छोटा आईना साथ ही बाल्टी, मग, मच्छरदानी, एवं दरी भी उपलब्ध करायी जा रही है। कैम्प से निकलने के समय ट्रेन के किराये के साथ-साथ 500 रुपये की अतिरिक्त राशि या न्यूनतम 1000 रुपये की राशि का भुगतान किया जा रहा है। जो व्यक्ति बसों तथा अन्य माध्यमों से बाहर से आ रहे हैं और क्वारंटाइन कैम्प में रह रहे हैं, उन्हें भी 1000 रुपये की राशि का भुगतान उनके बैंक खाते में किया जा रहा है। • ब्लॉक क्वारंटाइन सेंटरों में अब तक 15 लाख 22 हजार 582 लोग आवासित हो चुके हैं। इनमें से 14 लाख 29 हजार 365 लोग क्वारंटाइन की निर्धारित अवधि पूरी कर अपने घर वापस जा चुके हैं। प्रखंड स्तरीय क्वारंटाइन सेंटर में क्वारंटाइन अवधि में प्रति व्यक्ति औसतन 5300 रुपये का व्यय किया जा रहा है।

### सभी राशन कार्डधारियों एवं चिन्हित गैर राशन कार्डधारियों को 1000/- रुपये की सहायता। राशन कार्ड विहीन सभी सुयोग्य परिवारों को राशन कार्ड भी शीघ्र उपलब्ध कराने का निर्णय:

- अभी तक 1 करोड़ 42 लाख राशन कार्डधारियों के खाते में 1000 रुपये की राशि अंतरित की जा चुकी है। शेष राशन कार्डधारियों के खाते में राशि शीघ्र ही अंतरित कर दी जाएगी।
- अस्वीकृत, लंबित एवं त्रुटिपूर्ण राशन कार्डों के जाँचोपरांत सही पाये गये आवेदकों को भी एक हजार रुपये की सहायता राशि देने का निर्णय। सहायता राशि उपलब्ध कराने के उपरांत सुयोग्य परिवारों को राशन कार्ड निर्गत किया जा रहा है। • अभी तक ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में जीविका द्वारा तथा शहरी क्षेत्रों में नेशनल अर्बन लाईवलीहुड मिशन (NULM) के माध्यम से सर्वेक्षित एवं चिन्हित राशन कार्ड विहीन 21 लाख परिवारों को 1,000 रुपये की मदद दी जा चुकी है। अभी तक 15 लाख 76 हजार राशन कार्ड विहीन सुयोग्य परिवारों का नया राशन कार्ड बन चुका है। यह प्रक्रिया जारी है।

### सभी प्रकार के सामाजिक सुरक्षा पेंशनधारियों को तीन माह की अग्रिम पेंशन का भुगतान:

- बिहार के सभी 84 लाख 76 हजार पेंशनधारियों (मुख्यमंत्री वृद्धजन पेंशन, दिव्यांग पेंशन, विधवा पेंशन, वृद्धावस्था पेंशन) को तीन माह की पेंशन के अग्रिम भुगतान के रूप में के खाते में 1017 करोड़ (एक हजार सतरह करोड़) रुपये की राशि अंतरित। नये सुयोग्य आवेदकों को शीघ्र पेंशन स्वीकृति का निर्देश।

### छात्र/छात्राओं के लिये विशेष पहल:

- कक्षा 01 से लेकर 12वीं तक के सभी छात्र-छात्राओं को शिक्षा विभाग द्वारा देय छात्रवृत्ति एवं अन्य योजनाओं का एकमुश्त लाभ। कुल 1 करोड़ 13 लाख छात्र-छात्राओं के खाते में 3261 करोड़ (तीन हजार दो सौ एकसठ करोड़) रुपये की राशि अंतरित। • साथ ही एम.डी.एम. की राशि डी.बी.टी के माध्यम से 1.3 करोड़ छात्र-छात्राओं के खाते में अंतरित की जा रही है। कुल 651 करोड़ रुपये की राशि अंतरित की जायेगी, जिसमें से अब तक 379 करोड़ रुपये अंतरित किए जा चुके हैं तथा शेष छात्र-छात्राओं के खाते में शीघ्र राशि अंतरित कर दी जाएगी। • लॉकडाउन के कारण विद्यालयों को बंद किये जाने के फलस्वरूप छात्रहित में वर्ग 01 से 11 तक (वर्ग 10 को छोड़कर) के सभी छात्र-छात्राओं को बिना वार्षिक परीक्षा के अगली कक्षा में प्रोन्नत करने का निर्णय। • डी.डी. बिहार के माध्यम से कक्षावार दी जा रही ऑनलाइन शिक्षा। उन्नयन बिहार की तर्ज पर कक्षा 6 से 12 की तरह कक्षा 1 से 5 तक के लिए ई-कन्टेंट विकसित करने का निर्णय। विभिन्न कक्षाओं के पाठ्यक्रम की किताबों को डिजिटाइज कर वेबसाइट पर उपलब्ध कराने का निर्देश।

### किसानों को राहत:

- इस साल फरवरी, मार्च एवं अप्रैल में हुई असमय बारिश और ओलावृष्टि से हुई फसल क्षति हेतु किसानों को कृषि इनपुट अनुदान वितरित करने के लिए 730 करोड़ रुपये जारी। अब तक लगभग 14 लाख 01 हजार लाभार्थियों के बीच 466 करोड़ रुपये का कृषि इनपुट अनुदान वितरित। शेष आवेदनों की जाँच प्रक्रिया अधीन। उन्हें भी जाँचोपरान्त शीघ्र राशि का भुगतान किया जाएगा।

### लॉकडाउन की वजह से बिहार के बाहर फंसे बिहार के मजदूरों एवं जरूरतमंद व्यक्तियों के लिये मुख्यमंत्री विशेष सहायता:

- मुख्यमंत्री राहत कोष से आपदा प्रबंधन विभाग के माध्यम से मुख्यमंत्री विशेष सहायता के रूप में राज्य के बाहर फंसे बिहार के मजदूरों एवं जरूरतमंद व्यक्तियों के लिए 1000 रुपये प्रति व्यक्ति की सहायता राशि देने का निर्णय। • अब तक जितने आवेदन प्राप्त हुए उनमें वैध पाये गये 20 लाख 90 हजार 355 आवेदकों के खाते में 1000 रुपये की दर से 209.3 करोड़ रुपये की सहायता राशि अंतरित।

### बिहार फाउंडेशन के माध्यम से 9 राज्यों के 12 शहरों में 55 राहत केंद्र संचालित किए गये:

- मुख्यमंत्री राहत कोष से आपदा प्रबंधन विभाग के माध्यम से उपलब्ध करायी गयी राशि से बिहार फाउंडेशन द्वारा 9 राज्यों के 12 शहरों में 55 राहत केंद्रों में 15,06,000 लोगों को भोजन/फूड पैकेट्स उपलब्ध कराये गये। अन्य राज्यों में रह रहे बिहार के लोगों के लिए भोजन, आवासन एवं चिकित्सकीय सुविधा की व्यवस्था के साथ महाराष्ट्र में 6 शेल्टर होम एवं तमिलनाडु में 1 शेल्टर होम संचालित किए गये।

### आपदा राहत केन्द्र :

- बिहार में विभिन्न शहरों में फंसे दिहाड़ी मजदूरों, रिक्शा चालकों, ठेला वेंडरों एवं अन्य जरूरतमंद व्यक्तियों के लिए 200 से अधिक आपदा राहत केंद्र संचालित किए गए जिसमें लगभग 75 हजार लोग प्रतिदिन लाभान्वित हुए। इनमें गुणवत्तापूर्ण भोजन आवासन तथा चिकित्सकीय जाँच की सुविधा उपलब्ध करायी गयी। सीमा पर पहुँचे बिहार के लोगों के लिए सीमावर्ती आपदा राहत केन्द्रों का भी संचालन किया गया।

### पल्स पोलियो अभियान की तर्ज पर डोर टू डोर स्क्रीनिंग :

- पल्स पोलियो अभियान की तर्ज पर प्रभावित जिलों में डोर टू डोर स्क्रीनिंग करायी गयी, 1 करोड़ 87 लाख घरों की स्क्रीनिंग। कुल 10 करोड़ 40 लाख से अधिक लोगों की स्क्रीनिंग। इसके अतिरिक्त दूसरे चरण में अन्य राज्यों से आये बिहार के लोगों की भी डोर-टू-डोर स्क्रीनिंग एवं फॉलो-अप स्क्रीनिंग की जा रही है। • इसके तहत अबतक 5 लाख 35 हजार 756 घरों का सर्वेक्षण कराया जा चुका है।

### कोरोना उन्मूलन कोष का गठन :

- मुख्यमंत्री क्षेत्र विकास योजनान्तर्गत प्रदत्त राशि से स्वास्थ्य विभाग के अन्तर्गत कोरोना उन्मूलन कोष का गठन। अब तक इस कोष में 180 करोड़ की राशि उपलब्ध। • माननीय मुख्यमंत्री, माननीय मंत्रियों एवं बिहार विधानमंडल के माननीय सदस्यों के वेतन का 15 प्रतिशत अगले एक वर्ष तक कटौती कर कोरोना उन्मूलन कोष में देने का निर्णय। • इस कोष की राशि से दवा, जरूरी इक्विपमेंट्स, टेस्ट किट आदि क्रय करने के लिए प्रधान सचिव/ सचिव स्वास्थ्य विभाग प्राधिकृत।

### रोजगार सृजन की व्यवस्था :

- रोजगार सृजन का उद्देश्य ज्यादा से ज्यादा लोगों को रोजगार उपलब्ध कराना ताकि मजदूरों को काम मिलने में कठिनाई न हो। सात निश्चय अन्तर्गत हर घर नल का जल, हर घर तक पक्की गली-नालियाँ, हर घर शौचालय, जल-जीवन-हरियाली अन्तर्गत तालाबों का निर्माण एवं जीर्णोद्धार तथा मनरेगा के अन्तर्गत पांच एकड़ से कम क्षेत्रफल में चयननम तालाबों का निर्माण एवं जीर्णोद्धार कार्य, बाढ़ सुरक्षात्मक कार्य में अधिक से अधिक मजदूरों को रोजगार देने का निर्णय। • काम के दौरान सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन आवश्यक, मजदूरों को कार्यस्थल पर फ्री मास्क, साबुन एवं सेनेटाइजर उपलब्ध कराने का निर्णय। लॉकडाउन अवधि में गाइडलाइन के अनुसार अनुमान्य कार्यों में अबतक 4,52,286 योजनाओं में 5 करोड़ 79 लाख से अधिक मानव दिवसों का सृजन कर इच्छुक लोगों को रोजगार उपलब्ध कराया गया। • स्किल सर्वे - बाहर से लौटें बिहार के श्रमिकों का स्किल सर्वे किया जा रहा है। आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस तकनीक का प्रयोग करते हुये ऐप के माध्यम से स्किल सर्वे के आंकड़ों के आधार पर नियोजित एवं इच्छुक श्रमिकों की आवश्यकता को मैच करते हुये रोजगार के अवसरों की उपलब्धता के संबंध में सूचना दी जा रही है। • बाहर से लौटे बिहार के श्रमिकों के लिए योजना बनाने का कार्य अंतिम चरण में। • कार्यरत ईकाइयों में अधिक से अधिक लोगों को रोजगार मिल सके, नई ईकाइयों की स्थापना हेतु इन्सेंटिव, वर्तमान नीति में यदि कोई मिड-टर्म संशोधन आवश्यक हो तो इस संबंध में सुझाव देने के लिए विकास आयुक्त की अध्यक्षता में राज्य स्तरीय टास्क फोर्स गठित एवं कार्यरत।

### ग्रामीण एवं शहरी क्षेत्रों में मास्क एवं साबुन का वितरण :

- ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में सभी घरों में मास्क एवं साबुन का वितरण पंचायती राज संस्थाओं के माध्यम से कराया जा रहा है। शहरी क्षेत्रों में गरीब परिवारों, दिहाड़ी मजदूरों, रिक्शा चालकों, ठेला वेंडरों एवं अन्य जरूरतमंद व्यक्तियों को मास्क एवं साबुन वितरित किया जा रहा है।

**बिजली दर में कमी :** • राज्य सरकार के निर्णय के आलोक में विद्युत उपभोक्ताओं को लाभ पहुँचाने के लिए 01 अप्रैल 2020 से बिजली दर में कमी। सभी श्रेणियों के उर्जा शुल्क में 10 पैसे प्रति यूनिट की कमी, सभी श्रेणियों के उपभोक्ताओं के मीटर का मासिक शुल्क समाप्त। कृषि उपभोक्ताओं के लिए बिजली दर अब मात्र 65 पैसे प्रति यूनिट। विद्युत उपभोक्ताओं को वित्तीय वर्ष 2020-21 हेतु राज्य सरकार द्वारा कुल 5,494 करोड़ ( पाँच हजार चार सौ चौरानवें करोड़ ) की सब्सिडी।

### व्यवसायियों को राहत :

- व्यवसायियों के हित में वाणिज्यिक विभाग द्वारा बिहार कराधान विवाद समाधान योजना का तीन माह हेतु अवधि विस्तार करने का निर्णय।

### चिकित्सकों एवं स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों को प्रोत्साहन :

- चिकित्सकों एवं स्वास्थ्य कर्मियों को एक माह का अतिरिक्त मूल वेतन प्रोत्साहन राशि के तौर पर दिये जाने का निर्णय।

**दवा एवं उपकरणों की उपलब्धता :** • दवाओं, मास्क, टेस्ट किट और अन्य जरूरी इक्विपमेंट्स की पर्याप्त उपलब्धता सुनिश्चित की जा रही है। • पीएमसीएच, एम्स पटना, आईजीआईएमएस पटना, आरएमआरआई पटना, दरभंगा मेडिकल कॉलेज, दरभंगा, एसकेएमसीएच मुजफ्फरपुर, जेएलएनएमसीएच भागलपुर तथा अन्य

- कई संस्थानों में Covid-19 से संबंधित जाँच की सुविधा। • बेतिया, पावापुरी, मधेपुरा, गया एवं एनएमसीएच पटना में स्थित मेडिकल कॉलेज में RTPCR मशीन लगाने की कारवाई। • वर्तमान में 32 जिलों में कोविड-19 जांच की सुविधा तथा 13 जून तक सभी 38 जिलों में कोविड - 19 जांच की सुविधा हो जायेगी। • जीविका स्वयं सहायता समूहों द्वारा अबतक 1 करोड़ 50 लाख से अधिक मास्क निर्मित, प्रतिदिन 7-8 लाख मास्क बनाने का कार्य जारी।

### हेल्थ, क्वारंटाइन एवं आइसोलेशन बेड की व्यवस्था :

- पटना के नालंदा मेडिकल कॉलेज और अस्पताल (NMCH), गया के अनुग्रह नारायण मगध मेडिकल कॉलेज हॉस्पिटल (ANMCH) और भागलपुर के जवाहरलाल नेहरू मेडिकल कॉलेज हॉस्पिटल (JLNMCH) Covid-19 स्पेशल अस्पताल घोषित, जहां कुल 1991 आइसोलेशन बेड एवं 110 आइसीयू बेड व्यवस्था है। • राज्य के विभिन्न जिलों में 920 क्वारंटाइन सेंटर चिन्हित, इसमें 18,410 कमरों की व्यवस्था। कुल 463 आइसोलेशन केन्द्र बनाये गये जिसमें 31,818 बेड उपलब्ध।

- ▶ अन्य बीमारियों के इलाज हेतु प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य केन्द्रों, अनुमंडल अस्पतालों एवं जिला अस्पतालों में समुचित व्यवस्था।

- ▶ कोरोना से मृत्यु होने की स्थिति में मृतक के निकटतम परिजन को मुख्यमंत्री राहत कोष से 4 लाख रुपये का अनुदान।

लोगों की सहायता एवं सहयोग हेतु बिहार सरकार द्वारा हेल्पलाइन नम्बर की सुविधा :

- आपदा प्रबंधन विभाग का कंट्रोल रूम नं. 0612-2294204, 2294205 • स्थानिक आयुक्त का कार्यालय बिहार भवन नई दिल्ली के हेल्पलाइन नम्बर-011-23792009, 011-23014326, 011-23013884

**मास्क पहनें, काम पर चलें !**

जन सहयोग से ही होगी  
कोरोना की हार

सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, बिहार

सचेत रहें, सतर्क रहें  
तभी स्वस्थ रहेंगे।



# ON THE WARPATH

**The BJP is doing its damndest to unsettle and discredit Mamata Banerjee in the run-up to the assembly election next year. The Bengal chief minister must also deal with malcontent in her own party**

**By Romita Datta**

**O**

n June 5, World Environment Day, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee visited a well-known park in Kolkata to plant a neem sapling and announce a big afforestation drive—of 50 million mangrove saplings—in the Sundarbans, ravaged by Cyclone Amphan late last month. Bringing up the cyclone served another purpose. In its single-minded quest for power in

Bengal, the BJP, she raged, was politicising even natural calamities like Amphan and great adversities like the COVID-19 pandemic. “While we (her party, the Trinamool Congress) are labouring to save people, one political party is busy canvassing to overthrow our government,” she said, adding, for good measure, “Am I saying Narendra Modi should be thrown out of [power in] Delhi? This is not the time for politics.”

But that, political observers in Bengal will confirm, is a defensive political counter to the BJP, now her main adversary in the state. The BJP, which took 18 of 42 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 general election, is a clear threat to Mamata’s prospects of extending her tenure in power. The party has been quick to seize on Mamata’s discomfiture, as her administration struggles with the twin big blows dealt by the coronavirus pandemic and Cyclone Amphan. Hemmed in by criticism from the BJP over her government’s alleged mishandling of the crises,



ANI PHOTO

### CALAMITY CALL

Mamata Banerjee during a visit to the cyclone-ravaged South 24 Parganas district

lar outlook if it grabs power. She warned Union home minister Amit Shah it would be a mistake to eye the state as one of the BJP's many political conquests. "You (Amit Shah) have conquered a lot, the government of India, so many states... but don't think so narrowly about Bengal. It's a magnanimous place. If you love Bengal, the people of Bengal will love you back," she said.

Mamata's tactic, according to Ray, is to project the BJP as an outsider trying to destroy Bengal's distinctive cultural ethos. "With her assertions about Bengal being an intellectual hub, she is cautioning the educated Bengali middle class that a party of the Hindi heartland is threatening to radically alter the state's culture. Some of this has been in evidence in the Ramnavami and Hanuman Jayanti celebrations, and the incident in May last year, when a bust of social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Kolkata was vandalised," he says.

Appealing to provincial sentiment, Mamata reckons, might counter the BJP's time-tested ploy of polarising the electorate ahead of elections. It has done this with impunity in election after election, including the 2019 Lok Sabha, when it managed to garner a 40 per cent vote share—not only its best showing yet in Bengal but also just four seats less than the TMC. This performance, the BJP believes, will give it an edge in over 120 of the 294 assembly segments in the 2021 state election.

That the BJP is determined to pursue its polarisation campaign is evident. It has been accusing Mamata of being lax with the Covid lockdown enforcement in the Muslim-dominated areas of Kolkata and concealing data on Tablighi Jamaat returnees from a March congregation in Delhi that reported a major Covid outbreak. Mamata has dubbed this a malicious campaign against the people of Bengal. Alleging biased media coverage of Amphan, she said at the June 5 event: "It's all on Delhi's (Centre's) prodding—disrespect only Bengal, deprive only Bengal, malign only Bengal."

