

UrbanUpdate

Volume VI, Issue I

MAY 2020

ROAD TO REDEMPTION FOR COUNTRIES, CITIES

Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." COVID-19 is the biggest health crisis in the last 100 years. The repercussions on the world economy due to the shutdown could last longer than anticipated. Cities should use this crisis to overhaul their urban engine, make them resilient to such emergencies, focus on sustainable development, and avert the impending climate change

WHERE IS THE VACCINE?
The multi-billion dollar question



European Union



AIILSG

KNOWLEDGE LAB FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE



ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

No. 6, F-Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, TPS Road-12, Bandra-East, Mumbai-400051, Maharashtra
Tel.No.: +91-22-26571713, 26571714, 61805600, Fax: +91-22-26572115, Email: contact@aiilsg.org



Quality is just one of our strengths

AIILSG has begun skill development programmes in Rajasthan and Jharkhand. The institute with its 90 years of experience in the field of capacity building would impart training to youth living in rural areas of these two states to make them employable in various emerging sectors-

Apparel, Beauty & Wellness, Electronics, Healthcare, IT-ITEs, and Renewable Energy.

As per Mou signed, AIILSG will train 16,000 youngsters.

AIILSG IS COMMITTED TO BUILD EMPOWERED INDIA WITH SKILLED HUMAN WORKFORCE

For Details, email at delhi@aiilsg.org

UrbanUpdate

A monthly magazine published by the AILSG — a project funded by European Union's 'Equi-City' programme for India.

Ranjit Chavan
President-AIILSG

Rajiv Agarwal
Editor-In-Chief
Director General-AIILSG

Ashok Wankhade
Managing Editor

Abhishek Pandey
Editor

Ravi Ranjan Guru
Executive Editor

Kumar Dhananjay
Consulting Editor

Ashley Paul
Reporter

Akshit Pushkarna
Editorial Assistant

Prateek Singh
Digital Marketing Associate

Meenakshi Rajput
Rajesh Singh
Senior Graphic Designers

Volume VI - Issue I

Printed and published by Ranjit Chavan on behalf of All India Institute of Local Self-Government.

Printed at Artz & Printz, 208, DSIDC Shed, Okhla Industrial Area Phase-I New Delhi-110020

Published at Sardar Patel Bhavan, 22-23, Institutional Area D-Block Pankha Road, Janakpuri, Delhi-110058

Note: Subscriptions are only invited from municipal corporations, government bodies, academic & research institutions, etc. working in the domain of urban development. We only levy courier and handling charges. We may fully waive-off the charges for municipalities and academic institutions upon receiving such request and approval from our management.

Despite careful selection of sources, no responsibility can be taken for accuracy of the contents. The magazine assumes no liability or responsibility of any kind in connection with the information thereof. The views expressed in the articles are the personal opinions of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the All India Institute of Local Self-Government. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is strictly prohibited without written permission from the publisher.



European Union

The project is funded by the European Union.



AILSG

The project is implemented by the AILSG.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.



Mail Box

Readers' comments, criticism and suggestions are welcome. Letters to the Editor can be sent by e-mail, or regular mail. They should include name, address, phone number(s), and e-mail address, if available. The subject of the communication should be clearly mentioned, and we reserve the right to edit for sense, style, and space.

Address

Urban Update (All India Institute of Local Self-Government)
Sardar Patel Bhavan, 22-23, Institutional Area, D Block
Pankha Road, Janakpuri, Delhi-110058

FOR SUBSCRIPTION AND ADVERTISING RELATED ASSISTANCE, CONTACT

Phone: 011 - 2852 1783/ 5473 (Extn. 37)

E-mail: contacturbanupdate@gmail.com



Join Urban Update Community Online to read our previous issues, regular posts and news updates.



urbanupdate.in



[urbanupdatemag](https://www.facebook.com/urbanupdatemag)



[urbanupdatemgzn](https://twitter.com/urbanupdatemgzn)

THE ECONOMY IN A POST COVID-19 WORLD



Rajiv Agarwal
Editor-In-Chief
dg@aills.org

Over the last several days, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a wide ranging economic package aimed at relieving the stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pandemic and the resultant economic fallouts are both huge challenges with a whole host of unknowns and far reaching and deep impacts on every aspect of human life. India's 20 trillion rupees package aims to address the challenges in several sectors and supporting the economy to get back on its feet.

The uncertainties are on several fronts. For one, many sectors fear a labour vacuum especially in sectors such as construction and manufacturing where large numbers of the migrant workers have returned to their home towns and villages and one is not sure when they will return to their city jobs; or how many of them will return at all. This could put in peril the production system and in due course disrupt supply chains thus affecting larger sections of industry. Then there is the big question – are there buyers for the manufactured produce? In time, factories will start to produce cars, scooters and other goods once again as the manufacturers put their houses in order. But what is the demand scenario like? With salary cuts and job losses happening, when will the purchasing power, especially for discretionary purchases come back? There is an air of caution and hesitancy, and confidence is low.


The march back to economic normalcy could be a long one for most economies of the world. For us in India, there is need to get our small and medium industry (MSME) humming again. In many ways our MSME sector is a key building block of our livelihoods landscape. Along with small manufacturing, the related activities such as transport and supplies account for significant income of the less skilled, informal worker. The economic package has rightly aimed at making life easier for the MSMEs. Alongside there is need to put more spending power back in the hands of people so that confidence returns and wheels of the economy turn smoothly. While some attempt has been made at this, more measures are likely.

There has also been an attempt to bring about some reforms for the longer term. Announcements opening up commercial coal mining to the private sector and enhanced FDI in defence manufacturing will generate employment opportunities in the medium term. On the farm side, a facilitative legal framework is being created to enable farmers to engage with large retailers, exporters, processors and so on in a fair manner so as to secure better prices for their produce.

While these have the potential to improve prospects of the economy across different sectors, more measures and some tweaking could be required as we go along to realise our objectives.

A key development on the international scene is the reported moving out of many global manufacturers from China to set up elsewhere. India too is making a pitch for attracting such investments and we could realise big gains if we attract sizable manufacturing projects. We must leave no stone unturned. ■

“ “



The spread of COVID-19 has shaken economies, and people are beginning to question existing economic models: this pandemic has really thrown up the existing levels of both injustice and inequality worldwide. So bolder ideas are needed

” ”

Kanni Wignaraja
Director, UNDP Asia-Pacific

“ “



COVID-19 is a threat multiplier. We have a health, humanitarian and development emergency. These emergencies are compounding existing inequalities. In advanced economies, we're seeing higher rates of mortality among already marginalized groups

” ”

Amina Mohammed
UN Deputy Secretary-General

PIN POINT

“ “



We must transition to a new normal needs to include gender dimensions to build gender-approach into the responses, to move closer to achieve the SDGs to enable sustainable cities to thrive and prosper

” ”

Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Executive Director, UNHABITAT

“ “



Back in the 2009 recession, average oil demand dropped by 1.3 million barrels per day versus 2008. And now 2020 is set to average 10 million barrels per day less than 2019

” ”

Erik Holm Reiso
Senior Partner & Head of Consulting, Rystad Energy

BUZZ



World Bank Cities
@WBG_Cities

The #COVID19 pandemic painfully shows that the benefits and opportunities of technology are not equally distributed. In some countries, teleworking & online learning are luxuries few can afford. We must work together to connect the unconnected



Dr Omkar Rai
Director General, STPI, India
@Omkar_Raii

The growth of global #IoT market from \$55 billion in 2019 to \$66 billion in 2020 during #COVID19 pandemic reflects the massive use of IoT in various sectors, especially healthcare, to infuse remote interactions & health monitoring due to social distancing



FAO
@FAO

#COVID19 showed our food systems' fragilities, importance of data, & need to do more to ensure food security & nutrition for all



Manish Bapna
Executive Vice President & MD, WRI
@ManishBapnaWRI

#COVID19 is a reminder of the vulnerabilities in our societies and economies. As we respond to the health and economic crisis, we can also tackle the climate crisis, building back better now and for future generations.

Inside

Volume 6, Issue 1

May 2020

6 Pin Point
10 Newscan

15 City Image
46 Urban Agenda

COVER STORY

22 Road to redemption for countries, cities
Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Covid-19 is the biggest health crisis in the last 100 years. Nations have had to lock up their money-minting machines—cities—completely for almost two months. Analysts believe that the health crisis could be over in a few months but the repercussions on the world economy and normal lives of citizens would be longer lasting than is being anticipated. Cities should use this crisis to overhaul their urban engine, make them resilient to such emergencies, focus on sustainable development, and avert the impending crisis of climate change

LEADERSPEAK

26 ULBs will have to assume more responsibility in recovery phase
Cities are the worst affected by the spread of coronavirus. Over 90 per cent of total cases are from urban areas in India. This pandemic has reminded us that the coordinated action among cities and states is the only effective response in order to come out of the health crisis that has affected the economy and normal life badly



27



37

ARTICLES

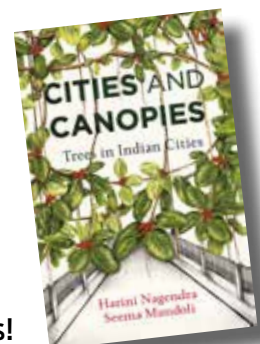
- 28** Where is the vaccine?
The multi-billion dollar question
- 32** Work, business, and progress in a new uncertain world
- 34** WFH: The new urban work culture
- 36** Not everyone is equally affected!
- 38** Global Mental Health
The Shadow Pandemic

E-DIALOGUES

- 40** Experts weigh in on the urban story of COVID-19
- 42** 'India needs to invest more in health improve local response'

BOOK REVIEW

- 44** Of cities & their trees!





CAPACITATING CSOs & EMPOWERING WOMEN & GIRLS THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Girl Power Project (funded by European Union), relates to the broader objective of the SDG5, which is on Women Empowerment. This project will fully address the global objective of strengthening the ability of Indian civil society and its organizations to perform their role as independent agents of change, implementing actions that bring transformative change into the lives of women and girls. It will work on fostering the overall development and empowerment of civil society organizations (CSOs) working on women and girls support in the state of Jharkhand. This project proposes to use a combination of training, skill building, network formation, policy dialogue and entrepreneurial support to achieve the objectives of the call

The Girl Power project is being implemented by the All India Institute of Local Self-Government (lead partner), along with the project-implementing partners- Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialisation (MGIRI), Saunta Gaunta Foundation (SGF) and Magan Sanghralaya Samiti (MSS), who came together for working towards the common goal of skill building & capacity development of women and CSOs. The project

aims towards offering guidance to support the overall development & empowerment of women and girls along with CSOs empowerment by fostering social enterprises run by women and adolescent girls groups.

The project targets to strengthen the ability of civil society organisations to perform their role as self-regulating agents of social change, promoting executing actions that will bring positive advantage in the lives of women and girls. The project also aims to bring socio-economic transformation and positivity in the lives of these women

and girls at ground level to fulfill the dreams of a just society.

Girl Power Project, Components & Activities:

The Girl Power Project will empower the women entrepreneurs and enhance/strengthen the contribution of CSOs at ground level ensuring their development through social entrepreneurship, in the 10 identified districts in the state of Jharkhand. The project oversees women and girls as key resources of socio-economic change. The broad work plan of the Girl Power Project is structured around Network

Building, CSO Capacity Building, Skill Building, Market Connect and Policy Dialogue. Following presents the brief set of objectives and activities of the project.

NETWORK BUILDING

The fifth South Asian Cities Summit was recently held in Goa in which AILSG covered more than 100 women entrepreneurs from India and a number of countries in the region, namely Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. This special session of the Summit, aimed to deliberate on the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs particularly in the realm of technical expertise, market penetration and better price discovery. The session included country presentations and a presentation was made on the Girl Power Project, by AILSG. The Social Entrepreneurship Network conference discussed methodologies and strategies to promote “Gender Mainstreaming” in the present times.

The Girl Power Project also aims at creating such a component of the larger gender network known as the Gender Network for Social Entrepreneurship Jharkhand (GNSE-J). The GNSE-J has been envisaged as such at the center of which are the Core Members, which will also be the CSO-Advisory Group of the project, who will engage in partnership building activities. As initiative to create a network of CSOs and woman entrepreneurs, GNSE-J will be leveraging the well-established Mega Skill Building center of the AILSG office.

As an important milestone of the project, an advisory group called the CSO-Advisory Group (CSO-AG) has been set up within the broader framework of GNSE-J. The main aim of the CSO-AG is to advice and provide regular inputs to the project capacity building and skill building, both for CSOs and Women and Girls group. The CSO-AG will provide strategic directions and will have overall supervision and control over curriculum of trainings. It will act as the steering body for the project. This CSO-

AG includes members such as women entrepreneurs, project partners, state government officials, academicians, and CSO representatives.

CSO SUPPORT/CSO MEET

In conformity with the project guidelines, AILSG and the partners met in mid-Feb 2020 to identify these CSOs through an open tendering process. Expressions of Interest (Eols) were invited from the agencies willing to undertake grassroots interventions as part of the project. In the spirit of close partnership, Saunta Guanta Foundation (SGF) also shared a list of some potential grassroots NGOs that could be considered for the project. Finally, forty-nine grassroots NGOs were shortlisted from this process. At the next step, a set of 26 of these grassroots NGOs (CSOs) qualified to the draft final stage, after careful scrutiny based on the devised parameters. Further to this, twenty CSO's were finally selected with the approval of the CSO-AG. These twenty CSOs were selected from the ten identified project districts.

As a next step, a meeting was conducted with the selected 20 CSOs via online mode on (May 14, 2020). The objective of the meeting was to introduce to the CSOs detailed project goals and expected outcomes. The basic goals of the Girl Power Project were discussed in detail in this meeting. The focal point of the discussion was how CSOs can contribute in women development with their expertise.

MARKET RESEARCH & GIRL POWER WEB PORTAL DEVELOPMENT

Considering this specific project objective, AILSG undertook a rapid online based research & market assessment in 10 project districts, for identifying the potential products that have a moderately higher demand. The market research was based on the parameters such as presence of marginalized groups, equally dispersed in the major zones, presence of supporting institutions, market

networks, women entrepreneurs and strong grassroots institutions.

Furthering this activity and to keep entire idea informed and for knowledge exchange, a web portal of Girl Power Project has also been launched <http://www.girlspower.in/>.

This portal will also act as the online job portal display with a database of women who have undergone training under the Girl Power Project. The database of all products and services provided by the women entrepreneurs will be captured.

Additionally to provide web/online marketplace to the women & social entrepreneur force an e-commerce site was inaugurated <https://www.divavi.in/>

CONCLUSION

The main aim of the Girl power project is to empower women by facilitating skills and trainings to the women entrepreneurs, linking them directly to the market and provide support to the CSO groups working in this sector. The Girl Power Project will facilitate the overall development and empowerment of women entrepreneurs & CSOs. This dynamic project will improve and recognize CSOs & their work in the local area of operation targeting skill building for empowerment of women and girls in the state of Jharkhand. This will also provide a key for developing employability. The project will improve the ability of woman to bargain for a better standard of living at the household level.

The project is a unique initiative and will enhance a sense of participation. This will be envisaged through constant consultation and interaction with stakeholders and beneficiaries at various stages.

This project will empower the Government of India's aim of Skill India Mission, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and its affiliation. Above all this project is expected to provide women new pride, ownership and independence in their own communities for a ray of optimism for achieving overall women empowerment. ■

India's unemployment touches 27.11 per cent during lockdown: CMIE

NEW DELHI: According to recent Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data, the unemployment rate in India had surged to 27.11 per cent for the week that ended on May 3, which had been the peak for India during the lockdown. The surge was brought under control the following week, dropping to 23.97 per cent in the consecutive week that ended on May 10. The employment rate also marked a rise from 26.4 per cent to 28.6 per cent as the government allows reopening of several industries. For further comparison, the unemployment rate was 6.74 per cent in the week that ended on March 15. The monthly unemployment rate for the month of March was 8.74 per cent, which bumped up to 23.52 per cent in April. Over 12.1 crore Indians were out of work in the month of April, the data shows. The rate of unemployment has been greater in urban areas, that is, 29.22 per cent as compared to the 26.16 per cent in rural areas, the Mumbai based think tank has

observed. The weekly data has shown that there has been a steady increase in the unemployment figures in India ever since the lockdown has been imposed. The economic think tank also noted that 2.7 crore of Indian adults in their 20s lost their jobs in April.

The Union Territory of Puducherry has the highest unemployment rate, where about three-fourth of the population is unemployed as of May 5. Following it are Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Bihar at 49.8 per cent, 47.1 per cent and 46.6 per cent respectively. Haryana also had a high rate, which stood at 43.2 per cent. One of the worst hit states by the pandemic, Maharashtra, noted a comparatively low unemployment figure, standing at 20.9 per cent. The state of Uttar Pradesh had 21.5 per cent of its population unemployed, while Karnataka had a rate of 29.8 per cent. The lowest unemployment rates were noted in hilly states, where Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand had unemployment rates of 2.2 per cent,

2.3 per cent and 6.5 per cent.

It is unsurprising that the inactivity that was imposed due to the lockdown will dent India's economy. This impending economic depression, which is set to affect the global economy substantially, can be averted, many economists suggest. Notable French Economist Thomas Piketty said that, in order for India to recover from the economic losses, talks of Universal Basic Income must be revived. "I think the government would be well advised to introduce a basic income scheme and more generally to develop a safety net in India. I do not see how a lockdown can work without a system of income maintenance," Piketty told PTI in an interview. He also noted that India has the potential to become the global democratic leader of the 21 century if the country manages to address the issue of inequality.

The gravity of economic disparity in Indian society has become more than evident, as the governments have failed to put a stop to the exodus of the migrant labor workers from the major Indian cities which continues even in the second month of the lockdown. Over 40.5 million of India's labor force has been employed in the informal sector, a sector that has been hard hit by the closure of factories, building sites and other workplaces.

Abhijit Banerjee, the Indo-American Economic Nobel laureate, in a conversation with Rahul Gandhi on May 5, said that India would need a big economic stimulus package and the money needs to be put in the hands of the people in order to bring back the demand. The Prime Minister of India has announced an economic stimulus package of ₹20 lakh crore, 10 per cent of the GDP of the country, on May 12. The US had also announced the same percentage of its GDP as an economic stimulus package recently.



Central Government announces ₹20 lakh crore economic stimulus package

NEW DELHI: In his May 12th address to the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the Central Government would be allocating a fund of ₹20 lakh crore. The amount is allocated to boost the economic conditions of street vendors, small and medium business enterprises, farmers, middle-class, etc.

With the economic booster in place, which is one-tenth of the total GDP of the country, Modi expects that the post COVID-19 era would bring India several opportunities, and given the nation's track record, it is expected that India would rise to the occasion and embrace the opportunities ahead. He underlined that it is a general perception that the 21st century belongs to India.

Further, the PM emphasised that Indians need to rely more on local manufacturing, markets, and supply chains in order to make India more self-reliant economically during this time. "Be vocal about local", he said. Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Finance Minister, and Anurag Thakur, Minister of State announced the details of the economic package for Finance and Corporate Affairs, in five tranches in the subsequent days. The first tranche of the announcements focused mostly on rebuilding or aiding the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The most salient set of announcements are:

- ◆ Collateral free automatic loan for MSMEs worth ₹3 lakh crores has been announced for a time frame of 4 years with a 12 moratorium. 45 lakh MSMEs are to benefit from the scheme. MSMEs who have ₹25 crore outstanding loans or have a turnover of below ₹100 crore can avail till October 31.
- ◆ Emergency credit line-₹20,000 crore subordinate debt was announced. This will address the problem of equity and around 2 lakh MSMEs



with below-average performance can benefit from the scheme. Non Performing Assets (NPAs) and stressed MSMEs would be eligible.

- ◆ The Government will also be changing the definition of MSME to eliminate the risk of stepping over the pre-defined limit of the business. Investment limit revised upwards. Additional criteria based on turnover have also been brought in. Investment for Micro units revised from ₹25 lakhs to ₹1 crore, it would be applicable for both manufacturing and service enterprises. Small enterprises are now defined as ₹10 crore investment and having ₹50 crore turnover, medium ₹20 crore investment and ₹100 crore turnover.
- ◆ Tenders for Government procurement up to ₹200 crores will no longer be listed globally.

The second tranche of the announcements focused on the migrants and farmers, possibly the most economically distressed at present. Here are the most salient features:

- ◆ The Central Government will be supplying free foodgrains to migrants for the coming 2 months.
- ◆ States to use SDRF for setting up shelter for migrants.

- ◆ Credit linked subsidy scheme (CLSS) that was to end by March 2020 to be extended for another year.
- ◆ A scheme for affordable rental accommodation for migrant workers and urban poor is being launched under the PMAY.