BJP sympathisers, however, say Mamata's game plan will not cut ice with the electorate. "Mamata Banerjee is crafting a '*Bangali-jagao* (awaken Bengalis)' narrative, but the people have seen for themselves how she handled Covid and Amphan. Will they forget how they had to go without

the chief minister is looking highly vulnerable. "Mamata faces an enormous challenge from the BJP in the coming election, less than a year away. Her nervousness is understandable," says Prasanto Ray, political analyst and professor emeritus at Kolkata's Presidency University.

### HIGH-PITCHED BATTLE

But no one expects Mamata, the feisty street-fighter politician, of taking any of this lying down. The TMC chief has launched an all-out perception war against the BJP. "We are reaching out to the people, first through social media and then in small teams, to convey how the BJP is playing politics over human tragedies while the TMC is on the ground helping people," said Rajib Banerjee, Bengal minister for forests.

Mamata is conjuring up an image of the BJP as a 'power-hungry invader' that will destroy Bengal's culture and its secu-



**"Where are the rumblings? The TMC has 35 MPs and 215 MLAs. Just one MLA (Sadhan Pande) made a statement out of line"**

— DEREK O'BRIEN  
TMC leader in  
Rajya Sabha

power and water for 100-160 hours after Amphan? Will migrants forget the unhygienic quarantine centres? Will relatives of the Covid deceased forget how they were kept in the dark?” asks Mohit Ray, visiting professor at Jadavpur University and member of the state BJP’s refugee cell.

### THE WAR WITHIN

It’s not just a strident BJP at its gates, the TMC is also dealing with internal rumblings. Party veteran and consumer affairs minister Sadhan Pande last month publicly criticised former Kolkata mayor Firhad Hakim over poor planning and relief in the aftermath of Amphan. Hakim, who is now chairman of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation’s board of administrators, is considered one of Mamata’s favourites. Pande’s remark that Hakim should have consulted former city mayor Sovan Chatterjee, a TMC rebel who defected to the BJP last August, not only caused consternation within the TMC but was also considered a challenge to Mamata.

Slapped with a show-cause notice by the party, Pande was defiant. “I have been in politics for the past 40 years and with Mamata Banerjee even before the TMC was formed. How can someone (Sudip Bandyopadhyay) suspended for anti-party activities in 2004 send me a show-cause notice?” he asked.

Pande isn’t the only one to speak out. On June 5, panchayat minister Subrata Mukherjee targeted Manturam Pakhira, junior minister for Sundarbans affairs, for poor relief and rehabilitation in the cyclone-ravaged areas. Many TMC ministers are also unhappy with the government’s handling of the Covid crisis, particularly the confrontational stance taken against the inter-ministerial central team (IMCT) that visited the state in April and the alleged underplaying of Covid deaths by citing comorbidities.

Rajib Banerjee conceded that all this mudslinging would “harm the TMC” at a time when there was no dearth of enemies outside. However, Derek O’Brien, the TMC’s leader in the

Rajya Sabha, dismissed reports of a rebellion in the ranks. “The TMC has 35 MPs and 215 MLAs. Just one MLA (Pande) made a statement out of line. So where are the rumblings?” he asked.

Amid the speculation on Pande’s next move, a state BJP leader said the party had “no immediate big plans” for him and that it was he who “needed cover given his daughter’s association with Rose Valley (a chit fund company)”. Rose Valley is facing a probe by central agencies over an alleged Rs



### Among the TMC big guns the BJP has set its sights on is transport minister Suvendu Adhikari (above), a mass leader with a strong base in rural Bengal

40,000 crore fraud. Pande may not be a prime pick, but the BJP knows its *Ebar Bangla* (Now Bengal) campaign could do with some influential TMC faces. In the run-up to the Lok Sabha poll, the BJP had got five TMC leaders to defect; three of them even won seats. “We will go by the winnability factor while picking [assembly poll] candidates. If this requires poaching, we’ll not hesitate,” says a BJP leader from North Bengal.

Among the TMC big guns the BJP has set sights on is Suvendu Adhikari, the transport minister. Adhikari enjoys a strong base in rural Bengal, is a mass leader and an eloquent orator. “He will be a prize catch for the BJP,” says a TMC MP, on condition of anonymity. “Mamata Banerjee has got wind

that Adhikari has made up his mind to defect, so she has begun divesting him of key responsibilities.”

Reached for comment, Adhikari was curt: “Is there any proof? I don’t answer hypothetical questions.” His father, Lok Sabha MP Sisir Adhikari, however, issued a forthright denial. “Why should we join the BJP? There can be a clash of personalities and egos, but we are loyal to the leadership,” he said. A wary Mamata, though, has retrieved charge of five of seven districts from Suvendu—Malda, South Dinajpur, West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura. These have been reassigned to leaders close to Mamata’s nephew Abhishek Banerjee.

Adhikari and Banerjee are adversaries. The former’s estrangement is believed to have started with Abhishek’s meteoric rise in the TMC and his decision to rope in poll strategist Prashant Kishor last year to boost the party’s prospects in the assembly election. Adhikari boycotted Kishor’s March 2 TMC meeting in Kolkata for which bar-coded entry cards were issued—a move aimed to detect absentee leaders.

“The season of defections to the BJP has begun,” claims Dilip Ghosh, president of the Bengal BJP. “We don’t need to poach. Leaders are dumping the TMC as the party is on its way out.”

Education minister Partha Chatterjee, however, affects optimism that Mamata’s popularity will win the day for the TMC. “People vote for Mamata Banerjee and the TMC, so leaders joining or leaving the party make little difference,” he says. Mamata, on her part, is doing everything to endear herself and her party to the people. She has asked TMC leaders not to interfere with the distribution of cyclone relief. The government, she says, has made direct cash transfers of Rs 1,000 each to 450,000 returning migrant workers and released Rs 6,250 crore in nine districts towards cyclone relief and reconstruction. “Our focus is to overcome the twin challenges of Covid and the cyclone. If the BJP’s priority is to indulge in politics and electioneering, that’s their prerogative,” says O’Brien. ■





# WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY-A GREEN REVOLUTION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

**The World Environment Day is celebrated every year with an objective to increase awareness and action for the conservation of environment. As any individual with care for the environment would agree, environment protection is an ongoing process. Industrial activity and other polluting activities have caused the earth to heat up considerably. With each passing year the planet is being witness to warmer temperatures, melting ice caps, natural and manmade disasters, and so on. All these tragedies have a direct link to global warming. The earth does not have a lot of time before the damage goes to a point of no return.**

Reversing this impact is difficult, but possible. Through dedicated and sincere efforts we can definitely reduce the impact of global warming. Recent times have shown that reversal of this adversity is possible.

If one has to look at the positive aspect of corona pandemic then it would probably be the somewhat reduction in pollution levels. In the absence of human activity, nature has begun to breathe again. It was a phenomenon experienced across the globe. It has also made people take global warming seriously. As the world limps back to normalcy, it becomes all the more relevant for all stakeholders viz the governments, the corporate, and the general public to ensure that their activities don't cause further damage to the environment.

There have been companies who have already treaded down the path of sustainable development. Yatin Gupte, the visionary CEO of Wardwizard Innovations & Mobility Ltd. shares his wisdom and the vision behind his latest offering.

"We have been celebrating World Environment Day since 1973. It would be more likely to say observing rather than celebrating. Amidst the pandemic panic, we started realising the importance of this day. The COVID-19 virus has clearly shown how

the environment can heal itself if there is no human interference.

We at Wardwizard Innovations & Mobility Ltd, believed in preserving the environment and with Joy e-bikes which is the fastest growing name in E-Vehicles in India, we made a promise to the environment to reduce the pollution emitted from automobiles. With our expert market research team and immense hard work, we succeeded in creating zero emission vehicles which can be a 'solution to pollution'. We then started thinking about how we can showcase our bikes as the perfect alternative to fuel powered motorbikes solving the problem of sustainable mobility the world has been running behind. Today we are listed as India's first electric automobile manufacturing company in BSE.

We always believe in making the world pollution free. Keeping this motto behind, we decided to empower 55,000 enterprises for prosperity and decided to facilitate OEMs to establish their business in the field of Electric vehicles. With not just limiting to India, we expanded our operations in the pearl of Africa, Uganda and are also aspiring to make our presence in Europe.

What I'm trying to achieve with my brand and its products is very noble. To promote

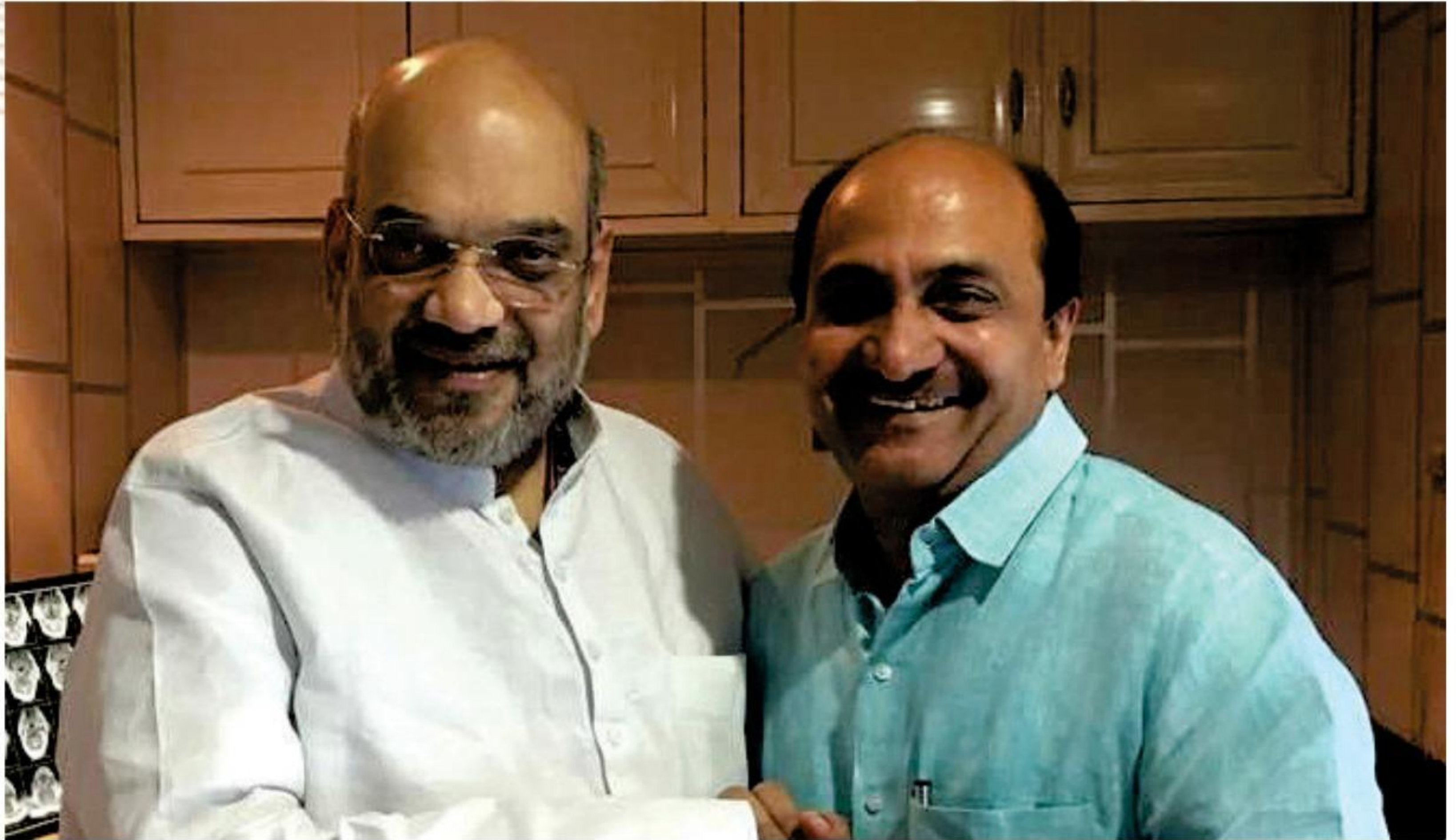


**Yatin Gupte,**  
CEO, Wardwizard Innovations and  
Mobility Limited.

a sustainable alternative for one's daily commute by putting the environment on priority. On the occasion of World Environment Day, let's make a promise to Mother Nature that we actually care about her. Joy E-bike is our solution to pollution." We have seen that damage to the nature can still be reversed which means we still have some time. Entrepreneurs like Yatin Gupte are not only showing promise of a greener future, but also taking steps to deliver on them.

# Dinesh Goyal

## A New India Will Rise



*Dinesh Goyal , President , Fedration of Educational Publishers in India and M.D Goyal Group of Publishing, with the Union Home Minister Sh. Amit Shah*

### Dinesh Anand

**O**minous clouds of Corona virus loom over the world, India too is not in any way insulated from this calamity that will have far reaching impact on the population health as well as the economy. In its last report, the World Bank has reported that India's economy will contract by 3 % in the fiscal 2020-21. This numbers as they unfold, would undoubtedly hit the country hard. Aware of the situation, the government has devised a policy for re-opening the economy in phases after a nationwide lockdown, which was necessary and intended to allow the country to prepare to meet this challenge.

In coversation with Dinesh Anand, Sh. Dinesh Goyal pointed out that it will not be easy for our country to bounce back until we, its people, drastically change our mindset. How we the people of India respond to these challenges will ultimately decide our fate in the long run as well as in the short term. While, national pride and integrity assume added significance in this hour of unprecedented crisis, it is important to get a perspective how the fabric of our national character was allowed to be weakened by greed and self interest over the years.

Founding fathers of our nation envisaged a future based

on Ram Rajya for the country. Based on this vision and their collective experience they drafted the constitution of the country with the conviction that this will enable the country to reach its destiny in the time to come. Sadly, instead of building on collective national character and pride, a culture of entitlement and distribution of largesse came about to take root in our national fabric. Significantly large swathes of the society, including the farmers, dalits and minorities, instead of getting empowered became dependent on the periodic doles by government after government. This not only fostered the politics of appeasement, but also made entire communities and people self centred and solely focused on their next dole, and therefore detached from national partnership or social responsibility.

Thus, the poverty never left the country, even after arrival of the middle class in the seventies. Then came the the major liberalisation push of the late 90's which espoused the cause of global competition for betterment of the domestic industry and trickle-down effect for the betterment of the poor. While the industry instead of competing chose the easier and lucrative route of imports and the promised riches did not trickle down to the grass roots. As a result, the plight of farmers, dalits

ans minorities never improved, the endemic culture of entitlement made them perpetually dependent and distrustful of the government. Instead of becoming stakeholders in the largest democracy of the world, they were reduced to the stature of serfs dependent on alms doled out by the powers that be. The policy of reservation for these sections too was abused and became a national curse. So much so, that after the last Bihar assembly elections even Prime Minister Modi admitted that even a discussion on his issue is difficult.

The country also failed to adequately skill its much touted demographic dividend all these years and this turned out to be a major stumbling block when the country looks to turn the corner and its manufacturing sector has begun to find its feet once again in the past years. The leadership of the country has been trying to invoke the self-belief among the people. For no country can move forward or grow if its citizens do not trust their own ability to succeed. Our citizens need to not only learn of their rights but also realise their duties as well.

Our huge population needs the manufacturing sector to grow and prosper, therefore As Indians, we need to make sure that our consumption focuses more and more on indigenous products. With 65-70% of our workforce unskilled, it is our prerogative to train this workforce to help them grow from unskilled to semi-skilled. Unlike the urbanized economies like Singapore, ours still remains a rural economy. We need growth in the villages, Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns. While the government has given the MSME sector a major push, this sector needs to double down and reinvent itself. The current investment climate however negative as it may look, needs positive and bullish sentiment on the India story. Because India is a country too big, too great and with a far richer legacy and culture to wither in this present storm.

While fighting through the present crisis, we should not lose sight of the fact that come what may, India will be the largest consumption market in the coming years, therefore positive steps taken now will bear huge dividends. We must also overlook that every town, village and city has entrepreneurs and startups willing to put their lives on the line to succeed. We should build on this sentiment and encourage local manufacturing. Every penny spent purchasing locally manufactured products gives a 10x boost to our economy, as it not only gives revenue to that local manufacturer but provides security and livelihood to the hundreds of allied small industries, their workers and their families associated with the manufacturer. We as traders and consumers do not realize that our actions have far reaching consequences that can impact the future of the nation itself.

However, it is important to keep a balanced perspective.



*Dinesh Goyal with the Union HRD Minister Sh. Ramesh Pokhriyal*

Consider the ongoing, shrill social media campaign to boycott International products especially the Chinese imports. This is extremely short sighted. This approach will not get us anywhere in a global economy. Economic isolation has great perils in a connected world. And we do not need to focus on China. We will not win by defeating one country, we will win by building on our strengths.

Till a mere quarter ago, India was being looked at by the entire world to provide the next growth destination. Even in this global crisis there are opportunities for the country in medicine and pharmaceuticals. We even have the potential to actually lead the way in managing and tiding over this pandemic. We have done that with small pox and polio.

Present crisis has given us the opportunity to rally people and gradually instill a passion for the country. To focus on the national character. Our country needs an indirect national emergency to fully control and protect its potential. The need for a strong leadership was perhaps never as dire as now. To keep the country together, to keep the faith of the people, and to emerge victorious. Fortunately, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is firm in his resolve to make India emerge as a self-reliant power.

A New India will rise. One where its national integrity and pride matters to its people. The year 2020 has thrown challenge after challenge at India. How we the people of India respond to these challenges will determine our fate in the long run as well as the short term.

# LIVING WITH COVID

**THE TESTIMONIES OF THOSE WHO HAVE HAD A TRYST WITH THE DISEASE REVEAL THAT A MAJORITY EXPERIENCE ITS MILD MANIFESTATION. THOSE WHO DO NEED CRITICAL CARE CAN TAKE HEART FROM THE RELATIVELY HIGH RECOVERY RATE AND LOW FATALITY RATE**

By SONALI ACHARJEE

**W**hen Mukhtar Ahmed, a 106-year-old man from the Nawabganj area of Delhi, recovered from COVID-19, hope coursed through the entire neighbourhood. The same people who not so long ago would lay out every currency note in the sun to rid it of any possible virus lurking around and sanitise even their newspapers could now be seen walking around without masks while shopping for groceries. If Ahmed at his age could survive corona, surely they would too.

Yet, it is exactly this kind of complacency or 'optimism bias' that doctors and analysts warn against as the disease continues to rage across the world. On June 6, India became the fifth worst-affected country in the world, its tally of 245,670 cases on that day overtaking that of Spain. "We should still be scared," warns Dr Balram Bhargava, director-general of

the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), as India emerges from a prolonged lockdown. "We cannot return to a post-Covid world overnight." (See interview: *'The main thing now is to save lives'*)

Even though community transmission has not been announced officially in India, it is clear that we are past the point of eradicating the virus let alone containing the contagion. With 276,583 cases as on June 10, around five of every 100 individuals tested in India are currently reporting positive for the virus, a rate that is less than the 9.4 per cent of the United States but more than double the 2.3 per cent of South Korea.