The third set of announcements reinforced infrastructure in food industries like food processing units, fisheries, animal husbandry, horticulture, herbal cultivation and beekeeping. The total funding for these industries amounts to ₹50,000 crore, which included funds allocated earlier in the budget. The fourth tranche was made in an attempt to boost employment and important sectors such as coal, minerals, defence, aviation, space and atomic energy were covered in the announcements made by Sitharaman. The Finance Minister said, "Many sectors need policy simplification. Once we de-congest sectors, we can also provide the necessary boost." The final tranche was focused on announcing immediate reforms for MNREGA, health infrastructure in both rural and urban, decriminalisation of companies act, public sector, state governments and resources related to the state governments.

Rajasthan govt uses Ayushman Bharat data to trace people most vulnerable to COVID-19



The Government of Rajasthan is using the Ayushman Bharat data to track people above the age of 60 years who are chronically ill due to pre-existing conditions residing in hotspots. In Ramganj alone, where more than 95 per cent of Rajasthan’s total cases have originated, the state government has identified 10,000 people who are at a high risk of being infected by coronavirus. The government is now using this data and testing only those most likely to be affected by the virus instead of sampling everybody.

NDMC to ensure safety of sanitation workers



North Delhi Municipal Corporation has planned to procure 520 infrared scanners and plans to scan all its sanitation workers before their shift begins. An official said that 499 sites have been identified and divided into six administrative zones of civic body. The supervisors are assigned the role to ensure proper safety of workers and to check every ground worker is wearing gloves and mask. After the end of shift all the gloves and masks are disposed of as per the new guidelines. Everyday temperature of station staff will be recorded and if any anomaly is found they will be sent to the healthcare facility.

ICMR to help carry out plasma therapy on trial basis

NEW DELHI: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has announced that it is framing a protocol for carrying out convalescent plasma therapy on patients suffering seriously from COVID-19. In the therapy, blood plasma from people who have recovered from COVID-19 is infused into patients suffering from COVID-19. The therapy is carried out in expectation that antibodies specific to the novel coronavirus present in the body of the recovered patient will help generate immune response in the other patient.

ICMR officials clarified that this will only be done on a clinical trial basis on patients that are in a severe condition or on ventilator support due to COVID-19. “We are in the final stages of making a protocol for convalescent plasma therapy and after that we will need approval from the Drug Controller General of India... It will be done on a trial basis. Abroad, it has been found successful in limited trials. Here we will do it only on patients on ventilator or severe patients,” said Dr Manoj Murhekar, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology. The therapy was recently allowed by United

States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for investigational purposes.

Dr Anoop Kumar, member of the state-constituted expert committee for advising the Kerala government on COVID-19, said that after talking to patients who had recovered from the disease, they agreed to be a part of the trial therapy. According to him, the difficult task would be to ensure the availability of the kit for checking the antibody level in the plasma of recovered person. He said that these kits are not available in India and will have to be imported from Germany. However, the cancellation of international flights across the world would lead to delay in procuring the kits for testing.



Alappuzha to turn boats into isolation centres

ALAPPUZHA: In a bid to increase isolation beds for the patients in Alappuzha district, the district administration has decided to convert bedrooms in the houseboats into isolation rooms. According to G Sudhakaran, Public Works Minister, 2,000 isolation beds will be set up in houseboats.

A Health Department official said, “We are expecting an inflow of people from overseas and other States after the end of the COVID-19 lockdown period. More people may have to be quarantined. Converting houseboats into isolation beds is part of the measures to deal with any possible emergency in the district. The converted rooms in houseboats will be used only if the need arises. Besides, 60 hotels and resorts and other structures with attached toilet facilities have been identified for isolation of people.” As of now, the five coronavirus positive cases have been identified, of which two have been recovered. According to the officials the isolation boats will have a medical team and all required medical facilities inside the boat, if anyone isolated in the houseboat amid tested positive for the virus, the boat will be detached from the group anchored at the Finishing Point in Alappuzha, and the isolated person will be shifted to hospital for proper medical care. Kevin Rozario, general secretary, All Kerala Houseboat Owners and Operators Samiti, said, “There are hardly any tourism-related activities now. We are not expecting our boats to set sail again anytime soon given the global situation. By handing over the boats, we are joining the society in its fight against the disease.”

Wear masks or pay fine

SURAT: In a bid to make people take the rules and regulation of lockdown and self-preventive measures more effectively, four cities in Gujarat, Surat, Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Vadodara have made it compulsory for people to wear masks in public places. An order has been issued under the Epidemic Diseases Act beginning April 13, under which those caught without wearing a mask in public places in these cities will be fined ₹5000. If the offender failed to deposit the fine then they will be booked under IPC sections. Udit Agarwal, Commissioner, Rajkot Municipal Corporation, said people are allowed to cover their face with readymade or homemade mask, they can also use a handkerchief to cover their face while going in the public areas. The first time offenders will be fined ₹1,000 and if they violate the rule again they will be fined ₹5,000. Refusal/denial or failure to pay the penalty will cause strict action under IPC sections.

In Vadodara and Ahmedabad, a notification issued by Municipal Corporation's office stated that the rule came into effect from 6 am on April 13, and permits strict action against the offenders. In Surat, the rule was implemented earlier and around 500 people were penalized for not wearing masks in public places. Surat Corporation is also penalizing people who are not following government orders of maintaining social distancing at public places. Banchhanidhi Pani, Commissioner, Surat Municipal Corporation, said, "We have made masks and social distancing mandatory at public places under Epidemic Disease Act-1897. Both are important to stall the spread of COVID-19."

IIT-D's COVID-19 diagnostic kit becomes first to get approval from ICMR

NEW DELHI: Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi (IIT-D) has become the first academic institute in India to get approval from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for its real-time PCR-based diagnostic array. The method will be used to test people for COVID-19 in India. The test reduces the cost of testing and makes it viable for agencies to test a large population for the disease. The approval comes at a time when the ICMR asked states not to use of Chinese COVID-19 testing kits.

According to officials, the currently used testing method is 'probe-based' while the one developed by IIT-D is 'probe-free'. This is the reason for it being cost-effective while still giving accurate results. "The array has been validated at ICMR with a sensitivity and specificity of 100 per cent," a senior official told PTI.

Since the array does not require fluorescent, it can be easily scaled up to be used widely. The team responsible for developing the array is already targeting large scale deployment with suitable industrial partners as soon as possible.



Professor Vivekanandan Perumal, the lead member of the team, said that the team has successfully managed to identify unique regions in COVID-19, using comparative sequence analysis. Since these unique regions are not present in other human coronaviruses, it becomes easy to specifically detect COVID-19.

"Primer sets, targeting unique regions in the spike protein of COVID-19, were designed and tested using real-time polymerase chain reaction. The primers designed by the group specifically bind to regions conserved in over 200 fully sequenced COVID-19 genomes. The authorities are hoping that it will help fill the shortage of testing kits in the coming days.

COVID-19 cases could reach 111 crore by Sept 2020, says CDDEP report

A recent report published by the US-based Centre for Disease Dynamics and Economic Policy (CDDEP) has projected that the total number of cases of the COVID-19 pandemic in India could reach up to 111 crore by September 2020. It stated that even this number is the average of the expected range between 55-138 crore confirmed COVID-19 cases. The report titled 'SARS-CoV-2 in India: Potential Impact of the Lockdown and Other Longer-Term Policies' further stated that the range covers 50-150 per cent of the point estimate. Asymptomatic or mild infections may account for a significant proportion of the infected population.

Gujarat to start exporting hydroxychloroquine tablets to USA



Preclinical tests in China have shown that the use of hydroxychloroquine medicine can reduce the chances of being affected by the virus. In the wake of such a discovery, the demand for the medicine has skyrocketed across the world. Following the decision of the Government of India to permit exporting the tablets to other countries, Vijay Rupani, Chief Minister, Gujarat, announced that three companies from the state have started manufacturing the medicine for export. The medicines produced by all three companies will be exported to the United States of America.

Rajasthan government begins performing 10,000 COVID-19 tests daily



Raghu Sharma, Minister of Health, Government of Rajasthan, has said that the state government has achieved the target of conducting 10,000 tests per day in the state. This target was achieved by the government on Saturday, May 2, 2020. The government has also purchased Cobas-8800 machines to speed up testing in Jaipur and Jodhpur, which are amongst the worst-hit districts in the country. As a result, these two cities will each be able to conduct an additional 4,000 tests daily.

Centre to deploy 20 'public health teams' to worst hit districts



The Health Ministry will soon be deploying 'central public health teams' to 20 worst-hit districts from various states for assistance. An official of the health ministry said that the decision was taken by the ministry to aid the various state health departments to manage the outbreak in the hotspots. Districts include Mumbai, Pune, South East and Central Delhi, Indore, Chennai and Jaipur, among others. The teams would report to regional directors appointed by the ministry. The teams would submit reports with their recommendations based on the observations from the area.

Scientists turn to sewage for tracing route of asymptomatic cases of COVID-19

NEW DELHI: While the countries and government are looking for ways to contain the spread of the novel corona virus, which has claimed more than two hundred thousand lives, and put countries at a stop, a group of scientists have turned their attention to sewage system to flush out hidden cases and measure the spread of virus within communities by examining sewage.

According to a report published in CNN, the scientists are using wastewater testing which has detected traces of COVID-19 genetic material, also known as RNA, in faecal matter.

Matt Meyer, New Castle County Executive said that the data gathered from wastewater will be helpful in finding how many people have been infected with the virus asymptotically and are now transmitting it to others. Matt also said, they have tied up with a MIT-based start-up, 'Bigot' to test wastewater for the virus. "We want to identify hotspots, run this at 10 treatment facilities across a county of 560,000 people, and find out with these hotspots where they are and

where they're not," he added.

According to a report published earlier, Dutch scientists had earlier traced the virus in wastewater before the cases were reported. The novel coronavirus is often excreted in an infected person's stool. Although it has not been made clear that the wastewater system will become an important route of transmission of the pathogen. The scientist had also detected traces of novel coronavirus at a wastewater treatment plant in Amersfoort in the Netherlands on March 5, before any cases were detected in the city. Though, Netherlands registered its first case of coronavirus on February 27.



About 38,000 relief camps set up across India

NEW DELHI: Government of India, on April 27, informed the Supreme Court in a fresh status report about the measures taken to fight the COVID-19. Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Union Home Secretary, informed the SC that Center has set up 37,978 relief camps combined in all the states and union territories that are occupied by 14.3 lakh people as mentioned in an affidavit filed earlier on April 12. In addition to the shelter homes, 26,225 food camps have also been set up which are distributing food to nearly 1.34 crore people daily. The govt also informed that employers have given nearly 16.5 lakh migrant workers shelter. The govt has also issued directions under the Disaster Management Act 2005 that every employer is to pay wages to their employees at the due date without the closure due to the lockdown. Along with this, the district authorities have been instructed to make sure that migrant workers who live on rent must not be forced to pay up by the landlords. Any landlord flouting this order will be liable for action under the Disaster Management Act. The govt also highlighted that, in order to maintain supply of essentials, the Indian Railways are continuously running their freight operations. The railways have moved 6.11 lakh wagons from March 24 till April 9. They have also distributed 10.1 lakh free meals. The govt also informed that the Ministry of Civil Aviation has operated a total of 180 flights to transport 258 tonnes of medical cargo. The govt said that to ensure food production is not affected, harvesting has been allowed to continue uninterrupted. Indian Council for Agriculture has issued an advisory to farmers for harvesting of Rabi crop and sowing of summer crop. Department of Chemicals and Fertilizers is making all efforts to ensure adequate supply of fertilisers for the Kharif season, it said.

NYC TRANSIT USES UV TO DISINFECT COACHES IN PILOT

NEW YORK CITY's Transit has launched a pilot program of disinfecting subway cars and buses from the virus, said officials. With the announcement made on May 19, the Transit official claimed

that this is a tested killer of COVID-19. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has spent \$1 million to purchase and install 150 UV lamps. The purchase was made from a startup Puro.

The first phase of experimentation with the lamps is under way. Patrick Foye, Chairman, MTA has said that this is the first report of this kind. New York is the city that is worst affected by the crisis.



Cipla set to begin clinical testing of favipiravir

Cipla, an Indian pharmaceutical giant, has sought approval from Indian regulators to start experimenting a drug called 'Favipiravir' to treat corona positive patients. Under the guidelines of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Cipla will conduct trials of the drug before launching it in the market. Currently, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has identified 25 drugs/drug candidates for fighting the virus. Among these 25 drugs, Favipiravir has emerged as one of the most promising drugs. The drug Favipiravir is developed by Fujifilm Toyama Chemical Ltd. and is used in the treatment for patients suffering from influenza.

4 Gujarat cities to take part in WHO's Covid-19 clinical trials

Hospitals from four cities in Gujarat will be participating in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) 'Solidarity' international clinical trial. The trial is being conducted to help determine an effective method of treatment for COVID-19 patients. The trial will be conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). During the trial, the effectiveness of four drugs and standard care on COVID-19 patients will be recorded and studied in order to determine which of the four drugs is more effective. The four drugs to be tested are Remdesivir, Lopinavir, Hydroxychloroquine and Interferon.

A2A mutation of coronavirus becomes dominant across regions: Study

MUMBAI: A recent study by Partha Majumder and Nidhan Biswas of the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBG) has revealed that the novel coronavirus has mutated into ten different types. However, one of its type, the A2a, has nearly replaced all others and become the most dominant type of the virus across geographical regions. The A2a mutation of the novel coronavirus is highly efficient in entering human lung cells in large numbers.

The previous SARS-CoV that killed 800 and infected 8,000 people 18 years ago was also efficient in entering human lungs but not as much as the A2a. The study would prove to be crucial as it would provide vaccine manufacturers with a specific target. In order to conduct the study, the researchers accessed RNA sequence data shared by COVID-19 researchers from across the world on a public database, the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID). The team used RNA sequences of

3,600 coronaviruses collected from 55 countries from December 2019 to April 6, 2020. Initially, the team observed that the virus had started mutating into newer types during its spread within China and the rest of the world. According to Partha Majumder, Founding Director, NIBG, in order to survive, a virus must propagate by infecting other animals. A mutation usually disables the virus from transmitting itself. However, some mutations, like the A2a of the novel coronavirus, make the transmission of the virus more efficient, thereby affecting a larger population in a shorter time. Such mutant viruses can sometimes completely replace the original, ancestral virus.

This study is extremely important in the battle against COVID-19 as it will help vaccine manufacturers in understanding exactly what the virus is. Moreover, it will also help to determine if the existence of the A2a mutation along with other types of mutations in a particular region is possible.

Maharashtra govt to provide free health insurance

MUMBAI: While the world is grappling with an overwhelming population rushing to the hospitals amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, many are left to worry about the rising medical expenses. In order to provide relief to the population, the Government of Maharashtra has announced free health insurance scheme for all its citizens. Maharashtra becomes the first state in the country to take such a step.

According to Rajesh Tope, Minister of Health, Government of Maharashtra, people in the state can avail free and cashless health insurance as part of the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana. Documents like ration cards and domicile certificates are essential to apply for the scheme. Currently, the scheme covers nearly 85 per cent of the population in the state. Tope said that from now on, the benefits of the scheme are being extended to state government, semi-government employees and white ration card holders, taking the reach of the scheme to 100 per cent of the population in the state. The minister added that the extension of the scheme will not be revoked and will be modified to apply for treatment of all diseases at all hospitals in the state. The scheme will now cover more than 1,000 hospitals across the state in comparison to just 496 hospitals in the past. The state government has also capped the fees of COVID-19 treatment in private hospitals in order to stop private hospitals from charging exorbitant fees. Moreover, hospitals that are not connected with the GIPSA, will also have to standardise their treatment fees.

Maharashtra government issues directives to meet expenses, raise revenues

Government of Maharashtra has announced a slew of measures to raise govt revenues. According to a govt resolution (GR) issued by the state, various departments have been directed by the govt to not introduce any new schemes for the current fiscal year. Moreover, the state govt will also not be spending on any scheme that it had announced/undertaken from the start of the fiscal year 2020-21. The govt has designated Public Health, Medical Education, Food and Civil Supplies and Relief & Rehabilitation as priority departments. All other departments are being barred from issuing new purchase orders or tenders, the GR said.

Telangana becomes first state to extend lockdown till May 29



The Government of Telangana announced that the ongoing lockdown has been extended till May 29. During this time, the general public is permitted to move out of their houses between 7 am and 7 pm. However, if anyone is found outside for non-essential activities during curfew, the police will initiate action. Moreover, the govt advised people above 65 years of age to not come out of their houses unless it is a medical emergency. Children are not allowed to move out of the house either. With this, Telangana becomes the first state in the country to extend the lockdown post-May 17.

EU leaders commit to raise \$8 billion for COVID-19 vaccine

NEW DELHI: European Union Commission has announced that the grouping, along with its partner organisations, will be hosting an international pledging conference today, May 4, in order to raise a targeted fund of \$8 billion. This fund will be used to initiate a global cooperation to develop a vaccine for COVID-19, ways of better diagnosis and prognosis for the disease. The announcement was made by Charles Michel, President, European Council; Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission President; Emmanuel Macron, President, France; Angela Merkel, Chancellor, Germany; Giuseppe Conte, Prime Minister, Italy and Erna Solberg, Prime Minister, Norway, in a joint statement. In an interview, von Der Leyen said that the pandemic can only be resolved by the development of a vaccine, for which, globally coordinated research is needed.

Saudi Arabia pledged \$500 million to the fundraiser and announced that they will co-lead the global response. EU will also partner with prominent international funds like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust to develop the required medical



treatments for the virus. The funds collected will be directed to global health organisations like Coalition for Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi Vaccine Alliance, United amongst others. EU leaders have also confirmed that they will also be supporting the World Health Organisation with the fund. They have also said that they were building on the commitment by G20, which had earlier launched 'Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) acceleration', which is a global platform for the exchange of research and treatment methodologies for the virus.

ICMR planning research on mutation of SAARS-CoV2 in India

NEW DELHI: In a bid to build an effective vaccine to fight the coronavirus, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is planning to study the genome sequence of SARS-CoV2 strain to find out whether the virus has undergone mutation while spreading within the country. As per Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID), in India, the maximum difference in novel coronavirus strain has been found between 0.2 to 0.9 per cent as compared to the strains in other countries, said another scientist from the organisation. As per the current data, GISAID has received over 7,000 complete genome sequence of SARC-CoV2 deposited by various clinical laboratories across the world where they have classified the virus based on their mutations. Due to this, Indian scientists are also suspecting different strains of the virus have entered the country from people who came back from different regions of the world. So far, three strains of the virus have been traced in India. One was from Wuhan, and the other two from Italy and Iran. The virus sequence collected from patients from Iran and China were similar. Dr Raman R Gangakhedkar, Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases at ICMR said, "It will take us time to determine the predominant quasi-species of the novel coronavirus in the country. But the mutation are not likely to make vaccine ineffective, as all type of mutated sub virus have the same enzymes. Also, the virus is present for around three months in India and it is not mutating very fast."

India plans to restart public transportation in a staggered manner

NEW DELHI: The Indian Government plans to restart operation of public transportation throughout the country, with social distancing norms being strictly followed in order to ensure a safe commute. Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, made the announcement on May 6. Gadkari also said that the Central Government is working on formulation of the guidelines that are to be followed with the reopening of the public transportation facilities.

A day after the announcement, the CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CSIR-CRRI) released some recommendations for the authorities to look into before restarting the public transportation in India post-lockdown. The think tank has included various guidelines like, limiting the passengers on buses- 18 for 60-foot buses and 12 for 40-foot buses, separate boarding in Metros amongst others which are shared with all the state governments and central government ministries of the country. Some other guidelines include:

- ◆ Creating partition via plastic sheets in taxis.
- ◆ Ensuring digital payment for taxis, autos and e-rickshaws.
- ◆ Allow only a single passenger per auto

- ◆ Display showing the exact number of seats available in buses and metros.
- ◆ Increase boarding time for commuters using public transport.
- ◆ Marking and regularly cleaning common waiting areas.
- ◆ Painting additional zebra crossings.
- ◆ Limiting seating at bus stops.

The suggestions were made to help the local authorities to manage inter city/ state travel more efficiently.

Further, experts from the institute also recommend social distancing of at least 6 feet between commuters even after the lockdown is lifted as a key to avoid any transmission. The authorities have also been recommended to encourage the use of non-motorised transportation in urban areas.

It has been observed that the state run transport authorities have mulled over the suggestion put forth by the think tank and made improvisations. An official of the Delhi Metro Corporation (DMRC) has confirmed that the new rules being drawn up by the metro authority are most likely to include cashless transactions at ticketing counters, designated spots for passengers waiting for metros, mandatory use of face masks and Aarogya Setu mobile application and separate entry and exit points to the

station premises. With the imposition of the lockdown guidelines in its fourth edition, public transportation as well as private transportation began across various states in India that are non-containment zones. The buses are not running on full capacity and the taxis and auto rickshaw are using plastic screens between the commuters and the driver.