However, as on June 10, our recovery rate of 48.8 per cent and the case fatality ratio (CFR) of 2.8 per cent compares favourably with the global CFR of 5.7 per cent, 5.6 per cent of the United States or 5.2 per cent of Brazil. Even the reproduction number ( $R_0$ ), or the average number of new infections an infectious person can generate in a totally naïve

# THE SLOW MARCH OF A PANDEMIC

RECOVERY RATE OF COVID PATIENTS HAS IMPROVED...

RECOVERY RATE

May 6 **26.6%** June 10 **48.5%** ↑

MORTALITY RATE HAS DROPPED...

MORTALITY RATE

May 6 **3.2%** June 10 **2.8%** ↓

THE INFECTIOUSNESS IS FALLING

REPRODUCTION NO. ( $R_0$ )\*

May 6 **2.0** June 10 **1.2** ↓

\*  $R_0$  is the average number of new infections an infectious person can generate in a totally naive population

## HOW SAFE ARE YOU?

STUDIES OF PATIENTS IN MAHARASHTRA AND DELHI

DELHI

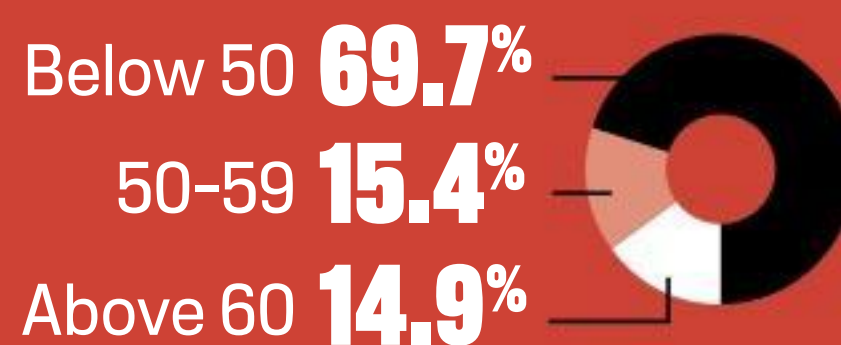
(as on May 13)

MAHARASHTRA

(as on June 8)

AGE IS NO BAR, A MAJORITY OF THE PATIENTS ARE BELOW 60 YEARS

No. of cases **7,998**



No. of cases

**85,975**

**85%** Below 60  
**15%** Above 60

A MAJORITY OF THOSE AFFLICTED ARE ASYMPTOMATIC

Active cases **5,034**  
Asymptomatic patients **75%**



Active cases **42,600**  
**83%** Asymptomatic patients



FATALITY RATE FOR THOSE ABOVE 60 IS THE HIGHEST

FATALITY RATE

Below 50 **0.3%**  
50-59 **2.3%**  
Above 60 **4.8%**



**1.32%**

FATALITY RATE

**3.55%**  
1% Below 40  
4% 40-60  
8.1% Above 60



FATALITY RATE HIGHER AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE HYPERTENSION AND DIABETES...

COMORBIDITY DEATHS **86.8%**

Common comorbidities: diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, asthma, heart disease



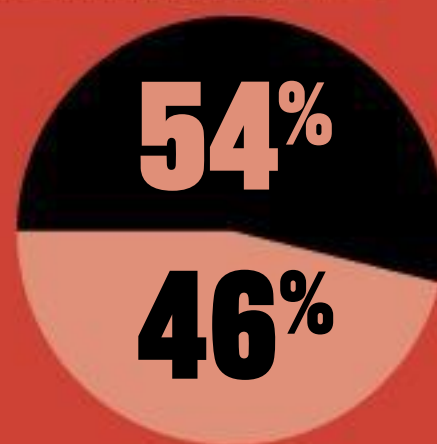
**69%** COMORBIDITY DEATHS

Common comorbidities: 32% had diabetes and BP; 26% only diabetes; 24% only hypertension

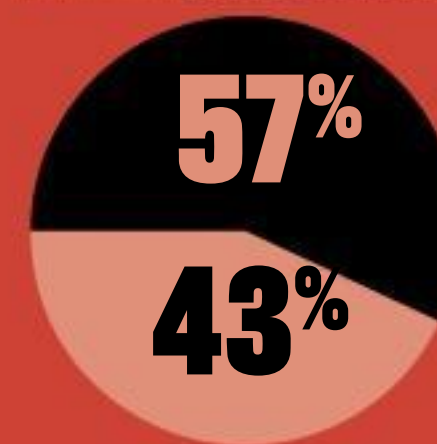


ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE ABOVE 60 AND HAVE THESE DISEASES

DEATHS ABOVE 60 **54%**  
DEATHS BELOW 60 **46%**



DEATHS ABOVE 60 **57%**  
DEATHS BELOW 60 **43%**



population, has come down from 2.0 on May 6 to 1.2 on June 6. This could well be a result of the 70-day lockdown India was under. But the lower reproduction number could also be due to the fact that a majority of the Covid cases in India are asymptomatic. Seventy-five per cent of Delhi's 30,000-odd cases showed no symptoms while in Maharashtra, 83 per cent of cases were asymptomatic. And asymptomatic carriers of the virus are believed to be less infectious. As World Health Organization epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove said at a press briefing in Geneva on June 9, asymptomatic spread of Covid is 'very rare'. In a clarification the next day, she added that it did not mean cases of asymptomatic individuals spreading the disease could be ruled out entirely, and that a modelling study had estimated their chances of spreading the infection between six and 44 per cent. A study from China published in the April 15 issue of the journal *Nature Medicine* estimated this to be 44 per cent.

**A** majority of asymptomatic carriers are the young, who have no co-morbid conditions. Dr Richa Narang, a doctor in the ICU ward of the LNJP Hospital in Delhi, recounts: "I remember in April, when we got these patients, they wouldn't believe they were sick because they didn't even have a cough."

Yet, the number of infections is also the highest in this demographic. Younger members who spent the most time outdoors were the first to have contracted the disease, as several examples of families getting infected show. "Those going to work or shop are largely the young, so we see a greater share of them infected," says Dr Om Shrivastava, head of infectious diseases at the Jaslok Hospital in Mumbai.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that people over the age of 60 and with comorbidities have the highest risk of developing severe symptoms and succumbing to the disease. In Delhi, for example, the fatality rate of those over 60 is 4.8 per cent while for those below 50, it is just 0.3 per cent (see graphic: *The slow march of a pandemic*). In Maharashtra, the state worst hit by the pandemic, 85 per cent of the cases are in the below-60 age group but 47 per cent of the fatalities have been in the 60-plus demographic. "Three months ago, there were only a handful of elderly patients; now [their numbers are] increasing. Such cases are more severe due to poor immune responses, and take longer to test nega-

**"Healthcare workers are now more comfortable working in the Covid ward. Earlier, there was apprehension, even fear"**

**– DR B.L. SHERWAL,  
Director, Rajiv Gandhi SS  
Hospital, Delhi**



**DR BALRAM BHARGAVA**, *director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)*, spoke with Associate Editor Sonali Acharjee about the coronavirus pandemic—how our understanding of the virus has evolved over the past months, the current status of testing and the way forward. *Excerpts:*

**Q.** COVID-19 was first described as manifesting as a severe flu; it was later reported to also cause cytokine storms (severe immune reactions). Now there are reports of it causing pulmonary thrombosis (blood clots causing blockages in the lungs) as well. Will the virus continue to surprise us in the weeks ahead?

**A.** An increase in understanding happens with all diseases as a larger variety of people get infected and more cases come to light. Not only has our knowledge of how Covid impacts the body become more defined, but we have also been able to

## INTERVIEW

# 'THE MAIN THING NOW IS TO SAVE LIVES'

decipher the structure of the virus and isolate several strains. We now know more about its proteins, receptors and process of replication within the body than before—this has helped with diagnosis, monitoring and treatment. Research is an ongoing process, not just for India but for the entire world.

Immunity status has a role to play in the body's response to Covid, and the ICMR has moved to fast-track research applications in this field so that we can study what factors influence reactions like cytokine storms in a Covid infection.

### **Q. How have Covid infections progressed in India?**

**A.** Some aspects about Covid continue to hold true—it is very contagious, a large number of people are asymptomatic and recover on their own and the elderly and [those] with compromised immunity are at the highest risk.

### **Q. In March, you had said in a press briefing that isolation would be the best way to break the chain of transmission. With over 200,000 cases and Unlock 1.0 under way, what would you recommend today?**

**A.** It was expected that the coronavirus would not go away and we do have a higher positivity rate (the percentage of people testing positive for the virus) than before, but the lockdown has helped keep our curve low if not flat. Even more reassuring is that our mortality rate is low—this could be because of inherent immunity—but it is low and recoveries are fast improving as well. Spikes in cases will happen; they are happening around the world. We have to focus on keeping mortality figures low. People might get infected, but they should recover. For this, we have to protect those who are vulnerable, such as the elderly and those with comorbidities.

People are already coming out of home isolation, but with a greater awareness of precautionary measures like hand hygiene and [the importance of wearing] masks. We still have night curfews. We have to [remain] responsible and cautious. We should still be scared—we cannot return to a pre-Covid world overnight.

### **Q. With 70-80 per cent cases showing no symptoms, why aren't we testing asymptomatic individuals?**

**A.** Our testing numbers have grown significantly. We are now testing 110,000 samples a day, and we have 599 ICMR-run labs and 235 private sector labs to run RT-PCR tests. We are making our own test kits and reagents domestically—this was [not being done] earlier.

**“Our knowledge of the virus is now more defined, we have also been able to evaluate its structure and isolate several strains”**

The testing criteria were also expanded significantly in May—we now advise testing for frontline workers and for influenza-like cases. Most countries in the world focus on symptomatic testing. Asymptomatic high-risk contacts are being tested. [To test all asymptomatic cases] you would have to test the entire country, which is not possible. Asymptomatic cases also have very low viral shedding.

### **Q. How do we increase testing in the days ahead?**

ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) rapid test kits will be useful to

map the spread of infections. We have already recommended pooled RT-PCR testing, with no more than five samples per test. States also have differing testing strategies, but the infrastructure for diagnosis is significantly [better] today.

### **Q. Now that the WHO has restarted its trials, can we assume that Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) holds some promise as a prophylactic or Covid treatment?**

**A.** Many drugs are being repurposed for [use in] Covid [treatment]. Using HCQ for prevention (six or more doses) has shown good results—we have published a study [on this] in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*. At this stage, we should consider drugs based on the results of trials, and India has not stopped trials for HCQ. There is some potential for [using] the drug in treatment as well. In India [it is being used] for mild cases—the WHO trial results will shed more light on this.

### **Q. What has been your experience of managing the pandemic so far?**

**A.** At ICMR, we have a responsibility to provide the government with accurate medical advice. Over the last few months, not just the body, but several of the country's top doctors, virologists, microbiologists, pulmonary experts and scientists have worked endlessly to provide medical guidance and strengthen medical systems in the country. Despite this, some circumstances have been unprecedented, but we have overcome the challenges. Our knowledge, like [that of] the rest of the world, including the US, UK and South Korea, is continuously evolving on the Covid pandemic and we are applying new lessons and insights in our handling of the crisis. The main thing now is to save lives.



### **COURSE OF TREATMENT** Doctors attend to a Covid patient at the LNJP Hospital in Delhi

tive,” says Dr B.L. Sherwal, director of the Rajiv Gandhi SS Hospital in Delhi, which treated 106-year-old Ahmed.

Comorbidity, doctors now confirm with certainty, is a major contributor in fatalities. In Delhi and Maharashtra, 86.8 per cent and 69 per cent of Covid deaths, respectively, were on account of underlying conditions. In Delhi, 80 per cent of the under-50 and 93 per cent of the over-60 Covid deaths had comorbidities. The Maharashtra figures show that 32 per cent of those who died had both diabetes and hypertension. “We are finding that those who have not taken care of their diabetes are unable to fight off the infection. Uncontrolled blood sugar limits immune responses and not just in the case of coronavirus,” says Dr Amrish Mithal, head of the diabetes division at Max Healthcare, Saket.

“We are still getting a very large number of asymptomatic cases,” says Dr Sudhir Bhandari, director of SMS Hospital in Jaipur, “which is less concerning. It is those with breathlessness or chronic cough that need more monitoring because they can suddenly take a turn for the worse. Why or when this happens still needs answering.”

Eventually, though, it is only 4-5 per cent of the infected who go on to require critical care. In Delhi, only 3

per cent needed critical care, of which 2.3 per cent needed oxygen care and 0.3 per cent required ventilator support. In Maharashtra, on the other hand, 4 per cent of the infected cases ended up needing critical care.

Taking note of this, the Union ministry of health has advised home isolation for those deemed to be low risk based on their age and the symptoms as determined by a doctor. This can take nearly 70 per cent load off the hospitals. In a city like Delhi, which crossed 30,000 cases on June 8, this means around 21,000 can manage symptoms at home with paracetamol, rest, increased fluid intake and oxygen monitoring. The medical system can then focus on those with moderate to severe symptoms.

**T**his has become crucial as India’s limited health infrastructure is beginning to creak under the weight of the rising number of cases. On May 27, only eight Covid beds were available in the national capital across seven private hospitals. “We were begging for a hospital bed, pleading with doctors. My uncle (aged 63) died of hypoxia in front of us, not one single hospital in the city gave us a bed when his health started to fail. They had 48 hours to save him, but there was no



bed,” recounts Apurva Singh, 37, a resident of Delhi. It’s an ordeal many others recount. Even as Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal went into quarantine, his plea to reserve beds in Delhi for the locals was overturned by the lieutenant governor, Anil Baijal.

“The anxiety,” says Malini Aisola, co-convenor of the All India Drug Action Network, “has shifted from the disease [itself] to its management. Now that there are over 200,000 cases, were I to get Covid, what am I to do? Will I get a bed? Will I be able to afford treatment?” Dr Mona Desai, president of the Ahmedabad Medical Association, sees the same public reactions. “The bottlenecks start to emerge with the first step itself—diagnosis. There is a backlog in results and the testing criteria still exclude asymptomatics with no contact history. How does one prove they have met a positive case? People aren’t scared of just Covid [any more], they are worried about their test results, if they will get a hospital bed, if they will get plasma.”

**M**eanwhile, as doctors recognise critical patterns in the disease, they have begun standardising the protocol for treatment. From focusing on antivirals and anti-HIV medication, as was the case in April, blood thinners are now being given to prevent blood clots, oxygen levels and critical organs are being monitored. “The most common treatment remains antibiotics, paracetamol and flu medication. But monitoring is more stringent—we now monitor markers such as high levels of Interleukin or D-Dimer, which indicate inflammation or a cytokine storm. The disease is still erratic and differs from person to person. One positive development is that doctors and nurses are more comfortable with working in the Covid ward. Earlier, there was apprehension, even fear; now, they have adjusted to the new normal in health services,” says Dr Sherwal.

With most Covid drug trials yet to prove the efficacy of various repurposed molecules, treatment in India is still being decided based on symptoms. Antiviral drug Remdesivir has shown some promise, with a five-day course approved for use in ‘severe’ cases on June 2. Gilead, the company that holds the patent for the drug in India and abroad, announced the results from its Phase 3 SIMPLE (Shockless IMPLant Evaluation) trial on June 1. It showed that hospitalised COVID-19 patients on Remdesivir were 65 per cent more likely to see clinical improvement by the 11th day as opposed to those who were not on the drug. However, the drug holds certain risks for those with renal and hepatic impairment; these will be better understood once

**“People aren’t scared of just Covid [any more], they are worried about their test results, **whether they will get a hospital bed, if they will get plasma**”**

**– DR MONA DESAI,  
President, Ahmedabad Medical Association**

the results of additional clinical trials are released (expected within nine months).

Some hospitals, such as ESI Gurgaon and the Kottayam Medical College in Kerala, have reported that patients often request non-allopathic medication as well. “*Haldi doodh* (turmeric milk) is a common request, especially among older patients,” says Dr Renjin R.P., medical superintendent of the Kottayam Medical College. So far, four Ayurvedic herbs have been listed for clinical trials with the AYUSH ministry, while on the allopathic front, major trials are being carried out for Favipiravir (a Japanese flu drug), Itolizumab (shown to have lower mortality in Cuba) and, most recently, for the Bangladesh ‘wonder drug’ Ivermectin and Doxycycline. Favipiravir trials by Glenmark are the first to have reached Stage 3 trials in India.

In the meantime, we can learn from the experiences of the Covid survivors, like those profiled in the following pages. What was their experience and what did they wish they had done differently? Some, like Patna path lab owner Sanjay Kumar Bhunia, found it difficult to handle the stigma. Others learned valuable life lessons which they want to offer as useful advice to others. Prepare better, say the Bhatias in Ghaziabad. “We just didn’t believe we would get infected ourselves. We took precautions, but didn’t prepare the home for it,” says Naresh Bhati. “So when we left, we had to leave our children behind alone. That added a lot of avoidable stress.” Get prompt diagnosis, advocates Dr Sumedh Kesaria of Mumbai. “Covid symptoms overlap with those of the common cold. If you come in contact with a positive case, or your symptoms don’t go away in three days, get a test,” he advises. Keep your mental spirits up, says Haryana banker Ashok Takkar. “The virus plays with your mind as much as with your body. *Bimari hai*, go quickly to a doctor and follow his advice,” he proffers. So the next time you pass by a front gate that has been pasted with a red sign saying ‘Quarantined Premises’, be cautious but do not be afraid. ■

# THE COVID SURVIVORS

**They have been to the edge of the Covid abyss and back. Some got away easy, others struggled with the stigma, the isolation and the disease. At the other side of the crisis now, all of them have one thing to say: whatever it may do to your body, don't let Covid mess with your mind**

**Naresh  
Bhati, 49**

**Businessman**



**Asha  
Bhati, 45**

**BJP Municipal  
Councillor, Ghaziabad**

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**CALLING  
ON THEIR  
INNER  
STRENGTH**

I would cough so much that my throat and chest would literally burn," recalls Naresh Bhati, who owns a medicine business in Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. On April 30, after his wife, Asha, the BJP's Ghaziabad municipal councillor, tested Covid-positive, Naresh was asked to get tested too. "My wife had fever for a few days but I had no symptoms initially. So I was surprised to find I too had Covid," he says. Asha says she most likely contracted Covid when she stepped out for work.

Having reported chronic cough and fever, the BhatIs were taken to ESIC Hospital in Ghaziabad's Rajendra Nagar and were there for 12 days. The couple had to leave behind their 14-year-old daughter and 18-year-old son, both of whom tested negative. "You cannot imagine the guilt I

felt. They had no one to look after them. They had to manage food on their own for the first time," says Naresh.

To pass time in the hospital, the couple read books, were on their phones but, mostly, they slept. The disease, they say, weakened their bodies considerably. "We were fortunate our lungs were not infected. But our battle with the cough was exhausting. However, suddenly, we began to feel better and our strength returned," says Naresh, who had seen several patients go into the ICU and was determined not to meet a similar fate. "We fought against the cough with our minds, listened to the doctors and were cured in under two weeks." His advice to those currently infected: "Prepare for a tough battle and don't give up." ■

**-Sonali Acharjee**

**ORDEAL  
AND AFTER**  
The Bhatias back  
in their home



“We fought against the cough with our minds, listened to the doctors and were cured in under two weeks. **Prepare for the battle ahead and do not give up**”

## Priyal Jain, 26

Software engineer, Indore



**MOVING ON**  
Priyal Jain wants to put the Covid ordeal behind her as just a bad dream

# TO HELL AND BACK

**A** family get-together turned into a nightmare for the Jain family in Indore, after three members tested Covid-positive in April and were admitted in a Covid ward.