Transportation of the migrant workers

Addressing the need of the stranded migrant labor stuck in major Indian cities with no work, the Central Government restarted train operations in a staggered manner on May 11. Till May 15, it was reported that the Ministry of Railways has operated over one thousand of such 'Shramik special' trains and repatriated over 1.4 million stranded migrant labourers to their native places across the country amidst the lockdown. Further, Nirmala Sitharaman has said that the centre is paying 85 per cent of the fare of the travellers.

Regarding the safety of the passengers, the Railways have announced that it is now mandatory for those travelling via the 'special trains' to install and use the Central Government's Aarogya Setu app. The announcement was made via the Ministry of Railways' official twitter handle. The government's application provides a means to the users to identify possible risks of infections and notifies if any corona positive patient is in the vicinity of the user. It crossed over 100 million registered users on May 13, which is about 7.2 per cent of the Indian population. Sources from Northern Railways have also confirmed that they are conducting thermal screening of passengers as they enter the station premises and only people with no symptoms are being allowed to go forward with their journey.



Exploring the challenges that startups are facing during the lockdown

Gwalior Smart City Development Corporation Limited (GSCDCL) and All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIIILSG), in association with Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) organised its first webinar on 'How to deal with COVID-19 crisis as a startup'. Experts shared their views on how to deal with the current scenario as a startup, and also mentioned about the sectors that could boom after this pandemic gets over. Speakers in the webinar also suggested a range of solutions that included spending on the most critical things

NEW DELHI: Ravi Ranjan Guru, Deputy Director-General, AIIILSG and Dr Sriparna B Baruah, IIE, joined the webinar as speakers. Rajiv Ranjan, Mission Director, Innovoir, moderated the discussion.

In his opening statement, Rajiv Ranjan expressed that as the duration of the lockdown extends, businesses are getting affected. Startups are worried about the salaries and other fixed costs. To limit the fixed costs, startups could have thought of laying off employees, but, as per the instructions of the government one cannot lay off employees during these tough times. Guru further discussed regarding the downfall in the economy.

Focusing on India, he said, "There are a lot of people who have been working in places away from their home to cater the needs of their families. Students have been residing away from their homes to get the best of education. During this lockdown, India will certainly see reverse migration."

Dr Sriparna B Baruah shared her views on the current situation and to discuss how startups are supposed to deal with the crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. She said that the startups should consider the benefits that they might reap in the future and not only focus on the negatives of the ongoing unusual circumstances. In order to ensure holistic economic development, the government will

surely come up with policies to boost the startups, Dr Baruah asserted. "The government will come up with policies to boost startups as they would also want to develop and grow through Startups and Entrepreneurs," she added. She further said that during this period, the government has still been working in favor of the startups as Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has come up with a scheme to encourage startups to come up with probable solutions to help India fight against COVID-19 and also allocated ₹10,000 crore fund to aid the start ups. Startup India, Invest India, and more such organisations are coming up with schemes to support startups.. Healthcare, logistics, supply chain management, online education portals are all going to boom in the post COVID-19 era, she said. Startups should also take up this crisis as an opportunity. The startups are, hence, suggested to revamp their business plans and come up with innovative ideas to grow in the sectors that are or are expected to boom.

Investor's outlook and investment sentiment was another major talking point of the webinar on which Dr Baruah responded that certain sectors will have investments coming in and existing investors will invest in the potential and booming sectors such as e-commerce, digital media and entertainment, online education portals, telecommunication sectors, healthcare sector, supply chain

management and logistics sector. The ones which might take up a lot of time to revive will naturally have low investments, sectors such as hospitality, tourism, restaurants and luxury items will have to see a downfall for now. She also suggested various safety measures and guideline to be followed by different sectors in order to become operational.

Rajiv Ranjan announced the measures that AIIILSG will be taking up to motivate and encourage entrepreneurs and startups.

Ravi Ranjan Guru suggested various measures that will be undertaken by AIIILSG to contribute in development after the COVID-19 pandemic. AIIILSG will be promoting and encouraging startups by backing up the products and services provided by the startups. AIIILSG has been working with Government agencies and has been a part of different campaigns related to sanitisation, cleanliness etc. and will keep supporting government agencies through these tough times.

Dr Sriparna said that one has to be hopeful, and believe in oneself, that you have something that not everybody has, people who have taken a plunge, are already on their way to become successful entrepreneurs. And as it comes to approaching investors and funders, one has to be transparent with their investors and stakeholders.

In closing, Dr Sriparna mentioned that developing and enhancing skills is important and one should try and utilise this time to learn new things, discover new avenues, enhance knowledge and work as much as one can on their project. Guru also presented his views on capacity building. He also felt that the government will be pumping money into sectors such as healthcare and sanitisation. "So, one should re-plan their projects accordingly", he concluded.

UN launches 'Closing the Loop' project to reduce pollution in ASEAN cities

BANGKOK: To reduce the plastic waste pollution in the rivers and oceans, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in partnership with Government of Japan has launched a new project called 'Closing the Loop'.

'Closing the loop', a project which aims to reduce the environmental impact of cities in South East Asia, will be implemented in four ASEAN cities on a pilot basis - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Surabaya, Indonesia; Da Nang, Vietnam; and Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand.

The project will support the governments by addressing the plastic waste pollution and leakages into the marine environment. To implement



this project, innovative technologies will be used such as remote sensing, use of satellite and crowd sourced data application to monitor and detect the pathways and sources of plastic waste entering rivers from urban catchment areas.

As per the data around 60 per cent of plastic waste leakage into the environment comes from cities in South East Asia. 75 per cent of land-based marine plastic pollution in South East Asia comes from uncollected waste and 25 per cent originates from the municipal waste management system.

To curb this pollution, 'Closing the Loop' project will produce waste maps and simulations to help training officials and stakeholders in ASEAN cities to reduce the plastic waste by use of smart technologies to monitor, report and manage the plastic pollution. Urban policy makers will also be provided with the right tool to develop better policies and strategies, which apply a circular economy approach in managing their plastic waste streams.

The 'Closing the Loop' project supports local implementation of the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris and the G20 Osaka Blue Vision to tackle the proliferation of plastic litter.

PM announces fiscal package; focuses on self-reliance

NEW DELHI: In his May 12th address to the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the Central Government will be allocating a fund of ₹20 lakh crore. This is to boost the economic conditions of street vendors, small and medium business enterprises, farmers, middle-class, etc. The details of the package will be announced by the Finance Minister in the coming days. With the economic booster in place, which is one-tenth of the total GDP of the country, Modi expects that the post COVID-19 era would bring India several opportunities, and given the nation's track record, it is expected that India would rise to the occasion and embrace the opportunities ahead. He underlined that it is a general perception that the 21st century belongs to India. Further, the PM emphasised that Indians need to rely more on local manufacturing, markets, supply chains in order to make India more self reliant economically during this time. "Be vocal about local", he said. Regarding the status of the lockdown, Modi mentioned that it will continue into its fourth phase, however, the impositions would vary from the past renditions of the lockdown. He further said the conditions would be discussed with the Chief Ministers and the announcement would be made before May 18.

Maharashtra gov seals all hotspots in the state, including Dharavi



With the total number of cases rising exponentially in the state, the Government of Maharashtra announced that it will seal all COVID-19 hotspots in the state. With more than 14 people being tested positive for COVID-19 from Dharavi, authorities decided to shut down the urban slum fearing community transmission. Apart from this, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) banned all unlicensed vegetable and fruit markets, hawkers and sellers at the containment areas in Dharavi to prevent further spread of the virus. Anyone caught buying from unlicensed sellers or vendors will be arrested.

Aarogya Setu mandatory for train travel

The Railways have announced that it is now mandatory for those travelling via the 'special trains' to install and use the Aarogya Setu app. The announcement was made via the Ministry of Railways' official twitter handle. The government's application provides a means to the users to identify possible risks of infections and notifies if any corona positive patient is in the vicinity of the user. Further, sources from the Northern Railways have confirmed that they are conducting thermal screening of passengers and only people with no symptoms are being allowed to go forward with their journey.



SUBSCRIBE TO UrbanUpdate

A magazine dedicated to Urban
Infrastructure, Governance & Sustainability

For 3 Years
(36 Issues)
Rs 2520

For 2 Years
(24 Issues)
Rs 1920

For 1 Year
(12 Issues)
Rs 1080

Yes, I want to subscribe to Urban Update

Tick	Year	Cover price	Issue/Year	Cover price/Annum	You pay	Discount
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	100	12	1200	1080	10%
<input type="checkbox"/>	2		24	2400	1920	20%
<input type="checkbox"/>	3		36	3600	2520	30%

Please fill this form in CAPITAL LETTERS

Name

Organisation

Designation Mobile

Address

City Pin Code State

E-mail

Cheque/DD/MO No Drawn on (specify bank)

For Rupees Dated

In favour of 'ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT' is enclosed.

Mail this form along with your Cheque/DD to the following address
All India Institute of Local Self-Government
Sardar Patel Bhavan, 22-23, Institutional Area, D Block, Pankha Road, Janakpuri, Delhi-110058

You can pay Subscription charges through National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT). Details for NEFT transfer are:

Axis Bank Limited

A/C Name: All India Institute of Local Self-Government

A/C No: 207010100182768

IFSC: UTIB0000207

Please e-mail your details (Name, Address, duration of subscription, transaction no.) to contacturbanupdate@gmail.com for initiating subscription after the NEFT transfer.

For any query, please contact our Subscription Department
Phone No.: 011-2852 1783 / 5473 (Extn. 37)
Or e-mail at contacturbanupdate@gmail.com

Terms and Conditions

- Payments for mailed subscriptions are accepted only via cheque or demand draft
- Cash payments may be made in person
- Allow one week for processing of your subscription
- You will receive your copy of URBAN UPDATE by post/courier
- All disputes shall be subject to Delhi jurisdiction only

ROAD TO REDEMPTION FOR COUNTRIES, CITIES

Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." COVID-19 is the biggest health crisis in the last 100 years. Nations have had to lock up their money-minting machines—cities—completely for almost two months. Analysts believe that the health crisis could be over in a few months but the repercussions on the world economy and normal lives of citizens would be longer lasting than is being anticipated. Cities should use this crisis to overhaul their urban engine, make them resilient to such emergencies, focus on sustainable development, and avert the impending crisis of climate change





ABHISHEK PANDEY
Editor

Every country is now aware of the physical threat of the COVID-19 but the associated damage has just begun to come into focus. Almost every country has taken an economic blow because of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown of 6-12 weeks. At the time of writing this story, 5 million people have already been infected; more than 320,000 people have died around the world. India recorded 100,000 cases and over 3200 deaths. The nation is also under complete lockdown since March 24. With so many unfortunate deaths and now economic distress staring down, cities have no time to mourn but restart the economic engine to save millions of people from falling into economic despair. However the reopening needs extra caution.

Every nation did look at lockdown as the first response to halt the spread of the coronavirus. Some countries acted quickly and some countries like Sweden, which has one of the best health care systems in the world, went the relaxed way and trusted their people for following social distancing and other precautionary measures. There has

been no strict lockdown in Sweden. Some countries including India, which has weak health infrastructure and densely populated cities, felt that lockdown was a necessity and an inescapable step.

ECONOMIC CRISIS LOOMING LARGE

The lockdown has caused havoc and thrown normal life out of gear for everyone. The worst affected are the poor, especially the migrant workers in Indian cities. They lost their jobs in a jiffy as most of them were daily wagers or weekly contract workers. The data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy tells that the unemployment rate shot up to 27.1 per cent in the week ended May 3. This is the highest in the last five decades as I could find the recording of the unemployment rate in the country from the late seventies only. Losing their job in such a difficult time was a big blow to the poor workers. They had no jobs, hence no daily earning to support themselves.

Despite assurances from the state and central governments for the monetary assistance and arrangements for the food and shelter, they faced difficulties. They started their journey to their respective destinations. Some cycled, some set out on foot for hundreds of kilometres. A number of these people died enroute; run over by goods train, rammed by speeding trucks or simply from the exertion and heat strokes. The pictures depicting the pain and agony of these people will haunt the nation for a long time.

Unemployment is not an exclusive problem for India during the pandemic. The United States of America is also witnessing the unemployment rate that has reached the level of the Great Depression of 1929. Similarly, all the big economies including Japan, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Germany have seen rise in unemployment levels between 5 per cent and 15 per cent; especially among the people working in the

informal sector. Guy Rider, Director-General of the International Labour Organization, has aptly described this in his tweet and suggested a way forward by saying, "Our new data shows the social and economic impact of #COVID-19 is being felt hardest by informal workers and by enterprises in high-risk sectors. It has exposed the frailties and inequalities of our societies. We must build better normal that supports the most vulnerable first." Remember the quote of Winston Churchill we quoted in the beginning. Nations and cities should not waste a 'good crisis'.

A recent report by the World Economic Forum 'COVID-19 Risks Outlook' underlines that economic distress and social discontent will rise over the next 18 months unless policymakers and business leaders work together to manage the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. International Monetary Fund predicts that the world economy would contract by 3 per cent because of the lockdown measures across the world. The same report namely 'The Great Lockdown' predicts that India's GDP would grow by 1.9 per cent only while another report by the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) says that India would grow between 0.9 and 1.5 per cent. Goldman Sachs says that India's GDP will slump by 45 per cent in the second quarter this year. These are also the best case scenarios if the coronavirus is contained in the next six months.

The crisis has already started gripping the white and blue-collar working groups because of the salary cuts, and retrenchments. Many of them have started digging into their savings to survive or remain financially stable during the crisis. Salaries may have stopped coming, shops may have been shut for months, the businesses may have been closed but the recurring expenses like EMIs, rent, electricity bills, medical expenses and many others remain the same. People are comparing the scenario with the great depression but the economic problem may run

INDIA THAT HAS WEAK PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE AND HAS JUST 0.5 BEDS PER 1000 PEOPLE HAS FARED BETTER THAN THE COUNTRIES WITH EXCELLENT HEALTHCARE FACILITIES. SOME COUNTRIES HAVE 8 TO 14 HOSPITAL BEDS PER THOUSAND PEOPLE. RUSSIA, JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA, GERMANY, ITALY, THE USA, THE UK, AND FRANCE HAVE 8.2, 13.4, 13.2, 8.3, 2.9, 2.8 AND 6.5 RESPECTIVELY. ALL OF THEM HAVE HIGHER PER MILLION DEATH RATES THAN INDIA. INDIA HAD 2.5 DEATHS PER ONE MILLION POPULATION. THOUGH EVERY DEATH IS UNFORTUNATE, THE INDIAN NUMBERS ARE FAR LESS THAN DEVELOPED NATIONS WHICH HAVE URBANIZATION BETWEEN 70 TO 100 PER CENT. ONLY CHINA COMES CLOSE TO INDIA WITH 3.5 DEATHS PER ONE MILLION POPULATION BUT THERE ARE QUESTIONS ON THEIR TRANSPARENCY IN DATA SHARING. (SEE THE CHART A)

deeper in the absence of any vaccine. This is perhaps the first time in recorded history that countries have completely shut down the economic activities. Every country has taken a slew of measures to bring the economic train back on track. India has also announced a fiscal stimulus package of ₹20 lakh crore or almost 10 per cent of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This includes new loans, the moratorium on existing loans, selective contribution to Employee Provident Fund (EPF) of small companies, tax deferrals, direct cash transfer to the poor, free food grains through Public Distribution System coupled with labour and agriculture reforms.

COVID-19 Data

	Confirmed	Deaths	Recovered	Cases per 1M	Deaths per 1M	Urbanisation
World	5,036,920	326,252	1,990,156	646.2	41.9	54
USA	1,576,950	93,858	364,263	4,764.20	283.6	82
Russia	308,705	2,972	85,392	2,115.40	20.4	74
Spain	278,803	27,778	196,958	5,963.10	594.1	80
Brazil	275,382	18,130	106,794	1,295.60	85.3	87
UK	248,818	35,341	NA	3,665.20	520.6	83
Italy	226,699	32,169	129,401	3,749.50	532.1	70
France	180,809	28,022	62,563	2,770.00	429.3	80
Germany	178,170	8,213	156,900	2,126.50	98	77
Turkey	152,587	4,222	113,987	1,809.20	50.1	75
Iran	126,949	7,183	98,808	1,511.40	85.5	75
India	111,602	3,426	45,216	80.9	2.5	34

Source: WHO, World Bank
As on May 20, 2020

POST CORONA WORLD

Now the nations are lifting the lockdown with invariable concessions to come back on the track soon. When the world is still reeling under the impacts of the pandemic and finding ways for normalization, China is already on its feet and has even opened the Disney World for the public on May 12. Its factories are again roaring and producing the essentials, non-essentials, everything.

They may not be running to full capacity but in no time, they will completely return to normal much before any other country because of their political and administrative system. China was operating at 87 per cent of typical output on May 12, according to the Trivium National Business Activity Index.

Prime Minister of Sweden Stefan Löfven had repeatedly pointed to the fact that the more relaxed framework is sustainable for a longer time. The leaders of all the countries have to take a cue from his statement because it seems that humanity has to live with the virus for some time until the vaccine is out.

Life, while living with the virus, is going to be different. Cinema halls, malls, restaurants, hotels, aviation and tourism industry, and many more businesses, where chances of contagion are high, will likely bear the brunt of the restrictions. People will avoid going to concerts, sporting events, etc.

Life is going to change and we will have to prepare ourselves for transformative changes.

RETHINK CITIES

India has fared well in terms of the number of positive cases and fatalities considering that we have the second largest population in the world. As per the last census, a majority of Indians, a little over 65 per cent, still live in rural areas. Though there is no research done on this, it could be one of the reasons that the number of cases in a hugely populated country like India is lower than the USA, Russia and many European countries

which host a fraction of India's population. But the reason for most of the cases from the big cities could be the density. That's why only five Indian cities account for 65 per cent of positive cases.

And, the world over, more than 50 per cent of the world's population lives in cities that occupy just 2 per cent of the world's landmass.

This has always seemed to be a critical problem even before anybody knew what the phrase social distancing meant literally. Now, we know well what havoc a communicable disease can cause in the cities. New Yorks, Londons and Mumbais of the world are the examples. The pandemic has told us that cities are dangerous places to live in and during the lockdowns, many people living in cities thought of living in emptier places. Is this thinking going to prevail? Nobody knows. Many outstation workers returning home have said that they will prefer staying back home but this trend will not last long for many reasons.

Cities attract people not just for offering them employment for survival but also offer them a dream of a better life. Just compare the thinking of a migrant worker with an upper-middle-class youngster who aspires to get a Green Card or Permanent Citizenship in a developed country. They can get a job back at home but most of them who studied abroad want to stay back and give the same lifestyle to their children; unless they have some family business to manage in India.

Migrant workers will come back sooner or later but we must prepare our cities to include them and have a respectable space for them.

Our cities need to learn from the various aspects of this pandemic and plan their future development, not just making themselves efficient to handle the pandemics and disasters but also learn the nuances to handle the social aspects of the evolving urban challenges.

VILLAGES SAVED INDIA!

I have tried to collate some data on coronavirus cases, cases per million, total deaths, deaths per million and urbanization trends in countries and regions. The data suggests that cities are friendly to coronavirus and give them fertile ground to spread wide and fast. Leaders all over the world are all praise for India for handling the pandemic well.

There is no proven model of fighting coronavirus from India that proves that the country has done something exemplary in containing the virus and deaths. India has also followed the model of lockdown like many other countries did. This is just one hypothesis, based on the comparison of data, that Indian villages could have saved India from the massive damage from the pandemic. India that has weak public health infrastructure and has just 0.5 beds per 1000 people has fared better than the countries with excellent healthcare facilities. Some countries have 8 to 14 hospital beds per thousand people. Russia, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Italy, the USA, the UK, and France have 8.2, 13.4, 13.2, 8.3, 2.9, 2.8 and 6.5 respectively. All of them have higher per million death rates than India.

India had 2.5 deaths per one million population. Though every death is unfortunate, the Indian numbers are far less than developed nations which have urbanization between 70 to 100 per cent. Only China comes close to India with 3.5 deaths per one million population but there are questions on their transparency in data sharing. (See the COVID-19 Data)

There are surely many positives of urbanization as it provides economies of scale and other efficiencies. Cities fuel the economy of nations but the pandemic has reminded us that the urbanization process has many faults and it is the duty of urban planners and policymakers to relook at urbanisation from a new lens. The road to redemption for countries shall go through the tunnel of rethinking urbanisation. ■

ULBs WILL HAVE TO ASSUME MORE RESPONSIBILITY IN RECOVERY PHASE

Cities are the worst affected by the spread of coronavirus. Over 90 per cent of total cases are from urban areas in India. This pandemic has reminded us that the coordinated action among cities and states is the only effective response in order to come out of the health crisis that has affected the economy and normal life badly

Cities in India and the world over are the worst victims of the coronavirus. The rapid spread of the virus in our cities has made us rethink the urban design of our cities. It seems cities are not pandemic resilient. This century has seen many deadly viruses including Sars, Mers, Ebola and now the coronavirus—the most infectious of all. Our mighty and modern cities could not safeguard us from the spread and on the contrary, they proved to be fertile grounds for spread of the virus.