Priyal Jain, a software engineer with Decathlon in Bengaluru, had come to her hometown Indore in December 2019 to be with her parents while expecting her first child. On February 29, her son Aanav was born. The celebrations in Priyal and her husband Atit's families went on all of March.

In early April, Priyal's father Sunil got high fever and flu-like symptoms. He was admitted to a hospital, tested for Covid and found positive on April 7. He was soon shifted to the Aurobindo Hospital, a dedicated Covid facility. The next day, the whole family—Priyal, son Aanav, mother Sukesha, younger brother Anupam, elder sister Paryul and her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter Kianshi—was tested, as primary contacts of the patient. On April 10, Priyal and her sister Paryul tested positive.

Priyal had almost no symptoms initially. They were all in the same Covid ward, and would spend time chatting, and counting the days when they would get home, especially as Sunil had recovered from the fever.

Then, on April 22, Priyal was taken for an X-ray. It showed white patches

on her lungs. The doctors shifted her to the ward for serious Covid patients and put her on oxygen support. "I somehow couldn't reconcile with what the doctors were saying since I felt completely alright. I thought they may have mixed up my X-ray with someone else's," recounts Priyal.

The situation in the serious patients ward was very different. "There was always someone who was sinking and frantic attempts to save them. This went on all the time, so

**"There was always someone sinking and frantic attempts to save them. This went on all the time, so much so I thought I'd be next"**

much so that I thought I'd be next. I was forever thinking about my son, how he was faring with my mother and how life could be so cruel as to give me barely 40 days with him."

On April 24, Priyal was told she'd be given plasma therapy. "Plasma-based treatment was in a trial stage and I was scared," she recalls. "I consulted our family doctor who convinced me to go for it."

The first good news for the family came on April 26, when Sunil was discharged. On April 29, both Priyal and Paryul tested negative and were discharged after their CT scans were found clear. Now reunited with her family and son Aarav, all Priyal wants to do is put the whole ordeal behind her as just one bad dream. ■

—Rahul Noronha

## Sanjay Kumar Bhunia, 46

Path lab owner,  
Ranchi

# A FATE WORSE THAN COVID

**S**anjay Kumar Bhunia won his battle against COVID-19 on May 9, but when Ranchi's Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) discharged him, the landlord barred his entry to the home he had rented for 14 years. Since then, Bhunia has been living in his pathology lab that's now out of business.

The 250 sq. ft lab has no bed or other furniture, nor a kitchen, and reeks of chemicals and disinfectants. All by himself, Bhunia spends time thinking about his family, watching Bhojpuri films and listening to Rabindranath Tagore's *Ekla cholo re* (If none heeds your call, go it alone). "This song has kept me

### SELF ISOLATION

Sanjay Kumar Bhunia in his home in Ranchi



going, as have my daughter's video calls," says Bhunia, on the phone.

A "middle-class struggler", as he describes himself, Bhunia had set up the lab in 2006 with his younger brother Arun. His wife Savita is a lab technician with a Patna hospital. Their daughter, 10-year-old Sukirti, studies in Class 5 in a Ranchi school and has been with Savita after the school declared vacations in March.

Bhunias was confirmed Covid-positive on April 25

ward with 14 Covid patients," he says.

Bhunias narrates how the disease devastates its patients psychologically. "They [patients at RIMS] were so scared and worried. I'm a Bengali, but to cheer them up, I'd laugh and joke in Bhojpuri. I'd reassure them that we would conquer the virus," he says.

Discharged by RIMS only after two tests confirmed him negative, Bhunia considered volunteering as a plasma donor. But he soon realised that the world outside the hospital was not ready to accept Covid survivors.

Confined to his lab even a fortnight into his recovery, Bhunia says neighbours keep away from him and the local shopkeeper refuses supplies. Arun brings home-cooked food, but is not allowed to enter the lab, which has not seen clients since the last week of April.

Bhunias believes time will heal everything. He has asked his wife not to come to Ranchi till he finds a new house to shift to. It's been a futile search so far. "Except for my daughter, wife and brother, everyone else views me as a contagion, not a Covid survivor." ■

—Amitabh Srivastava

"Once I tested positive, the police came and shouted my name. I was **made to sit on the road like a criminal, then sent off to RIMS**"

following a test. "My ordeal began as soon as I tested positive. I was in my lab when a police vehicle and an ambulance arrived. The policemen shouted my name out. I was made to sit on the road, like a criminal, then bundled off to RIMS, where I was put up in an isolation

SOMNATH SEN

## Nageena, 30 Homemaker, Basni, Rajasthan

# DELIVERING HOPE

**G**rief and shock overwhelmed 30-year-old Nageena when doctors at the JLN District

Hospital in Nagaur, Rajasthan, informed her on April 14 that her newborn baby, Arman, was, like her, Covid positive. From her bed in the isolation ward, Nageena's eyes searched for her family: her in-laws, nine-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son, who suffers from cerebral palsy. They were all in the vicinity, on separate beds—battling COVID-19. Nageena's husband, Mohammed Javed, was far away in Jaipur, in the Covid ward of SMS Hospital. The 34-year-old had returned from Mumbai, where he worked at a tea stall, on March 24 and developed fever subsequently. He tested positive on April 12.

At one go, Covid had knocked out this family of seven from Basni, a village of 30,000 people near Nagaur that has seen 249 Covid cases so far. Dr Shadab Ali, in-charge of the health centre in Basni, recalls: "Their situation was so desperate that it was left to the Covid health workers who arrived on April 13 to escort Nageena to the hospital to pack her belongings and lock the house." Nageena's three-year-old daughter, who was not positive, had to be kept in an isolation ward as there was no one to take care of her at home.

JLN Hospital staff did their best to comfort Nageena. "Do not worry, all of you will be fine," Dr Moola Ram, a paediatrician, told her. Since both mother and child were infected, the doctors

let them stay on the same bed. They saw to it that Nageena wore an N95 mask and sanitised her hands before breastfeeding the newborn. Arman showed minor health problems but recovered from Covid within a week. Though Nageena took two more weeks to get well, Arman was allowed to stay right next to her. "On May 8, we discharged all members of the family," says Dr Rajendra Bera, the nodal officer for Covid at JLN Hospital, who hasn't had a day off in the past three months. "Protocol demanded that we send them

Nageena's husband, though, is still rattled by the entire Covid episode and the vilification of his family at the start. "I still cannot fathom what the panic about being isolated is all about. I had fever, but it was never serious. Also, nobody in my family developed any of the Covid symptoms," he says.

Nageena and her baby's successful treatment gave doctors at JLN Hospital vital experience to handle Covid cases among pregnant women. Zulekha, the 30-year-old Covid-positive wife of Javed's younger brother Wazid, delivered

**"It is success stories like Nageena's that have given us the inspiration to handle 456 cases in a small district hospital in Nagaur"**

to a quarantine centre for another 14 days, but considering that the entire family had been affected, we permitted home quarantine."

When Nageena's family tested positive, neighbours and relatives were too scared to interact with them. But as more and more residents of Basni began to get infected, the family's successful recovery, through prompt hospitalisation and adherence to Covid protocols, set an example for others to follow. "When we returned home, people welcomed us with garlands," recalls Nageena. The social acceptance, she adds, helped her overcome the agony of the preceding few weeks.

a girl on May 3. The baby tested negative. Another woman, 23-year-old Asma, was admitted on May 5 and delivered a Covid-negative baby on May 12. "Cases like these inspired us to handle 456 Covid patients in a small district hospital," says Dr Shankar Lal, principal health officer at JLN Hospital.

Nagaur collector Dinesh Kumar Yadav adds: "In these times of Covid, successes from the most unusual of places restore people's faith in survival and leave us moved." The confidence-building measures initiated by Yadav by using community radio have helped contain the outbreak in Basni. ■

**—Rohit Parihar**



## Manoj Gupta, 52

Co-owner, Defence Store, Delhi



**AIMING FOR NORMALCY**  
Gupta at his Defence Colony residence

YASIR IOBAL

# NO ROOM FOR PANIC

**L**ong before e-commerce entered our lives, Defence Store in New Delhi's Defence Colony Market was one of the few shops that stocked butter paper and imported cocoa. For the past 68 years, it has attracted families, food enthusiasts and students from across the city. On May 17, owner Manoj Gupta downed the steel shutters of his store, not knowing when he would get to pull them up again. He had received word that he had tested positive for Covid that day. "My case made it to the newspapers. Almost overnight, everybody knew. There was panic—those who had been to the store were worried, even though we had been wearing masks and had observed social distancing throughout," says Gupta.

A diabetic, Gupta suffered a fever and cough for almost a week before he got tested—he had initially dismissed his symptoms as the common cold. "Doctors told me not to worry. But after three or

four days, the cough became more pronounced and my fever shot up," he says. Gupta's test results were received by his son, whose first words to his father were: "Don't panic, but you have Covid." Gupta didn't panic, but social media exploded with rumours and fear-mongering. "WhatsApp forwards spread so many lies. If nine people are infected, they will say 60. They have to exaggerate, which leads to needless worrying and social stigma," he says. Like several other Covid survivors, his advice to anyone who gets Covid is: "*Ghabrane ki itni zaroorat nahin hai* (there is no need to panic), stay positive and follow medical advice."

Gupta's entire family and his known contacts were tested. His nephew, 21, was asymptomatic and self-isolated at home. But Gupta's father, 76, tested positive and was showing symptoms. Both were admitted to Max Hospital, Saket, where Gupta spent 13 days on bed rest, taking the occasional walk

**"WhatsApp forwards spread so many lies. If nine people are infected, they will say 60. This leads to needless worry"**

around the Covid ward to keep his spirits up. His father, however, was admitted to the ICU after a few days with a lung infection. He received plasma treatment in early June and is now showing signs of recovery. "We had no problem finding plasma," he says, "the Delhi government is arranging donors. The doctors and staff at Max took extraordinary care of us."

Returning to normal was a matter of planning and foresight for the family. To reassure their customers, they had the entire store fumigated and discarded old products. "Customers are returning. There is no reason to be scared if you remove all risks and follow the guidelines," says Gupta. With business taking off again, his experience shows that precautions can indeed trump fear and stigma. ■

**—Sonali Acharjee**



## Ashok Takkar, 53

Officer, Sarva Haryana Gramin Bank, Gurgaon

**W**hen the car turned the corner to his house in Gurgaon on May 19, Ashok Takkar spotted his wife, son, and several neighbours standing outside. They gave him a hero's welcome, showering him with marigold petals and cheering his recovery from Covid. From that day on, Takkar says, everybody he met—from the vegetable vendor to office colleagues—wanted to know just one thing: “*Kaisa tha?*” Being the only case in his colony at the time, he had become a point of contact for many who were experiencing Covid anxiety, or were simply curious to hear what the experience was like. In Takkar's case, there really was little to fret over.

RAJWANT RAWAT

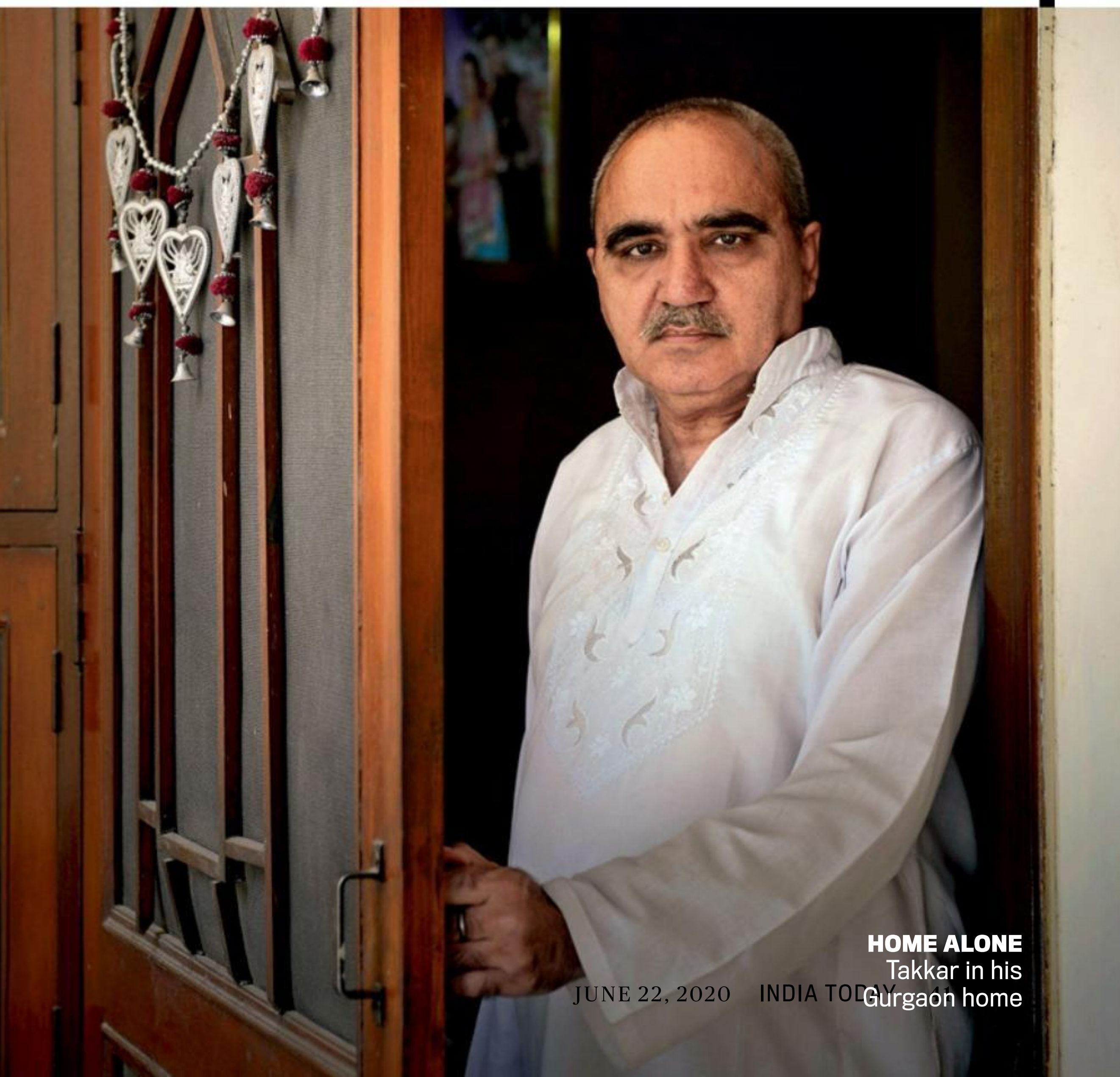
# BANKING ON HIMSELF

Around May 5, Takkar, who works at the Sarva Haryana Gramin Bank, realised he had a mild fever. When this persisted for a few days, he decided to go in for a Covid test at the privately-owned Aryan Hospital on May 9. A day later, his results came in positive. “I was depressed. That was my first reaction. I was also worried for my family,” he says. Both his wife and son, however, tested negative and Takkar was shifted to ESIC (Employees State Insurance Corporation) Hospital in Gurgaon. “I stayed there for nine days. I did not have any difficulty getting a bed. I had vitamin C every day, drank *haldi doodh* (turmeric milk) and lots of water,” he says. Thankfully for him, Takkar experienced no symptoms

other than fever. After four days, he went through a second test which came out negative. Five days later, he was home. “We need to stop building fear and drama around Covid. I was more depressed based on what I had read and heard about the disease than what happened to me. If you maintain good health, take your medicines and go to the doctor on time, all will be well even if you get infected. There is no need to panic,” he says, adding that keeping one's mind healthy is essential. “Mentally, too, you should be fit and prepared, because you will be alone and isolated, amid unfamiliar people and surroundings. It will be a testing time, and it will require courage and a calm mind.” ■

—Sonali Acharjee

“You need to be fit and mentally prepared, because you will be alone and isolated, amid unfamiliar people and surroundings. **It will be a testing time, requiring a calm mind**”



**HOME ALONE**  
Takkar in his Gurgaon home

JUNE 22, 2020 INDIA TODAY

**SPREADING  
AWARENESS**  
Khedawala in the  
Muslim locality  
of Palampur in  
Ahmedabad



## Imran Khedawala, 49

Congress MLA,  
Jamalpur-Khadia  
Ahmedabad

# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

**O**n May 11, 49-year-old Imran Khedawala, Congress MLA from Ahmedabad's Jamalpur-Khadia, was seen driving around his constituency in his white Toyota Innova, distributing immunity-boosting Ayurvedic medicines to his constituents. Many were surprised that he was out among them. A month ago, Khedawala had decided to get himself tested for COVID-19 in the hope that by posting such news on social media he could convince his constituents to cooperate with the state government's anti-Covid drive. Little did he know that he himself would test positive and have to remain in hospital for the next 14 days and in self-quarantine for another 12 days.

The initial days at the hospital were full of anxiety as Khedawala learnt from doctors that he was severely diabetic. He ran a mild fever too. Then, his sense of smell diminished. The news of the deaths of two party colleagues, Badruddin Shaikh and Siraj Khan Pathan, from Covid made him all the more de-

spondent. Khedawala, who saw four patients die while he was in hospital, says: "What I didn't learn in my entire life I have imbibed in just two months. The Almighty has taught me the essence of life."

Khedawala, who owns a textile-printing business, has been widely credited for his efforts in raising awareness of the government's anti-coronavirus campaign between March 26 and April 14, convincing thousands of Muslim citizens from his constituency to get tested. Many Muslims had been suspicious about the drive, believing it to be part of a secret identification exercise for the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

When Khedawala began accompanying medical teams to Muslim-majority areas to ask people to cooperate with the authorities, many labelled him a stooge of the government. However, he remained steadfast. "I would travel in an autorickshaw in the narrow lanes of the walled city with a loudspeaker in hand, appealing to people to come forward for testing," he says.

As a confidence-building measure, Khedawala made a video of himself getting tested and posted it on social media. His first test, in the first week of April, revealed him to be Covid-negative. This had some impact. Then, when the number of Covid deaths in Ahmedabad's walled city began rising, an increasing number of residents began coming forward. However, when Khedawala decided to repeat his earlier test in the hope of this bearing fruit a second time, he was found to be Covid-positive.

This had some unforeseen consequences as well. Khedawala had met with Chief Minister Vijay Rupani not long before the second test, and his positive result led to the CM having to go into self-quarantine. Seven members of Khedawala's immediate family were also found to be Covid-positive. Fortunately, all have recovered. When asked if he feared dying in the hospital, Khedawala replies: "Not at all. Perhaps one of the reasons was that my symptoms were never severe. However, it was painful to see four of my neighbours in the hospital ward die."

Since his recovery, the MLA has been a source of inspiration for other Covid patients. He has been sharing his experiences, hoping to give them the confidence to emerge victorious over the virus. ■

—Uday Mahurkar

**"I learnt life lessons, but I was not scared of dying. My symptoms were never very severe. However, it was painful to see four of my neighbours dying"**

**Vinay Bansal, 75**  
Retired bureaucrat,  
Mumbai

# HIGH ON PRAGMATISM

**V**inay Bansal is a stickler for rules. As India went into lockdown on March 25, the retired bureaucrat diligently followed social distancing measures and stepped out only for brief walks within the society premises. He also registered himself on the government's Aarogya Setu app. On May 6, when he developed a minor cough, he turned to home remedies for respite—saline water gargles, steam inhalation, drinking lots of warm fluids and turmeric milk. But when fever kicked in the next day, Bansal had read enough about COVID-19 to know he needed to step up. He updated his symptoms on Aarogya Setu and decided to get tested. Mindful of the danger of infecting his family, the 75-year-old headed on his own to the HN Reliance Foundation Hospital. He had no fever then, so an antibiotic was prescribed and a swab sample taken for testing.

Bansal was a prominent bureaucrat before retirement—he served as principal secretary to two chief ministers—so he received his test results directly from Nikhil Meswani, a member of the board of directors of Reliance Industries Ltd, and Dr Tarang Gianchandani, CEO of the hospital. “They were so encouraging and considerate that I had no time to bemoan my fate,” says Bansal. On May 9, he was admitted to Seven-Hills, a dedicated Covid hospital, and his treatment began. He took his iPad for company.

“We have no idea how he got it, even though you hear about how it afflicts those in his age group and with comorbidities,” says his daughter Gitika, who had a hard time dealing with the news. Bansal, though, had a more pragmatic approach to his diagnosis. “If you have the virus, you have it,” he says. “How do you tell the wind not to blow in a certain direction?” The septuagenarian exhibited no anxiety or distress as he recounted his experience, which, he is aware, was much better than the privations many other patients have suffered. Covid, for Bansal, was mostly like an “ordinary flu”, albeit one where following rules is essential.

In the hospital, Bansal was asymptomatic and despite his pre-existing condition of hypertension, he didn't need any special care besides medication. Days were, thankfully, uneventful. He finished reading *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda and *Krishnavatara III: The Five Broth-*

“If you have the virus, you have it. How do you **tell the wind not to blow in a certain direction?**”



ers by K.M. Munshi on Kindle. He also honed his skills in bridge and chess, playing online versions of the game. After 12 days without any symptoms, he was discharged and asked to quarantine at home.

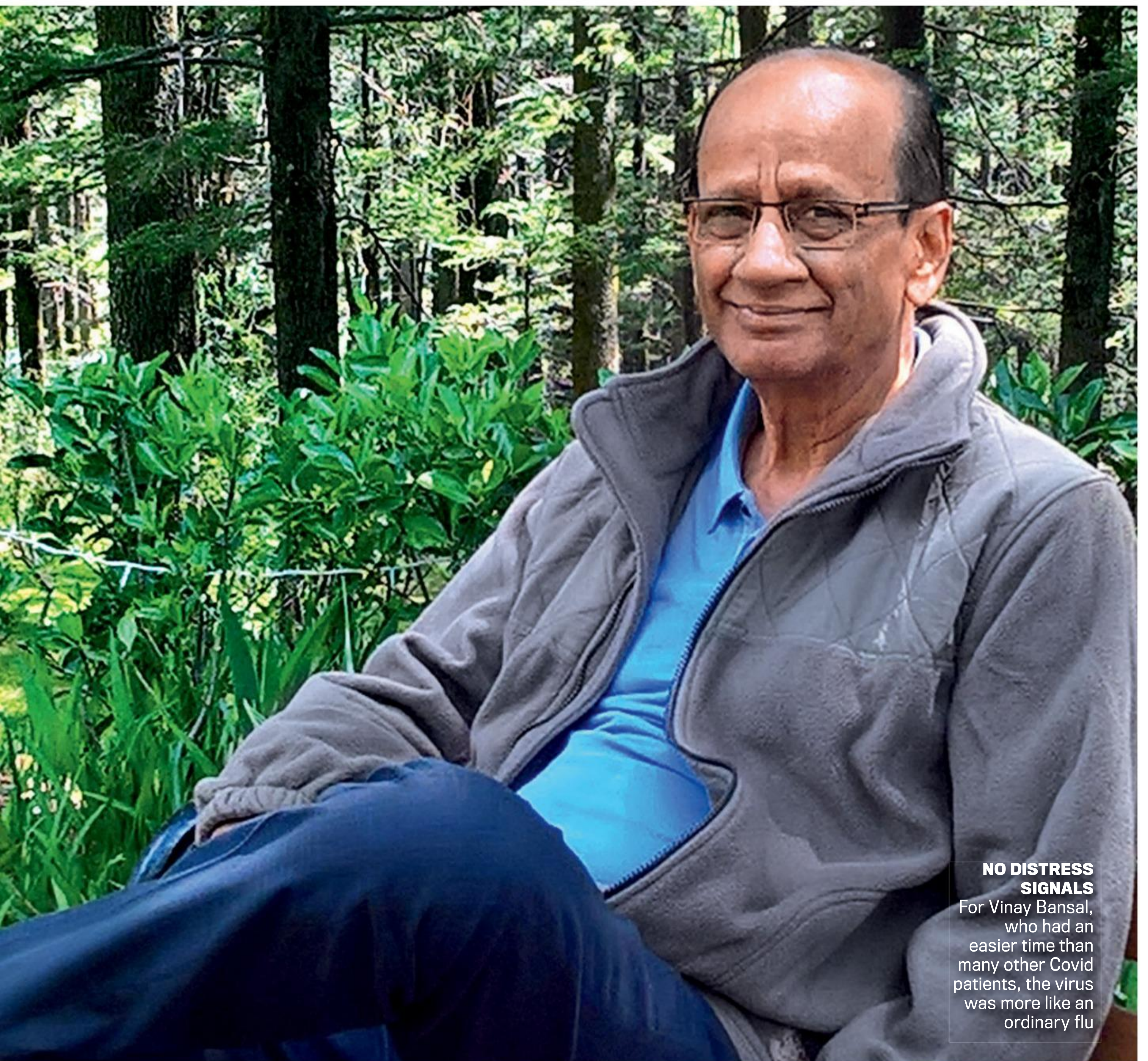
As accounts surface of Covid patients being harassed and ostracised on their return, Bansal has had little to report in that direction. Once back home, he wrote a letter to the residential society apologising for the trouble

his diagnosis had caused them after the building was labelled a containment zone as per the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation guidelines. "I got encouraging responses. Everyone has been very kind," he recounts.

In his second phase of quarantine, WhatsApp messages and calls from his erstwhile colleagues in the Indian Administrative Service, a few members of the building and daily ones from his daughter helped him while

away the seemingly interminable days. On June 5, after testing negative, he finally opened the door to his room to see his son, daughter-in-law and five-year-old granddaughter. "It was a great family reunion," says Bansal, with a laugh. He is still being cautious though. He confines himself to listening to stories from his grandchild. Giving her a hug, he says sorrowfully, will have to wait a few more weeks. ■

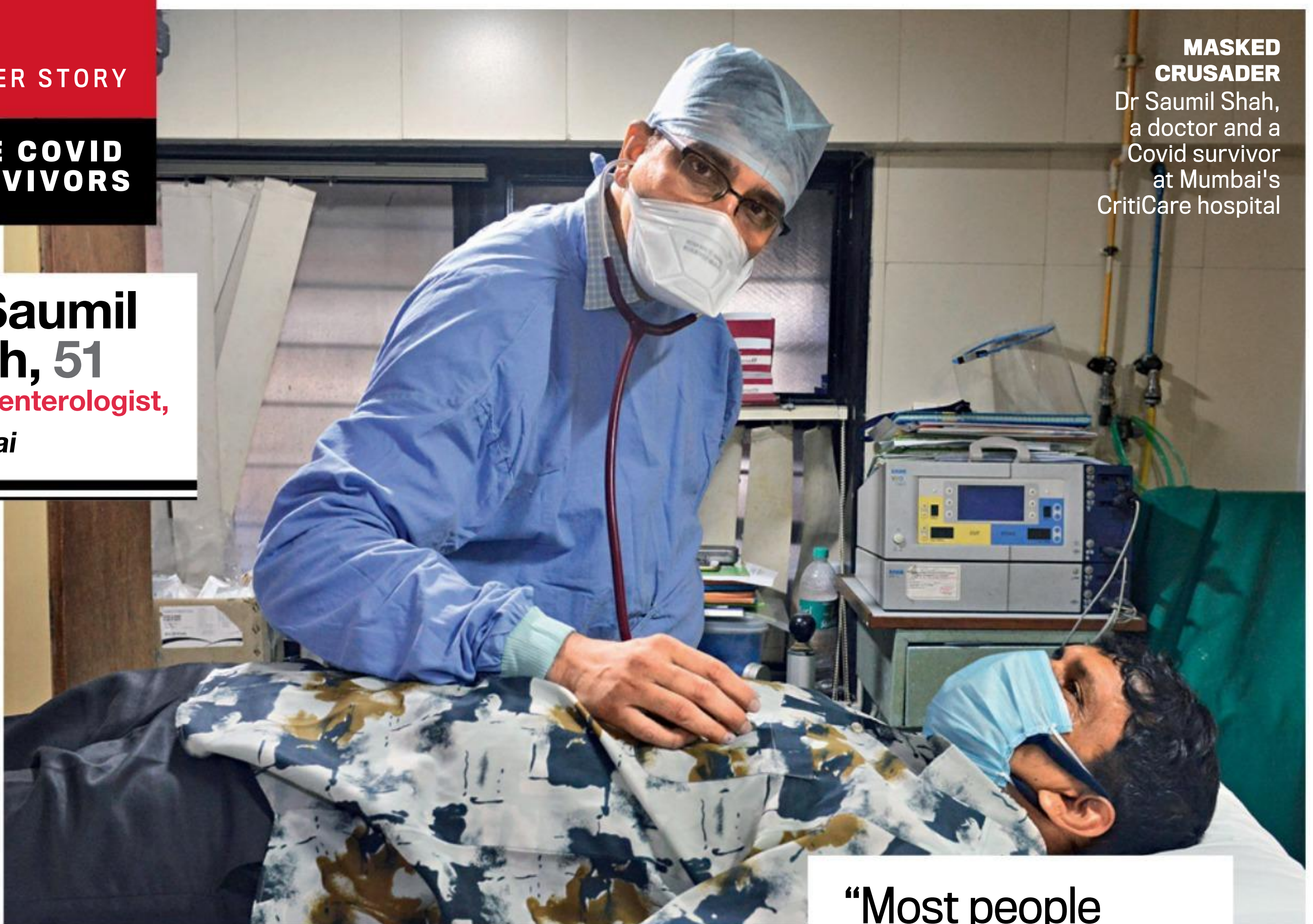
**-Suhani Singh**



**NO DISTRESS SIGNALS**

For Vinay Bansal, who had an easier time than many other Covid patients, the virus was more like an ordinary flu

**Dr Saumil Shah, 51**  
Gastroenterologist,  
Mumbai



**MASKED CRUSADER**  
Dr Saumil Shah, a doctor and a Covid survivor at Mumbai's CitiCare hospital

MANDAR DEODHAR

## BATTLE OF THE MIND

It's an invisible enemy and no one can escape it. Eventually, almost all of us will get COVID-19 and most people will recover. Be strong emotionally and physically, exercise and eat healthy to increase your immunity." This is the advice from Dr Saumil Shah, a leading Mumbai-based gastroenterologist and now a Covid survivor. Shah contracted the virus in late March, weeks after attending a wedding in Mumbai where a few international guests were present.

It began with his 83-year-old mother running fever and complaining of loss of appetite. Her second Covid test result came out positive. Being attached to Mumbai's Lilavati Hospital, Shah got his mother admitted there. "The toughest part was not being allowed to meet her for the first two days though we kept talking to her [on the phone]," he says. Shah was forbidden from seeing patients and

entering the wards as he had been in close contact with his mother.

When the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) tested 10 members of the extended family, Shah tested positive. "The rule at that time was to get admitted if you tested positive," he says. His treatment at Lilavati, though, was short. Four days and two negative tests later, he was home. "I only had to tackle boredom in hospital," he says. The family followed the fortnight-long quarantine rule strictly and was assisted by neighbours, who would deposit vegetables and provisions at their door.

With lanes around his building cordoned off, a few people in the vicinity got worried. Fear of the disease, Shah says, is exaggerated. "Most people who get medical care in time and do not have other underlying diseases are recovering," he says. But he does admit that the actual number of infected

"Most people who get medical care on time recover. **What is worrying is lots of people getting sick at the same time**"

people may be 10 times higher as many cases are asymptomatic and therefore untested.

Even as Shah awaits a call from hospitals to donate convalescent plasma, he warns that the virus presents itself in varied ways, such as loss of appetite, extreme weakness or abdominal pain with no respiratory trouble. The only way people can avoid catching the virus is by maintaining hygiene and physical distancing and building immunity through diet and exercise. "The only worrying part is to have lots of people falling ill at the same time. It would be unfortunate if a patient dies because of lack of medical care," says Shah. ■

—Aditi Pai

**Faiyaz  
Ahmed, 29**

**Indian Railways  
Machine  
Maintenance,  
Patna**

# ON A COVID ROLLERCOASTER

**F**aiyaz Ahmed, employed in the Indian Railways' machine maintenance unit in Savarkundla, Gujarat, was visiting his family in Patna for Holi when he felt the first few symptoms of Covid coming on. Ahmed, who returns to Patna every year during the festival, had been mingling with family and friends since March 6 and had even attended a wedding.

His health troubles began on the night of March 19. It started with a cough, some throat pain followed by breathlessness. Since there was no fever, Ahmed waited a day before calling a medical helpline on March 21. He was advised some medication, but no test. However, as the problems persisted, Faiyaz set out to see a doctor. March 22 being Janata Curfew

**POSITIVELY HEALTHY** Faiyaz Ahmad recuperates at his home in Patna after surviving Covid

day meant he had to walk more than four kilometres with his 60-year-old father to find a doctor. They finally did find one, who, after a basic check-up, called an ambulance immediately which took him to Nalanda Medical College and Hospital.

Faiyaz's hospital stay was a series of highs and lows. He had to wait a full 24 hours before his sample was taken at all to test for Covid. His father, though, faced a tough time as he waited for updates about his son's health and was, at times, at the receiving end

neighbours even tried to get the family to leave the housing society.

"The good things started happening when the Indian Railways intervened, offering to shift me to a railway hospital," says Ahmed. The most comforting memory he has of the hospital was when a doctor told him: "*Main tumhein kuchh bhi nahin hone doonga* (I will not let anything happen to you)."

Ahmed feels that if you start to lose hope, recovery becomes harder. "After the first two days of disappointment, I decided to do push-ups whenever I felt downcast and sing aloud to myself," says Ahmed. Now, more than two months after recovery, Ahmed says he has left all the bitterness behind. "I was only the third Covid patient in Bihar. Obviously, people, including a few health staff, were panicking."

Ahmed wants it to be known that the coronavirus is not life-threatening. "At least not for those free of other ailments. But the suffering that it piles on you and your family is worse than the virus. So, my advice to everyone is to take all possible precautions in public places even if you feel it is uncomfortable. If you still contract it, never let your morale dip," he says, with a hard-won smile. ■

**—Amitabh Srivastava**

**"Coronavirus is not life-threatening for those free of other ailments. But the suffering it piles on you is worse than the virus"**

of inconsiderate behaviour from the hospital staff and police. At one point, Ahmed himself was kept in a room with no fan which prompted him to make a video documenting the lack of facilities and the poor conditions at the hospital and release it on social media. At home, Ahmed's family faced a bit of discrimination. A few

RANJAN RAHI

COVER STORY

THE COVID  
SURVIVORS

**Jhuma  
Murmu, 31**  
Nurse, Kolkata



**DUTY FIRST**  
Jhuma Murmu  
at her home  
in Howrah



# KEEPING THE FAITH

It was the end of March and West Bengal was just waking up to the realities of dealing with Covid. Satyabala ID Hospital in Howrah district, converted into a dedicated Covid unit, was struggling with its limited resources. Just 10 sets of personal protective equipment (PPE) had been delivered to the hospital, and Jhuma, a nurse and way down in the hierarchical chain, would get to wear one only if she had to approach a patient for swab collection. For taking temperature, changing urine pots and other activities that did not require actual physical contact with patients, Murmu and other nurses had to make do with masks and gloves.

On April 1, a Haj pilgrim admitted to the hospital tested positive. Before the confirmation report had arrived, a spiritually-inclined Murmu would hang around the patient's bed, hoping to hear the pilgrim's stories as she fixed saline bottles and took his temperature. One day, Murmu saw him gasping for breath as his oxygen saturation percentage dipped, and

even though she had no protective gear on, she couldn't help but rush to his aid. The man, whom Murmu had affectionately started calling 'Haji dadu', passed away the same day. Two days later, Murmu felt the first signs of Covid—irritation in the throat and common flu symptoms. She realised she and her teammates could be carriers of the virus, having worked in the Covid ward for almost a fortnight since March 21 with no protective equipment.

Testing perhaps would have taken a few more days had the medical personnel not protested against the hospital authorities. Murmu was tested on April 10. "My immediate concern was my 69-year-old father, who is hypertensive as well as diabetic," says Murmu. "I knew they would be packed off to a quarantine centre and be left for days with other Covid suspects. On the morning of April 12, Murmu received the results—she had tested positive for the coronavirus. She was admitted to M.R. Bangur Covid Hospital. "I was told to bring along the bare minimum. I just wanted my Bible and mobile phone. The Bible helped me survive the dreadful storm that is Covid. There were times when gulping even a spoonful of food was difficult and water tasted like bitter-gourd juice. The condition of the toilet, being shared by 30 people, used to be horrible. Even the thought of having to use it would make me throw up. It was a daunting challenge. I thought of the lord and his sufferings and felt calm within. I went into respiratory distress only once and had to be

administered oxygen. But I kept insisting to my attending sister to not put me through nebulisation as it could lead to other complications."

After 15 days, Murmu was discharged. But she was now worried whether she would be accepted by the neighbours in her apartment building. "I was reluctant to go home to my parents, even though they had tested negative. I was required to self-isolate at home for another 10 days." But the welcome was grand—there were people in the balconies and staircase out to greet her and someone even left a bouquet of freshly-plucked flowers at her door.

It has been a month and Murmu is back at her job in the Covid ward. She says she has emerged stronger from this experience. "Having had Covid, I can handle patients better with a lot more patience and endurance. I am in a position to tell them that this too shall pass," she says. Murmu's illness has ensured that hospital authorities are now actively ensuring enough PPE kits for all staff members. She also quarantines herself at her own expense at a small hotel in Salkia (Howrah) during her week off which follows a week of working in the Covid ward. "I cannot put the lives of 23 families living in our building at risk," says Murmu. As she gets ready for work—dressed in her crisp white uniform, her nose and mouth covered with a mask and her hair wrapped in a scarf, she slips the Bible in her satchel. It has become as integral to her as the mask in Covid times.