As per the World Health Organisation figure, over 1,430 cities in 210 countries are affected by COVID-19 and over 95 per cent of total cases are in urban areas. The problem is compounded in cities because of the poor living conditions and density. It is to be noted that one billion people live in informal settlements and slums in overcrowded and inadequate housing facilities.

The spread of cholera, plague and typhoid in the past paved the way for creating the modern sewer systems in our cities which have improved sanitation in the last century. There are many learnings from this pandemic too. Cities have to be prepared to deal with infectious viruses and the urban local bodies will have to assume more responsibility in India. As of now, the buck stops with the district magistrate or collector in managing health emergencies like these. The elected representatives like mayors

and councillors who have better local connect with the citizens have no administrative powers and financial resources to respond locally. This is the time city leaders must come forward and focus on strengthening their capacity and planning local actions more effectively.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

Some cities are playing a proactive role by providing relevant information to their citizens and staff. One among them is Surat Municipal Corporation that has created a separate COVID-19 dashboard linked to its existing website. They have made all information related to the virus available. The corporation is regularly updating the information like a daily update on fatalities, the number of cases (ward-wise, age-wise, gender-wise, etc.), helpline numbers, and government circulars. The corporation has also provided the link of the Integrated Government Online Training Platform (iGot) for helping frontline workers with various courses. iGOT platform has a training module for management of COVID-19 for the capacity building of frontline workers to handle the pandemic efficiently. According to the program details available, these courses are specifically designed for doctors, nurses, paramedics, hygiene workers, technicians, auxiliary nursing midwives (ANMs), state government officers, civil defence officers, various police organisations, National Cadet Corps (NCC), and other volunteers. The training contents of the course include

basics of COVID, clinical management, ICU care management, infection prevention and care, usage of PPE, quarantine and isolation, training for NCC cadets, management of COVID-19 cases, laboratory sample collection and testing, psychological care of patients, pediatric care in COVID-19, pregnancy during COVID-19, etc.

Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has launched a website <https://stopcoronavirus.mcgm.gov.in/> for providing all kind of information to the public. The corporation's social media handles are also active and providing prompt information to people. Pune has also assisted in setting up 40 flu clinics in city hospitals apart from spreading





RANJIT S CHAVAN
President, AIILSG

BRIHANMUMBAI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (BMC) HAS LAUNCHED A WEBSITE [HTTPS://STOPCORONAVIRUS.MCGM.GOV.IN/](https://stopcoronavirus.mcg.gov.in/) FOR PROVIDING ALL KIND OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC. THE CORPORATION'S SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES ARE ALSO ACTIVE AND PROVIDING PROMPT INFORMATION TO PEOPLE. OTHER CORPORATIONS HAVE ALSO TAKEN SIMILAR ACTIONS AND PLAYING THEIR ROLES WELL IN MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF THE VIRUS ON NORMAL LIFE. SMART CITIES WHICH HAVE FOCUSED ON DEVELOPING OF CENTRALIZED DATA CENTRES ARE ALSO PROVING TO BE HELPFUL IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

awareness among citizens. Other corporations have also taken similar actions and are playing their roles well in mitigating the impact of the virus on normal life. Smart cities which have focused on developing of centralised data centres are also proving to be helpful in disseminating information. Lucknow Smart City has all the information related to the virus available on its website.

LEARNING FOR BECOMING PANDEMIC

RESILIENT

But many other cities have responded poorly. There is a need for city leaders and senior municipal staff to learn from each other. Many big cities of India do not have any information available on their websites and this includes some of the state capitals too. Chief Ministers and district magistrates are in the leadership roles. Mayors will have to lead from the front.

Our cities and the city leaders have not seen such a pandemic in the past. It is unprecedented. The world has

seen such a health crisis in the time of World War-I-Spanish Flu. There are many lessons which our cities can learn. The governments had issued similar guidelines and regulations for the people like we are seeing now such as lockdowns, compulsory wearing of masks and other sanitation protocols while travelling. According to The New York Times, during the pandemic, Boy Scouts in New York City approached people they'd seen spitting on the street and gave them cards that read: "You are in violation of the Sanitary Code." Similarly, Delhi Metro has decided to increase the fine on spitting to ₹1000.

We know that medical science was not at its peak during those days but it is important to note that the first licensed vaccine came after almost 20 years. We may be looking at six months or so for getting the vaccine but the cities will have to start their businesses and transport systems. This time is going to be crucial for cities to control the virus spread as the patterns of pandemics have shown that the second wave is imminent after relaxing of the lockdown and other measures taken by the governments. The cities which had controlled the spread with proper measures had almost one-tenth of fatalities than the cities which did not. Cities need to be well prepared until the vaccine is found, or until herd immunity is developed. ■



WHERE IS THE VACCINE?

The multi-billion dollar question



KUMAR DHANANJAY
Consulting Editor

The production lines are ready. The companies are estimating the numbers they need to produce as Corona vaccine. Billions of dollars are being pumped in, new factories are being set up, but the vaccine is nowhere in sight. A vaccine is currently the best bet to end the threat posed by the novel coronavirus, which has caused a pandemic across the world

There are as many as seven companies trying to produce a vaccine to combat Corona (see the graphics). But the fact remains that after 1961 the world has not produced a vaccine. We are yet to find a vaccine for HIV, a disease discovered in the early 1980s and all the subsequent pandemics, be it SARS, Zica, Ebola and so on and so forth. Now Corona is testing the health community and scientists alike to find a cure for this pandemic. So where do we stand today (at the time of going to print)?

TWO CONTENDING THOUGHTS

Global population in its fight against the virus has become a 'holy grail'. There are two thoughts within the scientific community. The first is that the threat posed by the pandemic will die down if the human population develops immunity to COVID-19. How does humanity acquire immunity? It can be acquired naturally or through vaccination.

The first alternative is dangerous because that requires a huge chunk of world population to get infected. The second option is more scientific against this fast spreading virus and raises hope. We need to keep in mind that science

has developed over the years and it's our best bet yet. Within months of the outbreak scientists across the world have launched projects to identify and develop vaccines to halt the march of the virus. If we look at World Health Organisation (WHO) global database of research into novel coronavirus there are seven vaccine candidates being tried on humans. Let's take a look at the efforts being made globally and in India too. Globally seven companies have entered human trials stage for corona vaccine. In India, too, six firms are in different stages of pre-clinical vaccine development. We need to keep in mind that vaccine research is a long process. It involves three stages of trials that include clinical and human trials. The number of people being injected increases and it requires an in-depth study of testing for safety, side-effects and whether it is able to induce immunity. Time could mean decades. There is also a fear that the scientists are forced to take 'shortcuts' to develop the vaccine but science does not endorse that.

NO CERTAINTY OF A TIME LIMIT

These are yet initial days in the development of a vaccine. If we look at the time line of companies making predictions to achieve a vaccine it ranges from four months to a year and

half. Most of the corona vaccine being developed at the moment is trying to target the spikes located on the surface of the virus. The virus uses these spikes, which are made of protein, to latch on to human cells. Vaccines currently being developed hope to disable these spikes and render the novel coronavirus incapable of causing an infection.

WHO has listed about eighty others apart from the seven mentioned in the list. These are various pharma companies which are in different stages of clinical trials. The landscape of COVID-19 is changing very fast also because of its mutation making it tough to come up with a vaccine.

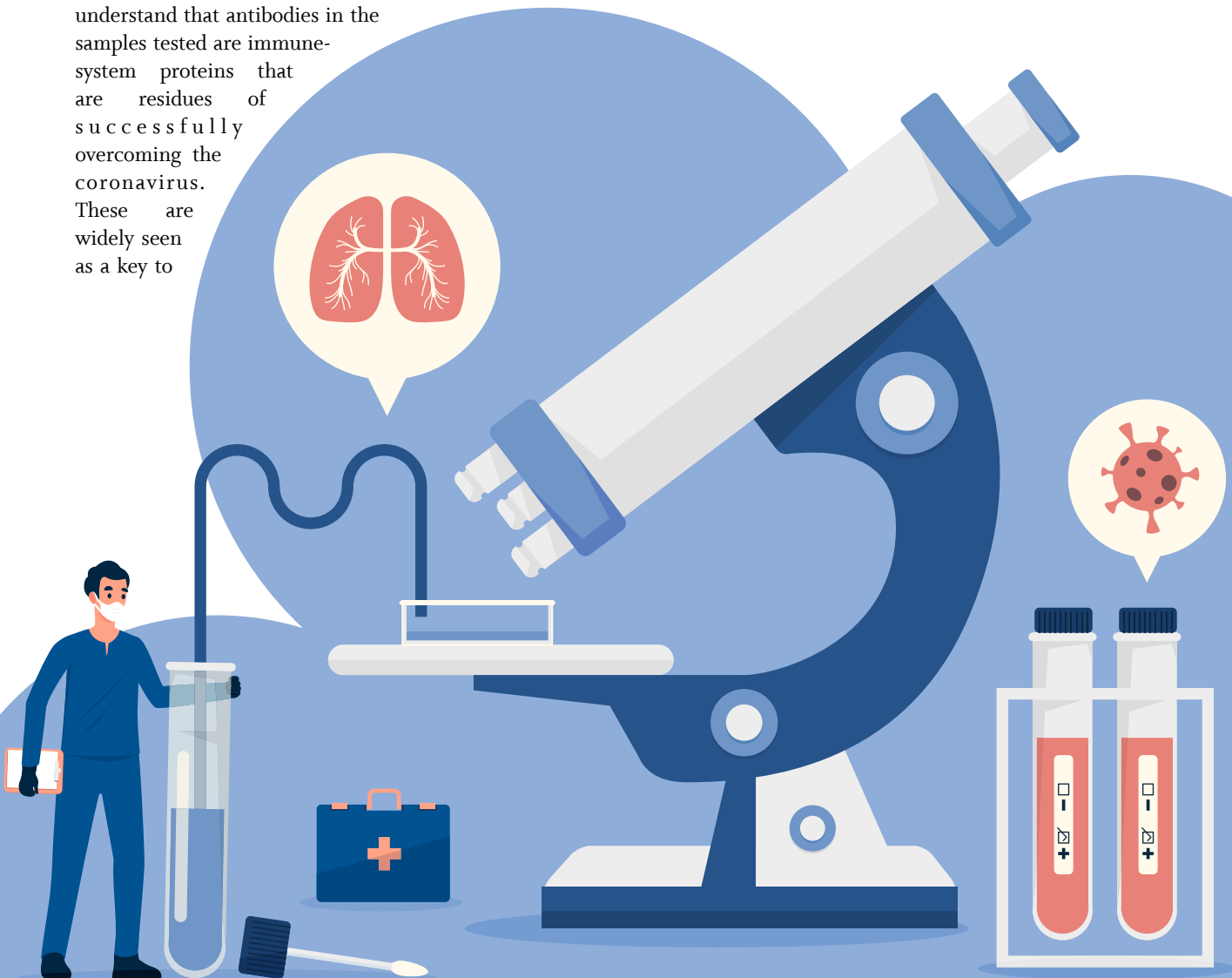
The other challenge is that the development of a vaccine goes through many stages. First it involves animal trials and at least three phases of human trials. The danger that we are confronted with is that scientists are trying to take a different route. They have accelerated route that is skipping stages and are combining various phases of research. This is fraught with a risk and something full of further problems. It could well mean that a vaccine is available in some record time but experts are sceptical.