—Romita Datta

"At times gulping even a spoonful of food was difficult; water tasted like bitter-gourd juice. **The thought of using a toilet shared by 30 people made me throw up**"

**Jitendra Awhad, 56**  
Minister of Housing,  
Maharashtra



## OUT OF THE ABYSS

**J**itendra Awhad, the housing minister of Maharashtra, was busy distributing food packets to around 80,000 people in his largely Muslim constituency, Mumbra, on the outskirts of Mumbai, on April 10 when he felt a wave of exhaustion come on. His daughter Natasha, a student, worried at the sight of her father looking frail, suggested he go for a check-up. Awhad, a member of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), rejected the idea outright. "It is only overexertion," he said. Nine days later, he fell unconscious. He was first rushed to Jupiter Hospital in Thane but later shifted to Fortis in Mulund as his condition worsened.

Awhad says he does not remember anything of the next three days. "Probably, the blood supply to my brain was inadequate. I had temporary amnesia." He was put on life support for a couple of days.

Only when the ventilator removed on April 27, does he remember being told he had COVID-19. On May 3, two subsequent tests showed a negative result and by May 10, he was back home.

Awhad blames the World Health Organization (WHO) for not including fatigue in the initial list of Covid symptoms. "I did not have symptoms like fever or cough. That made me think everything was fine with me. My ignorance led to carelessness," he says. The three weeks he spent in hospital, Awhad says, are best forgotten. He didn't even know of his diagnosis till an attendant at the hospital gave him a lunch plate with a label describing him as a Covid patient. His wife Ruta, too, had tested positive for the virus and was under treatment. "Natasha was alone at home," says Awhad. "I did not have access to a mobile phone or TV and my

"I did not have symptoms like fever or cough. **That made me think that everything was fine with me**"

ANI

head was full of only negative thoughts." The nurses and doctors at the hospitals were his saviours during this time. They encouraged him to stay positive and look at the future. "The nurses were very kind. They used to rush to my side anytime I felt nauseous. They kept my hope alive," he adds.

While on life support, Awhad managed to draw up a rough will to ensure Natasha would be well cared for should something happen. "The doctors had told Natasha I had only a 30 per cent chance of survival. She handled it very bravely," says Awhad. Back with his family now, he is determined to spend more time with them. ■

—Kiran D. Tare

**J. Santhoshkumar,**  
**40**

**Junior health inspector,**  
**Kerala**

## A HINT OF PERSONAL TOUCH

**S**anthoshkumar, the junior health inspector in Chowara village of Kerala's Ernakulam district, is back at work teaching people about the precautions to take against COVID-19. He is scrupulous about the sanitisation programmes in the village and visits the homes of those quarantined regularly to check on them. But not many know that Santhosh himself is a Covid survivor. When the locals ask him how deadly the virus is, he merely smiles and tells them to wear masks and take every single precaution to not pass the infection on to others. No one realises that he is speaking from personal experience.

As a health inspector, Santhosh has been actively involved in the preparations to keep Covid under check in his area. He was deployed at the Cochin International Airport to screen passengers flying into the state between March 19 and 21. After his stint at the airport, the 40-year-old returned to Ernakulam for a short break and was planning to visit his family in Parasala in capital Thiruvananthapuram for a bit. However, on the morning of March 22, he woke up with a fever. He immediately contacted his health supervisor and told him he needed medicines. He remained in isolation for five days during which he developed a cough and pain in his throat. On March 27, he went to Kalamassery Medical



ASHISH VINCENT

**BACK TO WORK**  
J. Santhoshkumar in Kochi

College in Ernakulam for a test and was informed the next day that he had tested positive for the coronavirus, making him the second health worker to test positive in the state.

Meanwhile, the district medical officer, district collector and health minister K.K. Shailaja were informed about his status and they all called to assure him that he would receive the best medical treatment. Santhosh had just one request for the minister—that his family not be told about his diagnosis. He feared his wife and mother would not be able to handle it.

**“I talked to my wife every day on WhatsApp. My family had no idea I was being treated at the hospital”**

“I was not scared. I went to the hospital and spent another 18 days (March 28 to April 15) there. I told my wife and mother that two of my colleagues had tested positive and that I had been directed to stay under hospital quarantine. I talked to my wife every day on WhatsApp. They had no idea I was undergoing treatment at the hospital,” says Santhosh. During his 18 days in hospital, there was a bit of a scare when he developed chest pain and lost his sense of taste. After the first six days, though, his fever subsided and he improved steadily with medication. After being discharged on April 18, Santhosh went into a week-long home quarantine. He did eventually visit his family and also told them about his battle with Covid.

As Santhosh left home on April 25 to rejoin work, what gave him immense joy was his daughter saying how proud she was of him. “My infection taught me how to handle a situation without panicking,” he says. “We’ll have to live with Covid for some time, so we must all join the fight against it.” ■

**—Jeemon Jacob**

## Punna Reddy, 43

Founder & CEO Purview Services, Edinburgh  
(Treated in Hyderabad)

# A REDDY RECKONER

**P**unna Reddy was confident he would pass the thermal screening at the airport without any trouble. Travelling from Edinburgh, via Dubai, to Hyderabad on March 14, Reddy was checked for signs of COVID-19 and cleared. On reaching home in the city's upscale Jubilee Hills after a week of back-to-back meetings in the UK, a relieved Reddy went to bed. The next day, he woke up feverish and with a headache. "Being a workaholic, this was normal for me," says Reddy, but as his fever rose to 101.9, he decided to get tested at the state-run Gandhi Hospital in

Secunderabad.

"The hospital felt like a war zone," says Reddy. "There was a long queue and I had to mention my travel history to seek a priority check-up." A day later, he was confirmed positive—officially Telangana's Covid patient No. 4.

Reddy's first reaction was despair. "I thought of my wife and two teenage children back in Edinburgh and how I had promised them I would return soon," says Reddy. "I wondered if I would recover or end up as a statistic—counted among the many who died of Covid."

Reddy eventually forced himself to look at the brighter side. When he

informed his wife, he said, "I am positive [for Covid], and with this positivity I will defeat the virus."

Reddy stayed up to date on Covid news, and kept telling himself this was just a fever and that he would soon defeat the virus. He had video calls with his wife and children every day. "The conditions at Gandhi Hospital were way better than at other government hospitals," says Reddy. "Their excellent treatment helped me recover early." On April 1, he was discharged with instructions to be home-quarantined for a month. During this period, he put out a motivational video message for other Covid patients.

Now, Reddy, as the founder and CEO of technology company Purview Services, has launched Purview COVID-19, an artificial intelligence WhatsApp-based chat bot conforming to WHO guidelines, which helps diagnose Covid based on symptoms. It is in use in Oman and the Netherlands. "All this activity kept up my adrenaline, and I almost forgot I was a patient in quarantine," says Reddy.

Looking back, he says: "A crisis does not make us, but reveals what we are made of. Covid has brought to the fore human fallibility. It has given us a perspective. Only a miniscule [fraction] of the power of technology has been harnessed. We should focus on building the best facilities using technology in a prudent way." ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

### TECH AT WORK

Punna Reddy has developed an AI chat bot to help with the initial diagnosis of Covid



PANIL KUMAR

"A crisis does not make us, but reveals what we are made of. Covid has brought to the fore human fallibility. **It has given us a perspective**"

**IN THE LINE OF DUTY** Dr Sumedh Kesaria at his home in Mumbai



“The stigma is very frustrating. I had contracted it while doing my duty and **people were outing me as though I was cursed**”

if I was cursed.”

At the hospital, in the unfamiliar role of a patient, Kesaria's fever dropped, but his eyes hurt, his sense of smell vanished and there was a constant weakness. But it was the mental strain Kesaria struggled with. “For a day and a half, I was just scared I had infected my family,” he says. “I kept replaying the events of the week in my head thinking what I would have done differently.” He was

able to calm down only once he received word that everyone else in his family had tested negative. Thereafter, he began a routine—meditation, walking around in the room, revisiting favourites like Harry Potter books, listening to a Coldplay-heavy playlist, video calls with his family and watching *Ramayana* on Doordarshan. “I thought if Ram could be in *vanvaas* for 14 years, surely I could pass 14 days.” Kesaria was discharged in a week, having tested negative twice.

He returned home, surprisingly, to applause from neighbours' windows. “That was healing,” he says. On April 22, after his home quarantine was over, he finally stepped out of his room. Getting out of the house for a simple stroll would take another 10 days.

Kesaria is yet to return to work, but once he does he wants to be posted in the Covid ward. His antibodies reduce the likelihood of reinfection. For the moment, he would like to find a temporary place to stay in to protect his family. Till then, Kesaria is trying to make sense of the disease. “Covid is dicey because the symptoms overlap with the common cold. What differs is that it is quite infectious. The general dictum is that if there is contact with a Covid-positive person, or if the common flu symptoms persist beyond three days, get tested.” He may not be back at work yet, but as a pulmonary specialist, he has been allaying the worries of patients who call asking if they have Covid. “This is a one-of-a-kind situation. Humanity must prevail. This too will pass,” he says. ■

—Suhani Singh

## Dr Sumedh Kesaria, 32

Pulmonary specialist, Mumbai

# ROLE REVERSAL

It was March 20, the early days of Covid, but Sumedh Kesaria, a pulmonary specialist at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital, was already following precautions and, when not working, confining himself to a room in his house where he lives with his joint family. The designated person for swab collection from those returning from abroad or walking in with fever, Kesaria, on March 27, took seven swab samples. He was wearing an N-95 mask, goggles and double-layered gloves throughout. One patient though, he recalls, showed severe symptoms. Two days later, Kesaria had joint pain and fever. By March 31, it was confirmed he was Covid posi-

tive. The said patient, Kesaria learnt, had passed away.

The next few days proved to be harrowing for Kesaria. It took him police intervention for him to get an ambulance to take him to SevenHills Hospital, at 11 pm! “It was pathetic,” he says. “No one was ready to take me.” Downcast and anxious for his family, Kesaria also became a target of WhatsApp harassment. His name and address were circulated in groups, leaving family members to deal with incessant calls. A neighbour also recorded a video of his house being sanitised. “The stigma is frustrating,” says Kesaria. “I caught it while doing my duty and people were outing me as



# A LONELY PASSING

COVID-19 changed life as we knew it but it also forced us to change the way we deal with death. Mourning rituals are hurried, last respects must be paid at a distance



## QUIET BURIAL

A Covid victim gets careful interment in Jaipur. Funerals in the time of coronavirus have become rushed affairs, where practicality has taken precedence over sorrow







## TRUNCATED RITUALS

A boy performing the last rites of his father at the Ratan Babu Ghat in Cossipore, Kolkata



1

2

Photograph by PANKAJ NANGIA



3

Photograph by CHANDRADEEPP KUMAR



Photograph by PANKAJ NANGIA



### 1. JOURNEY'S END

The relative of a man who died of Covid watches as municipal workers wheel in his loved one through the entrance of a cremation ground in Delhi

### 2. MASKED EMOTION

A municipal worker prepares the body of a man who died of Covid for cremation along with the relatives of the deceased at a crematorium in New Delhi

### 3. PANDEMIC PURGATORY

With many unable to immerse the ashes of their loved ones, Pandit Dharam Vir of Delhi's Lodhi Road Crematorium looks after the urns containing the ashes of the deceased

# HOPING AGAINST HOPE

**THOUSANDS OF SMALL BUSINESSES ARE ON THE BRINK, WITH THE GOVERNMENT RESCUE PACKAGE FALLING SHORT OF THEIR EXPECTATIONS**

By **SHWETA PUNJ**

**C** OVID-19 has kicked business owners in the gut. Thousands of small businesses, employing millions, face the grim prospect of permanent closure. A survey by the All India Manufacturers' Association found that more than a third of the self-employed and small and medium businesses did not see any hope of recovery and were on the verge of winding up. A national multi-institutional survey by the SKOCH Group, a private think-tank, and FISME (the Federation of Indian Small and Medium Enterprises) conducted towards the end of May, found that 62 per cent of surveyed MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) would let go of employees, and 78 per cent would cut wages. Both surveys were conducted *after* the recent government interventions.

On May 13, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled a Rs 3.75 lakh crore package for MSMEs, including Rs 3 lakh crore of collateral-free loans for businesses with outstanding dues up to Rs 25 crore, equity infusion of Rs 50,000 crore through a fund of funds, a reclassifica-

**₹3,00,000**  
CRORE  
COLLATERAL-FREE LOANS

Units with outstanding loans up to Rs 25 crore and turnover of Rs 100 crore are eligible. These four-year tenure loans have a moratorium on principal repayment of 12 months. The scheme can be availed until October 31, 2020

**₹20,000**  
CRORE  
SUBORDINATE DEBT

Promoters of MSMEs with outstanding loans declared 'stressed' or 'NPA' will receive bank loans they can infuse as fresh equity

**₹50,000**  
CRORE  
EQUITY INFUSION

Equity-based funding for MSMEs through a fund of funds, set up with a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore



## AJAY JONEJA, 53

Owner, Oliver McInroy, Moradabad, UP  
(‘Small’ manufacturer/ exporter of furniture,  
furniture accessories and lighting)

**Turnover: Rs 30 crore p.a.**

**No. of employees: 170**

### THE CRISIS

Joneja, who says he’s lost Rs 1.5 crore over the past three months, has restarted operations at a third of his set-up capacity. Six ready-to-ship containers are idling because buyers have pushed delivery dates. For future orders, he says, supply of hardware inputs like screws, rivets and such have been impacted. “Ours is a labour-intensive unit and we’re facing a labour shortage.” Given this, he is re-training workers across departments, though his production line requires specialists. He has paid minimum wages but those earning over Rs 50,000 per month have taken 50 per cent cuts. Rajiv Kumar, 42, a packer in the factory, supports a family of five on a salary of Rs 10,200. “We have

cut back expenses drastically,” he says.

### DID THE STIMULUS HELP?

Joneja says he might go for the collateral-free working capital loan “depending on my order book”. His company does not qualify for employees’ provident fund relief since most of his workers earn more than Rs 15,000 per month.

### WHAT MORE/ ELSE IS NEEDED?

Support in paying salaries would have freed up capital to soften the blow of deferred orders, says Joneja, adding that the state should have intervened more effectively to prevent the exodus of labour.

—Shwweta Punj

## SUPPORT FOR THE SECTOR

➤ **Revised MSME classification:** Aimed at incentivising MSMEs to grow—under the earlier system, firms would lose government support after attaining a certain size. Now, manufacturing and service sector firms will be measured under a common

metric: micro units are those with investment below Rs 1 crore and turnover under Rs 5 crore; small firms are those with investment less than Rs 10 crore and turnover below Rs 50 crore; medium enterprises are those with investment under Rs 20 crore and

turnover less than Rs 100 crore  
➤ **Priority for domestic firms:** Global companies cannot participate in government tenders valued up to Rs 200 crore  
➤ **Improved cash flows:** Pending payments to MSMEs to be cleared within 45 days

tion of MSMEs to encourage growth and a promise that government and central public sector undertakings (PSUs) would release all pending payments to MSMEs within 45 days of the announcement.

While a section of economists termed the package fiscally prudent, business owners withheld their verdict till more details were available. Three weeks later, thousands of MSMEs feel a sense of abandonment. They draw comparisons between India's stimulus package and those announced by the United States and Germany—the US has cleared a \$500 billion aid package for small businesses, while Germany is considering giving aid of up to €50,000 a month to freelancers and companies that employ up to 249 workers. Germany has allocated up to €25 billion from June to August to make up for coronavirus-related loss of sales.

Millions of small Indian businesses are suffering on several counts—higher compliance costs relating to the physical distancing and sanitisation demands of a post-Covid world, a lack of labour to resume operations, a lack of direct fiscal support and vulnerability on the health front. Issues like these are weighing on the minds of millions of small business owners, leaving them asking: Will my business survive?

### PAIN POINTS

In the recent past, small business owners have also had to deal with policy flip-flops. Amitabh Kharbanda, director of Sunlord Apparel in Noida, an export-oriented unit of home furnishings and garments to the US and European markets, points out that the Uttar Pradesh government had said, in early May, that labour laws would be relaxed and factories would be allowed to operate 12-hour shifts. However, the

## ASHISH GROVER, 50

Managing partner, Hawk Eye, Raisen, MP  
(‘Small’ packaging firm dealing with diapers, sanitary napkins and batteries)

**Turnover: Rs 25 crore p.a.**  
**No. of employees: 1,000**

### THE CRISIS

Hawk Eye's packaging plant can process 5.4 million diapers, 4.4 million sanitary napkins and 423,000 batteries per day. The plant was closed for the first two weeks after the lockdown was announced. After sanitary napkins and diapers were reclassified as essential goods, it was allowed to reopen, but battery packaging was not permitted for another two weeks. Now, though there are no restrictions, output has fallen. The plant is operating with 40 per cent of its workers and without night shifts. Grover says the company has lost about Rs 50 lakh per month in billing—roughly half its revenue.

### DID THE STIMULUS HELP?

Grover says the government's

package did not do enough for factories—there is no support for running costs like electricity bills. He says the company is currently studying the schemes for fresh credit. The support for employees' provident fund payments will help, he says, and the reduction in tax deducted at source has also given the company some support in terms of liquidity.

### WHAT MORE/ ELSE IS NEEDED?

More support was needed to meet running expenses. Better access to liquidity would also help. Grover says the lockdown also led to an exodus of skilled workers, and that measures to prevent this should have been taken in time.

—Rahul Noronha

PANKAJ TIWARI



**ARUN SARNOBAT, 71**  
**PRIYA SARNOBAT, 38**

Chairman/ director, Prijai Heat Exchangers, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra ('Medium' manufacturer of spare parts for the air-conditioning industry under the 'Enero' brand)

**Turnover: Rs 90 crore p.a. No. of employees: 400**



MANDAR DEODHAR

**THE CRISIS**

Arun Sarnobat's factory remained closed for 45 days during the lockdown. Since partially reopening on May 6, he has found it difficult to find workers—almost half his staff of 400 are migrants, who have left for their home states. He says he spends Rs 10,000 a day just ferrying staff to his plant. Despite having no revenue at all, he paid his staff for March and half their salaries for April. Since resuming operations, his factory has been running a single shift instead of the usual three. He says he has lost Rs 17.4 crore in sales between April and May.

**DID THE STIMULUS HELP?**

Sarnobat says the initiatives announced by the Centre are insufficient. "The government has only postponed the repayment of loans. We will have to pay them back with [added] interest," he says. Priya Sarnobat says the initiatives are more likely to benefit medium-sized companies

than small and micro firms. She adds that the Centre's support for employees' provident fund payments will not benefit their company since most of their workers earn over Rs 15,000 per month.

**WHAT MORE/ ELSE IS NEEDED?**

Priya says firms were looking for cash to get through the lockdown rather than the option of taking on more loans. "The government should have reimbursed or waived fixed expenses and interest on loans, reduced GST and income tax rates and electricity charges, and reimbursed at least 33 per cent of wages and salaries for the lockdown period," she says, adding that having to pay wages despite the lockdown hits firms hard. Most of the 300,000 workers living in the TTC industrial area in Navi Mumbai live in unhygienic conditions, she points out, urging the government to offer them living spaces at subsidised rates.

—M.G. Arun

**PRASHANT PATEL, 37**

Owner, R.K. Synthesis, Ahmedabad/ Surat, Gujarat ('Medium' firm producing chemicals for pharma, cosmetics and agriculture sectors and dyes for textiles, leather, wood, food, paper, ink, wool and pigment industries)

**Turnover: Rs 81 cr p.a. No. of employees: 160**

**THE CRISIS**

The lockdown halted all work, but Patel had to continue paying salaries. "Our products were ready, but we couldn't send them; our revenue target for April was Rs 8-10 crore, which was lost." When the lockdown was partially lifted in May, nearly 60 per cent of workers left. He is

bracing for losses of Rs 20 crore in three months (March-May).

**DID THE STIMULUS HELP?**

Patel says: "We do not see loans as a stimulus." EMIs and GST payments may have been deferred, but interest will still have to be paid. He says the Gujarat government's move to waive minimum electricity and CNG charges and levy only usage charges helped.

**WHAT MORE/ ELSE IS NEEDED?**

Patel suggests that business expenses incurred during the lockdown—interest, salaries, utility bills, etc.—should be considered



NANDAN DAVE

as industry credit, to be adjusted against government dues. He says this would have the added benefit of not burdening bank balance sheets.

—Shwweta Punj

PURUSHOTTAM DIWAKAR



## GAURAV GHOSH, 30

Owner, Garden View Hotel, Jaipur, Rajasthan ('Small' budget hotel with a popular bar)

Turnover: Rs 6 crore p.a.  
No. of employees: 75

### THE CRISIS

Ghosh says that one-seventh of his turnover goes to paying taxes, excluding local municipal taxes, and that after accounting for salaries and other expenses, his hotel earns a profit of six to eight per cent. During the lockdown, with no business, Ghosh was still left with major running costs—Rs 10-12 lakh in salaries and advances, Rs 3.5 lakh in fixed electricity charges for March-May, Rs 1 lakh to take care of staff on site and Rs 1 lakh for other costs, including utilities. Additionally, he had to pay Rs 5 lakh

in interest on loans until June and lost about Rs 5 lakh in food and drinks that had to be dumped.

### DID THE STIMULUS HELP?

Ghosh says he couldn't avail the employees' provident fund benefit because 90 per cent of his employees earn more than Rs 15,000. He also rules out taking an additional loan from either the government or banks. He says that the moratorium on EMIs is a good move—it could free up some capital to take care of expenses.

### WHAT MORE/ ELSE IS NEEDED?

A direct benefit transfer from the government to employees would have helped more, says Ghosh, adding that a deferment of electricity bills for the next six months would have eased the financial pressure. He is hoping for measures to ease the reopening of business.

—Rohit Parihar

latter provision was soon revoked. (The state government had issued a notification on this matter on May 8 that was to remain in force till July 19. But the state authorities had come under fire for this and had to revoke their decision.)

Meanwhile, the promoter of an MSME based in Odisha says his unit had orders for personal protective equipment (PPE) kits from a Bhubaneswar-based PSU. However, the firm received an email from the PSU on May 26 saying that it would not be accepting any deliveries after the end of that day. This sudden announcement left trucks full of PPE kits stranded outside the PSU's warehouse. This, despite repeated assurances by Union MSME minister Nitin Gadkari that the government and PSUs would make good on finance minister Sitharaman's promise that all pending dues to MSMEs—a staggering Rs 5 lakh crore, by some estimates—would be paid within 45 days of the announcement on May 13. Nearly 88 per cent of those surveyed in the FISME-SKOCH survey said they wanted government payments to be made urgently, while 90 per cent said they wanted immediate income tax and GST refunds—a move that was announced in April, to be implemented with 'immediate effect'.

An assessment by FISME finds that only about 40 per cent of MSMEs were able to open nearly a month after the government began its staggered easing of lockdown restrictions, and that nearly all are working at 20-30 per cent capacity. "[The government] has closed its eyes to this," laments Anil Bhardwaj, secretary general of FISME. "The EPF announcement benefits a minuscule percentage [of firms]. The Rs 3 lakh crore bonanza is mostly optics. Banks





## PRADEEP AGGARWAL, 55

Director, Spark Engineering, Sahibabad, UP  
(‘Small’ manufacturer/ exporter of bicycle gears)

**Turnover: Rs 33 crore p.a.**  
**No. of employees: 250**

### THE CRISIS

Aggarwal’s company has been manufacturing bicycle gears for over 30 years. He has restarted operations, but output is down to a third—from 300,000 pieces a month, he is currently manufacturing 100,000 a month. Only about 80 of his 250 workers remain. Some of those who left for their hometowns want to return, but with no transport available, he does not expect them back until the middle of July. He approached his bank for an export loan (which have better terms), since exports comprise 90 per cent of his business but was told he could apply only for a domestic loan. Unsure when again he can run at full capacity,

he has written off sales for nearly a quarter, and is bracing for losses of Rs 8-10 crore.

### DID THE STIMULUS HELP?

“The package is helpful, but I doubt banks will give loans. We expected much more.” Besides access to finance, he says, access to labour is a big issue: there are orders he can’t fulfil.

### WHAT MORE/ ELSE IS NEEDED?

Aggarwal says what’s sorely needed is a direct transfer of cash to tide over the liquidity crunch and effective interventions to bring back labourers.

—Shwweta Punj

SHEKHAR GHOSH

will do their due diligence before giving loans.” Putting this in perspective, Sanjeev Kapoor, a Delhi-based chartered accountant advising MSMEs, says that even though the government has pledged full guarantees for up to 20 per cent additional, collateral-free working capital loans under the Rs 3 lakh crore emergency credit line guarantee scheme for MSMEs, banks and shadow banking firms have been given the leeway to

do their own due diligence, which will restrict availability of credit.

### POLICY PRESCRIPTION

MSMEs want an extension of all term loans by two years, with the first year made interest-free and only simple interest charged in the second. They say interest payments should resume after business returns to normalcy and have asked for an increased working capital limit

requirement and a unified electronic platform for all services and financial support to MSMEs. Kapoor’s advice to his clients is that they reduce workforces and build war chests, monetising assets for liquidity or taking an overdraft, if needed. He also advises that manufacturers keep units running to avoid idle capacity. As MSMEs go through this trial by fire, one thing has become clear—it is time to get down to business. ■



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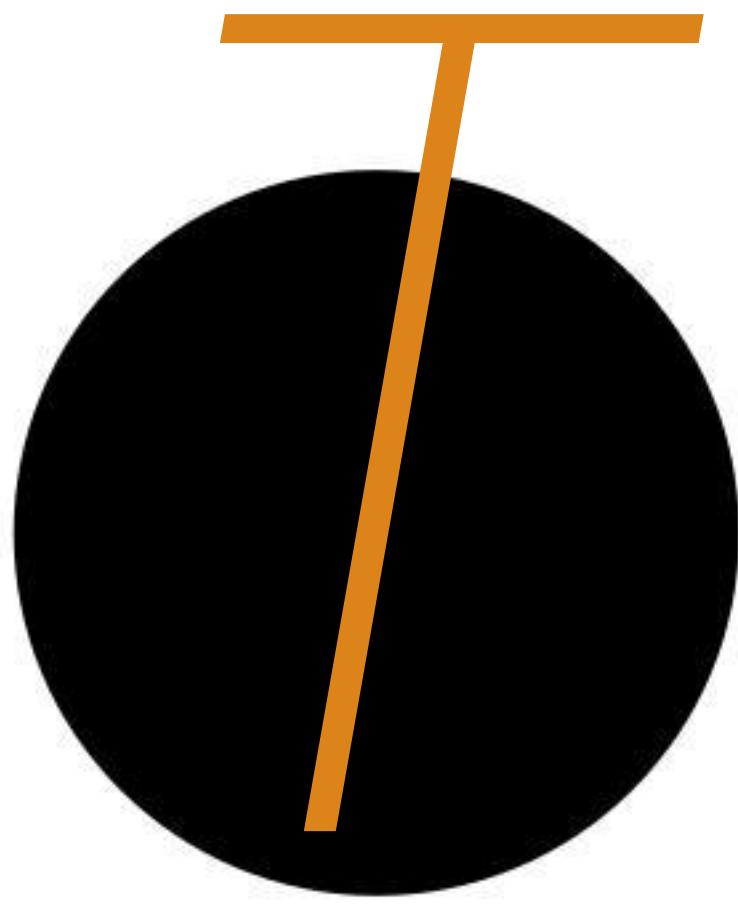


RESTAURANTS

## Cancelling the Reservations

Hit hard by the pandemic, India's restaurant industry is trying hard to survive and keep its chin up

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE



“Very small business or businesses which were not doing as well as expected will think twice about re-opening in this scenario”

**Vicky Ratnani,**  
*Chef and culinary consultant*



“Restaurants have always been innovative; that’s the nature of our business. If you don’t innovate, you fail. So, you have to add other avenues of business”

**Zorawar Kalra,**  
*Restaurateur*



“Standalone restaurants are bound to be hit hard. Even provenance has not proved a deterrent. Only the nimble will survive”

**Vineet Bhatia,**  
*Chef and restaurateur*

he COVID-19 pandemic has given new meaning to ‘survival’. When speaking to leaders of the restaurant business, it’s a word that gets employed often. The coronavirus has, of course, hit all industries hard, but the restaurant trade, one that hinges on people’s mobility and spending capacities, has been dealt a blow that seems altogether extraordinary. With experts predicting that 35 per cent of India’s restaurants might now shut shop, the country’s Rs 3.78 lakh crore restaurant industry is faced with an unprecedented turmoil, while the future of its seven million-plus employees is, sadly, precarious.

Little Bite Foods, a company that runs airport eating outlets and also standalone restaurants, has surely felt corona’s pinch, but Rohit Aggarwal, its co-founder, says that the virus’s effects are not even. “The market is not a level playing field, yes, but all businesses will have to adapt and evolve and change,” he says. Making the case that only “responsible” operators will regain the “trust” of customers, Aggarwal points to Instapizza. The Indian homegrown pizza brand has now introduced Crustflix, a live-stream that gives customers a 24/7 view of their kitchen. Their claims of hourly temperature checks can now be verified in real time. You can see staff wash their hands for 20 seconds every 20 minutes. To ensure that the last mile of delivery is as hygienic, Instapizza has also hired its own delivery fleet, TrustBrigade.

Though this level of attention seems novel, Zorawar Kalra believes “restaurants have always been innovative; that’s the nature of our business. If you don’t innovate, you fail”. Kalra knows a thing or two about restaurants. As founder and managing director of Massive Restaurants, he owns and operates eight iconic restaurants in the country, Masala Library and Farzi Café among them. He says, “You have to add other avenues of business. If you weren’t delivering, you will have to start, maybe look at doing cloud kitchens.” Kalra feels

during these uncertain times, it’s best to get your basics right.

Many eating establishments, as Kalra prescribes, are now considering renting out their kitchens. They are working out the economics of reduced seating and negotiating new revenue-share agreements, but standalone restaurants, says chef Vineet Bhatia, “are bound to be hit hard”. Bhatia, who runs 11 fine-dining and five-star restaurants around the globe, adds, “Restaurants in five-star hotels are better placed to the extent that they don’t have to pay rent, but they will have to reduce staff strength and re-engage them elsewhere. Only the nimble will survive.” His proclamation seems prophetic. The Marriott group, for instance, is already home-delivering dishes like quinoa *chaat*

across metros, while the Oberoi, Gurugram, is delivering in Delhi and Gurugram.

According to the Centre’s ‘Unlock 1.0’ plan, hotels and restaurants were allowed to reopen on June 8, but the respite came with several caveats—the establishments would have to be in areas that had not been designated

containment zones, they wouldn’t be able to serve liquor, both social distancing norms and a 9 pm curfew would apply. Vicky Ratnani, a culinary consultant to many restaurants in the country, says, “The number of guests will be almost a third, which means that the business and sales generated will be much less.” The chef also points out that large establishments often have “astronomical” rent to pay. Added to this, there are high operating costs, licences and utility bills, too.

While Rahul Singh doesn’t discount the weight of these financial strains, he does take a step back to also consider the ramifications of public health. “We don’t know how long or how many lockdowns there will be. Will there be a second wave? Nobody knows when a vaccine will finally be a real-time solution. So, the idea is to hunker down and focus on staying healthy, safe and disease free,” he

**Many restaurants are working out the economics of reduced seating and negotiating new revenue-share agreements**



says. Singh, former president of the National Restaurant Association of India, is also founder and CEO of popular beer chain The Beer Café. Compared to some of his colleagues, he manages a greater optimism. He says that for centuries, the restaurant business has survived wars, plagues and recession. "This time will be no different." Citing 2005's Hurricane Katrina in the US, he adds, "All of New Orleans's 984 restaurants were devastated in the deadly hurricane, but they were replaced by 1,300 new ones, an increase of 30 per cent."

It seems somewhat surprising that at a time when corona clouds only seem to be getting darker, there are other industry insiders and experts like Singh who also see silver linings. FMCG retail consultant L. Nitin Chordia, for instance, says, "We, as humans, have started to feel the fatigue of home-cooked food, and although the frequency might reduce due to the current fears, the demand and desire to eat out will pick up sooner rather than later as we slowly limp back to normalcy. Besides, with other travel, entertainment and expenses being curtailed, eating out is almost the only entertainment that is left."

Suvir Saran, chef-owner of Gurugram's House of Celeste, knows he will have to strategise for a future that is becoming harder to predict but in the end, he finds hope in habit. "Slowly and surely," he says, "patrons will retrace old steps to rediscover their comfort foods and favourite cocktails, wines and spirits; reuniting with tastes that will make them forget some of the pain, at least for a few brief moments." ■

—Chumki Bharadwaj

## GOURMET ALTERNATIVES

# BRING THE OUTSIDE

IN With gourmet ingredients and staples now delivered home, eating out may slowly turn passé

# N

Not too long ago, "gourmet" was synonymous with "imported". With international shipping curtailed through the lockdown, India's gourmands might have felt the absence of fancy ingredients. But, thanks to the arrival of hipster entrepreneurship in India, many producers have adopted organic, family-owned, delivery-driven models and adapted them with a swadeshi flair, giving gastronomes in metros access to a range of homegrown gourmet ingredients and staples.

The holy triumvirate of caffeine, carbs and cheese are at the forefront of these offerings.

Let's start with coffee. Brands like Araku, Bili Hu, Black Baza, Blue Tokai, Devan's



and Koinonia are available online, with the last also selling cheese, snacks, chocolate and tonic by other companies. This kind of platform-sharing collaboration is on the rise, with vegetable growers expanding into general grocery, and coffee roasters selling bread.

Budding bakers can check out Urban Platter for yeast (and lots more), and TWF for fancy flour. If baking is not your thing, there are plenty of great bread suppliers—Milk Patisserie, Suchali's Bakehouse, The Flourists, and Bombay Food Company.

Next up is cheese. Everything from burrata to yak cheese is available online from companies like Spotted Cow and Eleftheria in Mumbai, Begum Victoria in Bengaluru, Flanders Dairy in Delhi, ABC in Pune, Darima in Uttarakhand and La Ferme and Kodai Cheese in Tamil Nadu. Charcuterie

is a bit more elusive, but brands like Artisan Meats, Kaavo, Licious, Fresh-2Home and Meatigo offer a satisfying range.

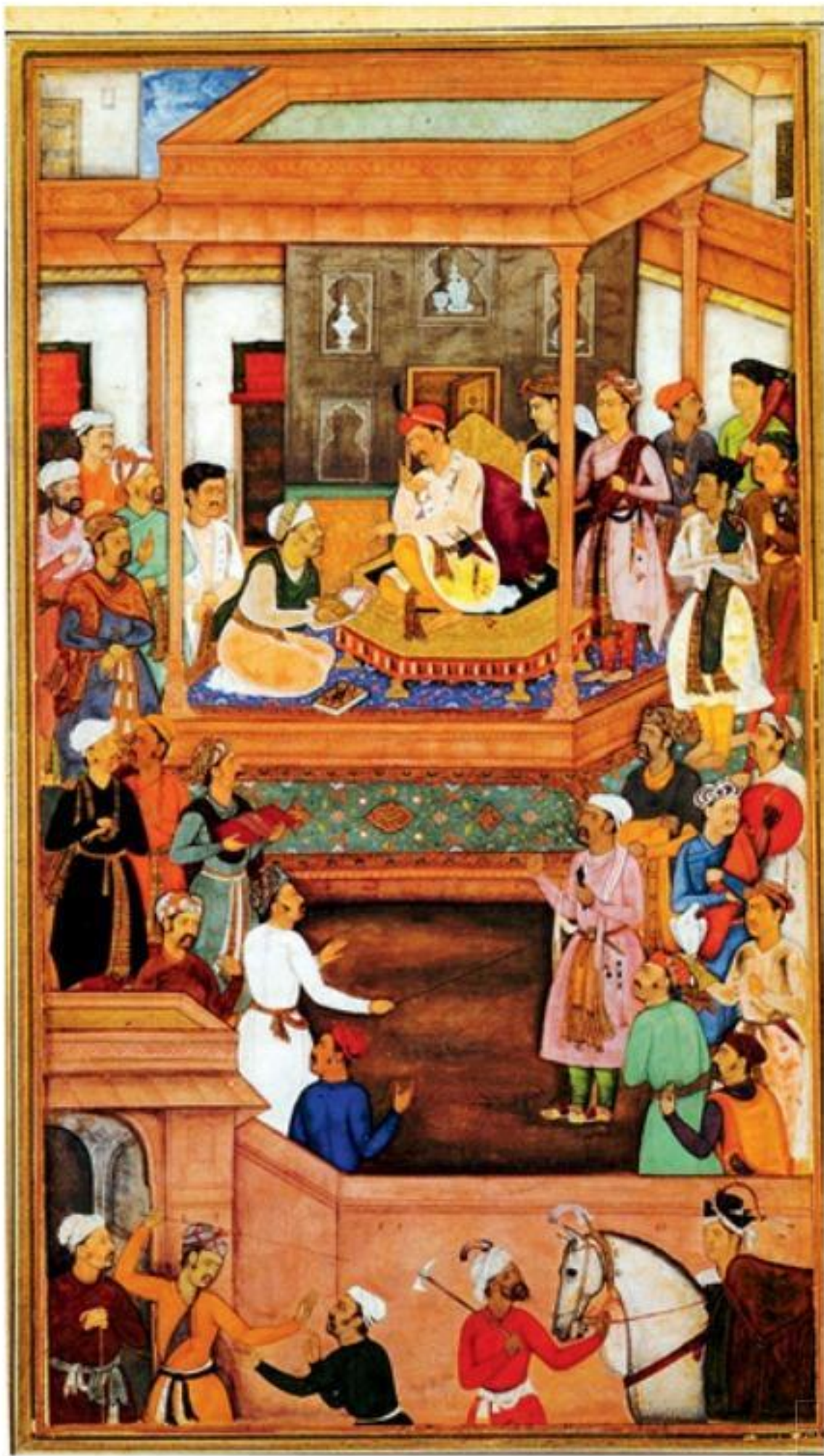
In Bombay, Scootsy has a separate gourmet section with things like dry staples from Conscious Foods and oils from Cold Food Company. For incorrigible epicures, it has La Rustichella, specialising in all things truffled. Organic produce suppliers—The Farmer, Go Farmz, Kisano, Krishi Cress, Nature's Soul, Prodigal Farms, Sahyadri, Zama Organics, and 21 Organic—have also mushroomed.

Finally, as restaurants pivot to delivery, prepped ingredients are the name of the game. In Delhi, Fig & Maple has a line of "Signatures", Parsi restaurant Rustom's is marketing its masalas, Caara its meal boxes, and Aku's has DIY burger kits. There are even bars doing batches of cocktails in barrels. But you've got to know a guy. ■

—Sonal Shah

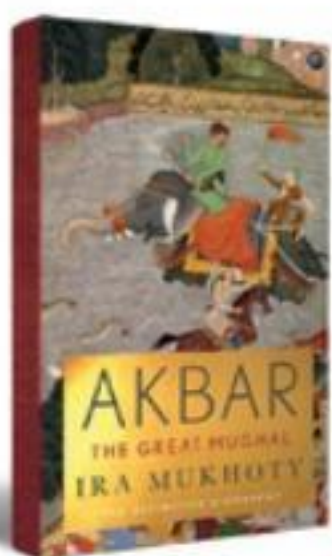
**HIPSTER ENTREPRENEURS** in India have given gastronomes access to a range of home-grown gourmet ingredients

## ALL THE KING'S MEN



ALAMY

**AKBAR**  
The Great Mughal  
by Ira Mukhoty  
ALEPH  
₹799; 624 pages



S

Sant Kabir—both a Hindu and Muslim and neither, and a fleeting character in Ira Mukhoty's brilliant biography of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar—shared something exceptional with the third Mughal Emperor. Brajbhasha! Mukhoty, whose effortless prose is one of her hallmarks besides psychological acumen, salvages Akbar, the polymath and human, from bickering symbols, politics and 'bastardised cuisines' of our age.

Akbar saw lutes from Mongolia married to the ragas of Hindustani classical music, the rebirth of Dhrupad, and

adopted Brajbhasha—the dialect of Awadhi Bhakti poets from Tulsidas in the 16th century to Wajid Ali Shah in the 19th—for his court. For readers who know that the first ever Persian translation of the Ramayana was commissioned in the emperor's reign, or that the Mahabharata was copiously copied and orally circulated at this time, it may be puzzling to think of the communal frictions associated with the return of these epics on Indian television.

Abdul Qadir Badayuni—Akbar's historian

*In telling the story of Akbar, Ira Mukhoty never loses sight of those who made his kingdom*

who translated 'Hindu' epics into Persian and authored a history of medieval India—lamented the king's cosmopolitanism that began with the arrival of Birbal and Tansen, between 1556 and '62. The latter was "the greatest gem of the Baghela court" of Raja Ramachandra. If Abul Fazl compiled the gigantic *Akbar-nama*, Akbar's aunt Gulbadan penned a memoir of the court's women, and an anonymous Brahmin wrote *Allopanisad* (Allah's Upanishad). Combined with the flourishing of Mughal miniature paintings, these artistic gems were seen as achievements on par with Akbar's architectural wonders in Agra or Fatehpur Sikri or his territorial acquisitions. His domain expanded from the Gangetic belt he inherited from Humayun to the Deccan, beyond Daman on the banks of Godavari, and Gondwana on the Mahanadi. Europe sent its diplomats to his court, Jains conferred with him and his Jesuit friends oversaw translations of the Gospel into Persian.

**Ira Mukhoty sketches Akbar as a humanitarian, although flawed, sentimental, raging and remorseful**

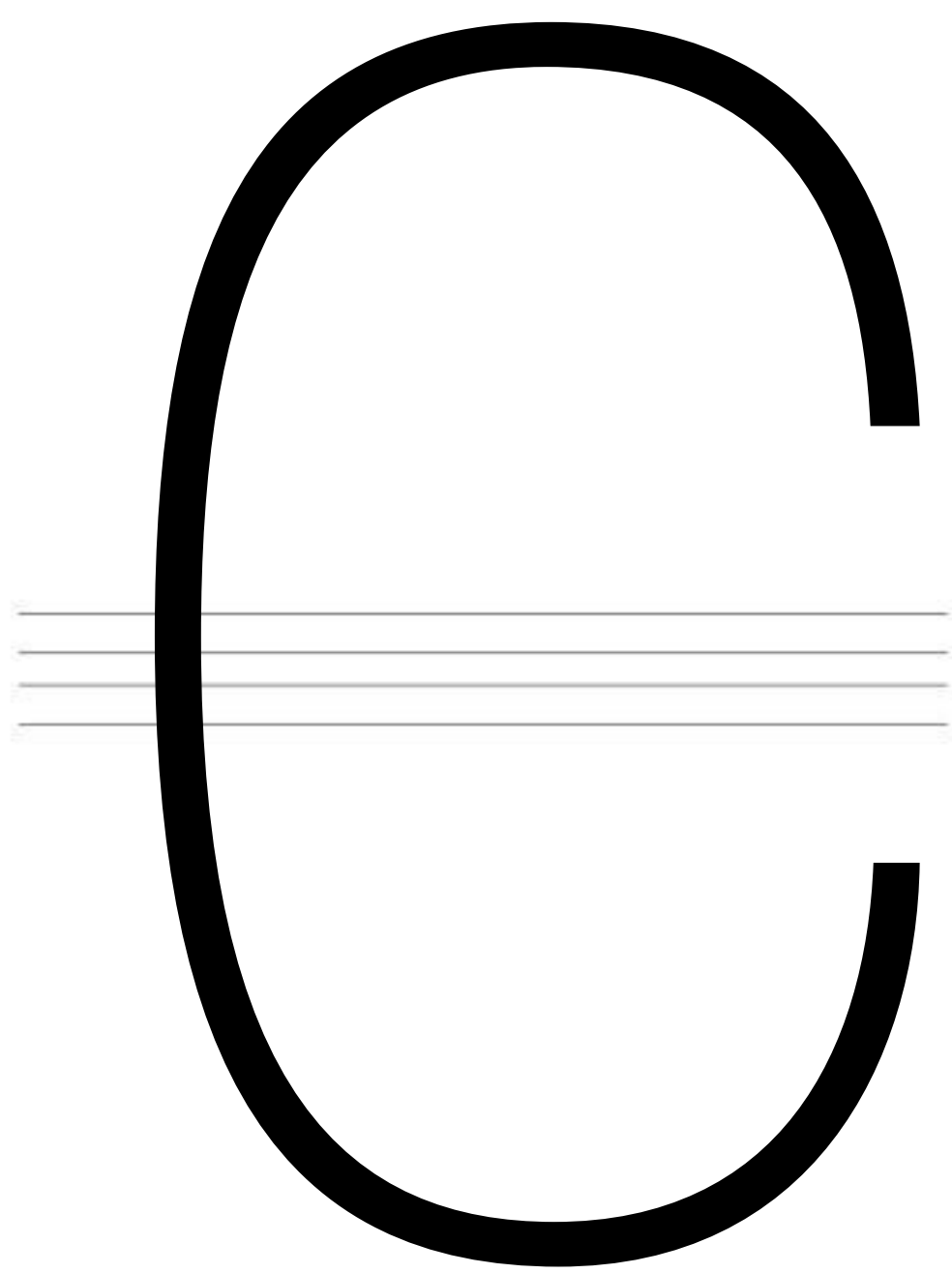
Assessing these frenzied fusions of Indian, Asian and European cultures that Akbar spearheaded, Mukhoty sketches him as a humanitarian, although flawed, sentimental, poetical, raging and remorseful, but preserving "an enigmatic, entirely unknowable, and still core", like any proponent of Nirguna Bhakti or Sufi ideals. Despite modeling himself as a Renaissance man, Akbar was often disoriented by pigeon-fights, kite-flying or spiders weaving their webs—a romantic eclecticism he was at no pains to conceal.

The old Emperor was aggrieved equally by his warring sons and the passing away of his artists. All his ecumenism, self-aggrandisement, administrative, economic, political and cultural experiments strove to cultivate the dignity of his citizens.

*Akbar*—also a history of philosophers, musicians, painters, storytellers, experts, scientists and women in Mughal India—is another inspiration for us to revive our admiration for scholars, historians and especially doctors and nurses, which we discarded before the outbreak of the uncertain war against Covid. ■

—Arup K. Chatterjee





Compiling terms, concepts and the everyday language of teaching, listening and musicianship—this dictionary is ethnographic in spirit and one of its kind. Most music dictionaries on the other hand eschew practice and are obsessed with explicating the '*shastriya*'—canonical texts and raga grammar.

Amarnath came from the music tradition of pre-Partition Punjab. This was a cultural zone that extended from the courts of Afghanistan to Kashmir, Jammu and the adjoining hill states. Muslim *ustads* and courtesans dominated the scene and the epicentre from the early 20th century was Lahore. Reformist

Hindus were keen connoisseurs and eager learners. Amarnath, like his more celebrated elder contemporary Prannath (he went on to influence American avant garde music in the 1970s), came under the spell of a school of music called the Kirana, exemplified by Ustad Wahid Khan and younger maestros like Amir Khan. An approach to vocalism that adopted a meditative, unhurried style, it was also closely tied to performance that showcased discipline and dignity.

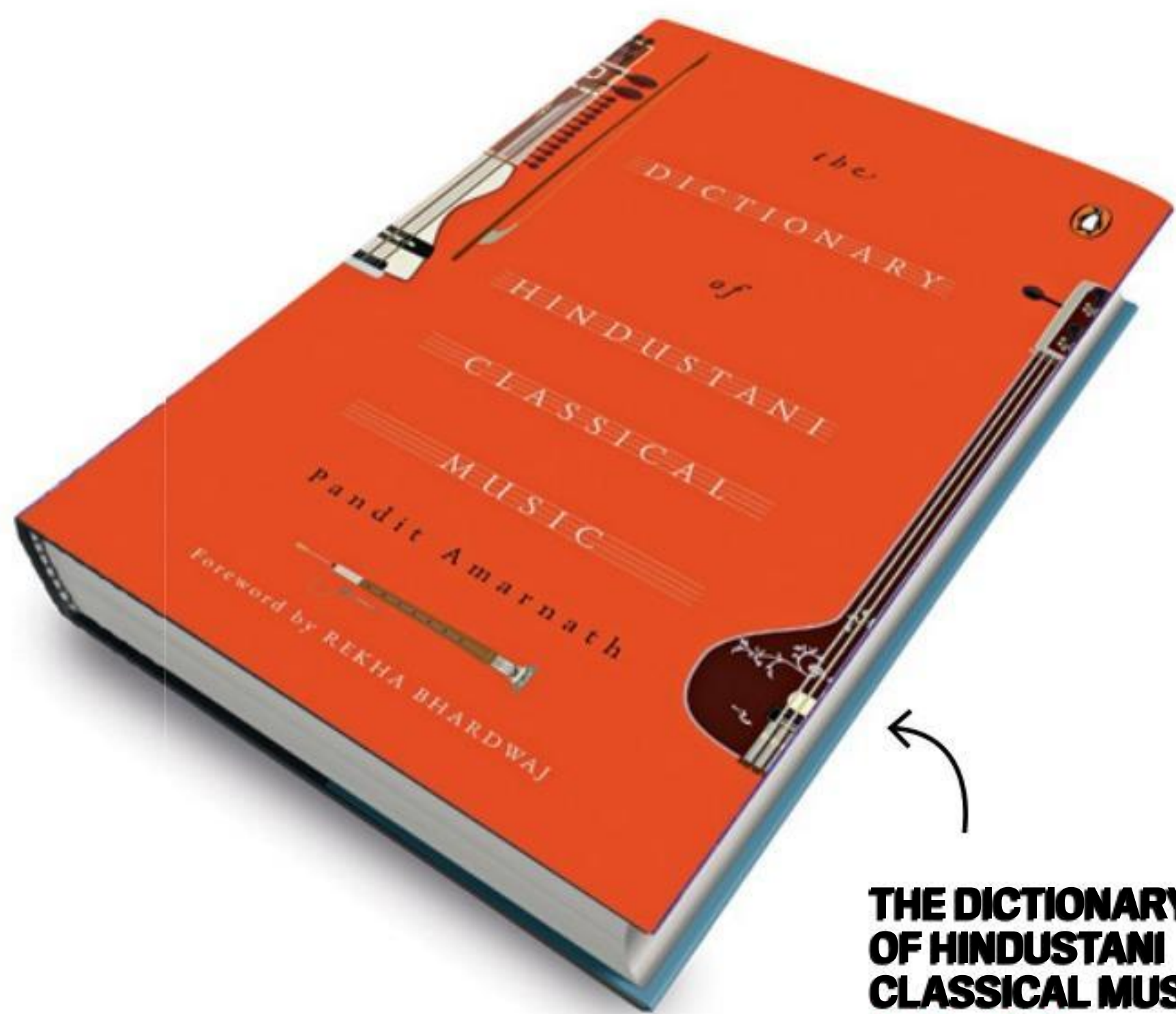
The dictionary is imbued with this ethos. Hindustani terms and phrases related to the Sufi culture of dargahs and shrines and the relationship of the 'ustad' to his 'murid', abound. The themes are mostly pedagogy and appreciation. Mischievous humour and sarcasm abound—*badkhabraa* (ill-informed musician), *haano* (hollow musician). Values associated with listenership—*nikasi acchi hai* (clarity) and the marvellous legend about Wahid Khan's rendition when the grateful patron said that *Lalit ki Khairat bant rahi hai* (Raga Lalit is being distributed as a sacrament).

Not just idiosyncratic terms and phrases, the dictionary is also a careful and comprehensive record of all the standard vocabulary that is used in raga music, both in the melodic and in the rhythmic traditions. Out of print for many years, kept alive as an e-book by enthusiasts, no one has done more for this legacy than Amarnath's daughter, the late Bindu Chawla, whose memoir is included in this edition. The new editors Rekha Bhardwaj and other disciples have inserted bionotes on contemporary musicians, but a more useful addition would have been Devnagari renditions of terms to clarify the phonetic which English spellings do imprecisely. A typo has turned a key term like *Asthayee* into *Asihayee*—this needs to be urgently corrected. ■

—Partho Datta

## A VOCALIST'S VOCABULARY

The reprint of a much-loved dictionary gives sa, re and ga its A, B and C



**THE DICTIONARY OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC**  
by Pandit Amarnath  
PENGUIN VIKING  
₹499; 240 pages



**ALL-INCLUSIVE** Somdev Devvarman with the kids enrolled in the programmes started by his NGO Life is a Ball

# SAVING THE BREAK POINT

SPORTS

**By helming the campaign 'Love All', Somdev Devvarman is trying to help Indian tennis survive Covid**



few weeks ago, while discussing the future of tennis with former Fed Cup captain

Enrico Piperno, Somdev Devvarman realised the far-reaching impact that the COVID-19 pandemic would have on the sport. Though the initial conversation was about the lack of an income for players on tour, his mind soon rushed back to all the people who had

helped him during his days as a professional. He thought of the markers, linesmen and ball kids who were now without any means or income. After a brainstorming session with friends, Devvarman decided to step up and give back to the community through a campaign called 'Love All'.

“The tennis fraternity is a big one, so I decided to reach out and raise funds. Then, I asked a bunch of close bud-





# No Fencing Her In

After years of struggle, fencer **Bhavani Devi** seems to have enough fight in her to reach the Olympics

**S**erendipity had something to do with C.A. Bhavani Devi taking to fencing. As a 12-year-old student in Chennai's Muruga Dhanushkodi School, she was stuck with a sport she knew nothing about because slots for volleyball, squash and gymnastics were all full. She didn't complain. "I was happy to play with a sword," says Devi. To get her hands on one, though, she first had to excel with a stick. Devi made quick strides and won her first gold in the under-14 category for Tamil Nadu within a year.

Soon, her talent was noticed and at 16, Devi was invited to train with Sagar Lagu, coach at the Sports Authority of India in Thalassery, Kerala.

Becoming the brightest star of a sport that still remains elusive to most Indians, Devi hasn't looked back since. With a gold at the Turnoi Satellite Fencing Championship in 2017 and as the first Indian to crack the top 50 with a career-high rank of 36, Devi is gradually changing the face of Indian fencing. "I still need to work a lot," says Devi from Chennai where she has been locked down with her mother, Ramani, since March 15.

Like many Indian athletes pursuing a sport other than cricket, Devi has had her fair share of struggle. Her parents took multiple loans to support her passion when funding was low. "The years 2011-2015 were really hard," says Devi, who at one point even considered giving up the sport. Fortunes changed with her maiden international victory. Support from GoSports Foundation and Tamil Nadu's elite scholarship scheme has made it possible to afford international training.

Before the lockdown began, Devi was in Livorno, Italy, training under the guidance of Nicola Zanotti, who has led the Italian national team in three Olympic games thus far. "The level is very high and I get better sparring partners," says Devi. She left Livorno just before Italy's fight with Covid began. Her current challenge is to maintain that level of intensity. Online training with her Italian coaches, body-weight training and yoga help. Her kit bag serves as her dummy partner as she sets her sights on winning more podium positions to help her become the first Indian fencer to qualify for the Olympics, now slated for next year.

Still uncertain as to when she can return to Italy, Devi, 26, is making the most of her time with her mother, her strongest ally. "This is the first time in a decade that I have stayed at home for whole days at a stretch, and more so, for over two months," she says. ■

—Suhani Singh

dies and coaches to identify those who were not being paid at various club houses and smaller courts. I wanted it to be as transparent as possible, so these recommendations were the way to go," Devvarman says. Folks like Sania Mirza, Mahesh Bhupathi and Rohan Bopanna stepped up to spread the word and take the campaign forward. Through his NGO, 'Life is a Ball', which has been promoting sports among school children, Devvarman started receiving funds. After identifying the right candidates, he disbursed small amounts to recipients in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam and Agartala. In just three weeks, they had raised around Rs 6 lakh.

"It's not like we are reaching out to hundreds of people in every city—the growth is very organic," says Devvarman. "This is also a hard time for most people, since everyone is wondering where their next pay cheque will come from, so it's a tricky situation when I ask someone to donate. I hope to reach out to big companies next to see if they can help," he says.

On the professional front, Devvarman has floated the idea of extending interest-free loans with the Association of Tennis Professionals. He compares a tennis player's current situation to that of any start-up. "The players are facing the same problem as entrepreneurs. If they can avail of loans, firstly, only those who need it will apply. A loan also makes more sense since you can expect some of it back in the future," he says. ■

—Shail Desai



**BHAVANI DEVI** is the brightest star in the fencing—a sport that still remains largely elusive to most Indians

## Q+A

# Tuning Out the Blues

*During the lockdown, there is much that Madhuri Dixit-Nene adapted to, but taking to singing and releasing her first single made it all worthwhile*

**Q. The show goes on, but it does so from your home now. How has the work-from-home experience been?**

It's been an adventure. I shot a promo for the TV show *Dance Deewane* and a music video for my first single, 'Candle', in the house. Hair, make-up, lighting, camera—we had to do everything ourselves. My husband handled the camera and learnt about lights. I love it. It gives you new perspectives.

**Q. Biggest lesson from the lockdown?**

You have to be self-reliant. It's also your duty to help others in need.

**Q. The lyrics to 'Candle' are intense and strangely appropriate for the turmoil the world is in right now...**

They asked me what I wanted to sing about. I thought that the one thing everybody experiences in life is struggle. Sometimes you feel like the whole world is against you and that hardships are insurmountable. You have to reach deep within yourself for that spark that can burn like fire and say, 'No, I will overcome all my troubles'.

**Q. What's been your coping mechanism during the lockdown?**

My family. We are spending more time together than ever before. I also get more time to spend with Carmello, my dog. We are experimenting with baking and I started my Kathak *riyaaz* in earnest. It's something I loved to do, but had been unable to do earlier.

—with Suhani Singh





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