And what does record time look like; experts and health practitioners are not looking at anything less than a year and half. Remember we are still struggling for HIV vaccine.

TWO MOST PROMINENT RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Israeli Defence Minister claimed that scientists have made 'significant breakthrough' and that 'Israel's secret lab isolated Coronavirus antibodies'. The Minister, Naftali Bennett claimed saying "I am proud of the Biological Institute staff, who have made a major breakthrough". "The Jewish creativity and ingenuity brought about this amazing achievement". His statement was released after he visited the labs of the Israel Institute for Biological Research (IIBR), a secretive unit that works under the Prime Minister's Office. The scientists there told him that the development phase of the vaccine has been completed. We need to understand that antibodies in the samples tested are immune-system proteins that are residues of successfully overcoming the coronavirus. These are widely seen as a key to

THE OTHER CHALLENGE IS THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VACCINE GOES THROUGH MANY STAGES. FIRST IT INVOLVES ANIMAL TRIALS AND AT LEAST THREE PHASES OF HUMAN TRIALS. THE DANGER THAT WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH IS THAT SCIENTISTS ARE TRYING TO TAKE A DIFFERENT ROUTE. THEY HAVE ACCELERATED ROUTE THAT IS SKIPPING STAGES AND ARE COMBINING VARIOUS PHASES OF RESEARCH. THIS IS FRAUGHT WITH A RISK AND SOMETHING FULL OF FURTHER PROBLEMS. IT COULD WELL MEAN THAT A VACCINE IS AVAILABLE IN SOME RECORD TIME BUT EXPERTS ARE SCEPTICAL. AND WHAT DOES RECORD TIME LOOK LIKE; EXPERTS AND HEALTH PRACTITIONERS ARE NOT LOOKING AT ANYTHING LESS THAN A YEAR AND HALF. REMEMBER WE ARE STILL STRUGGLING FOR HIV VACCINE



developing a possible cure. Another Israeli team has claimed that 'it is close to completing the first phase of development of a coronavirus vaccine'. It has already secured a US \$12 million investment to accelerate the path to clinical trials. IIBR Director Shmuel Shapira said that the antibody formula was being patented, after which an international manufacturer would be sought to mass-produce it. The IIBR has been leading Israeli efforts to develop a treatment and vaccine for the coronavirus, including the testing of blood from those who recovered

from COVID-19. The second research, and a prominent one, is happening at the University of Oxford. Here the researchers have started testing the vaccine. It has raised most hopes. In a statement, the University of Oxford said: "ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 is made from a virus (ChAdOx1), which is a weakened version of a common cold virus (adenovirus) that causes infections in chimpanzees, that has been genetically changed so that it is impossible for it to grow in humans. Genetic material has been added to the ChAdOx1 construct, that is used to make proteins from the

COVID-19 virus (SARS-CoV-2) called Spike glycoprotein (S). This protein is usually found on the surface of SARS-CoV-2 and plays an essential role in the infection pathway of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus uses its spike protein to bind to ACE2 receptors on human cells to gain entry to the cells and cause an infection."

INDIAN CONNECTION MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN

As India is fighting the battle along with the world, its connection to find

Global efforts to develop a vaccine

AD5-NCOV

Its a joint effort by the Chinese biotech firm CanSino Biologics and an arm of the People's Liberation Army, Ad5-nCoV. it was the first to vaccine that entered in human trials. Ad5-nCoV is currently in Phase II clinical trials and is the farthest along in research for vaccines against the novel coronavirus. The vaccine uses a harmless virus known as adenovirus to transport DNA of the 'spike proteins' present on the surface of the novel coronavirus. Once in the body, the DNA present in the vaccine results in the production of these spike proteins. The idea behind is that is that these spike proteins would activate the immune system. and will get them to produce pathogen-fighting antibodies that can take on an actual novel coronavirus infection in the future.

Timeline: Phase II trials of the Ad5-nCoV are expected to last at least six months. Final word on the efficacy of the Ad5-nCoV vaccine and its possible use in the real world is expected to come early next year.

CHADOX1

Developed by British scientists, ChAdOx1 is similar to the Chinese Ad5-nCoV in terms of the technique used to induce immunity. The shot is currently in combined Phase I/II clinical trials that aim to test the vaccine's efficacy and safety. The Oxford University scientists behind ChAdOx1 are so confident that they have taken the risk of ordering mass production of the vaccine. With the help of several manufacturers that includes Serum Institute of India. The researchers plan to produce a million doses by September, doses that will go to waste if clinical trials produce negative results. Conceptually, ChAdOx1 is working on similar Chinese Ad5-nCoV. the only difference is that British vaccine uses a harmless virus to introduce genes that produce the novel coronavirus's spike

proteins inside the human body. This forces the immune system to build system to neutralize spike proteins. its also directed towards building an ability that would protect against a future novel coronavirus infection.

Timeline: ChAdOx1's full clinical trial that will come to a conclusion only by May next year. However, the researchers behind the vaccine are hopeful of getting "emergency" usage approval before that. We should know more about ChAdOx1's possible use in the next few months.

INO-4800

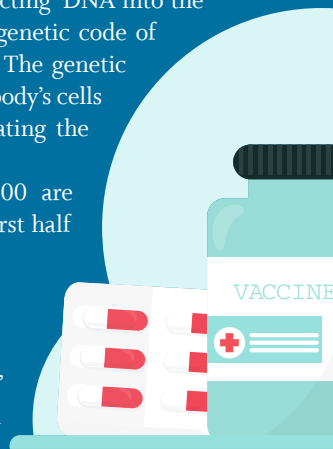
Developed by the US biotech firm Inovio Pharmaceuticals, INO-4800 is currently in Phase I clinical trials. INO-4800 has the backing of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, a global vaccine research coalition founded by the governments of India and Norway, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, among others.

INO-4800 is based on a relatively new vaccine technique of getting the body's own cells to produce fragments of the novel coronavirus. This is done by 'injecting' DNA into the body. The injected DNA contains the genetic code of the novel coronavirus's spike proteins. The genetic code, it is hoped, would be read by the body's cells to produce those spike proteins, activating the immune system.

Timeline: Phase I trials of INO-4800 are expected to be fully completed in the first half of 2021.

INACTIVATED CHINESE CANDIDATE

A conventional vaccine that uses a 'dead' version of the novel coronavirus and



a vaccine must be noted. The Serum Institute of India, one of the largest vaccine manufacturers in the world, has partnered with various pharma companies of the world in production of the vaccine. It is a leading partner in trials along with University of Oxford. In a statement, the company said: "SII will be manufacturing the vaccine in anticipation of clinical trials succeeding by September-October in the UK. The vaccine will not be made available to the public in two-three weeks, as suggested in some media reports. Following that, SII has undertaken the

decision to initiate the manufacture at their own risk. The decision has been solely taken to have a jump start on manufacturing, to have enough doses available, if the clinical trials work."

WHERE HAVE THE TRIALS REACHED?

For the first time in history the vaccine leapt straight to human trials for testing of efficacy. There were no animal trials. The reason being given is that the safety had already been proven earlier, when it was being developed as an option against MERS. For the

trial, 1,102 participants will be enrolled across Oxford, Southampton, London and Bristol. They will be split into the vaccine arm and the control arm; the control will not be a placebo as is usually done, but another vaccine. This will be MenACWY, a vaccine licenced for use against a common bacteria that causes meningitis and sepsis. Discussion with many experts and medical practitioners does not suggest that we are anywhere near a vaccine. The world is yet to find vaccine for HIV; let's hope we get to see the day when we will have a vaccine against Coronavirus. ■

developed by a state-run Chinese pharma firm reportedly entered Phase II trials end-April. The vaccine is listed on World Health Organisation's database but is relatively unadvertised outside of Chinese media. According to the state-run news agency Xinhua, the vaccine uses 'inactivated' novel coronavirus cells to induce immunity. Basically, the vaccine is made up of novel coronavirus cells that have been treated in laboratories to ensure no harm to the body. Once in the body, the weakened virus cells would be identified by the immune system, which would then build antibodies that can destroy the novel coronavirus.

Timeline: According to Chinese media reports, the vaccine is currently in phase two of clinical trials and is on track to enter Phase III. The overall development of the vaccine may take up to a year, according to Xinhua.

PICOVACC

Another Chinese candidate, PiCoVacc is an inactivated vaccine developed by the private biopharma company Sinovac. The vaccine, which is currently in combined Phase I/II trials, aims to generate an immune response by exposing the body to 'inactivated' cells of the novel coronavirus.

Timeline: The vaccine's current stage of trial research. this is expected to be finished in four months,.

MRNA-1273

Developed by the ten-year-old US biotech firm Moderna, mRNA-1273 is based on a radical -- and so, largely untested -- approach to vaccination that is similar in concept to a DNA vaccine such as the INO-4800. mRNA-1273 relies on 'information molecules' to deliver instructions to human body cells on how to build a part of the novel coronavirus. These

instructions are delivered by molecules known as messenger RNA, or mRNA, which are injected into the human body. In the case of mRNA-1273, the molecules contain information on building and producing the 'spike proteins' of the novel coronavirus. These spikes, theoretically, would generate a response from the immune system that can protect against a novel coronavirus attack in the future. mRNA-12 Timeline: Development of mRNA-1273 has been quick, thanks to the new technology on which the vaccine is based.

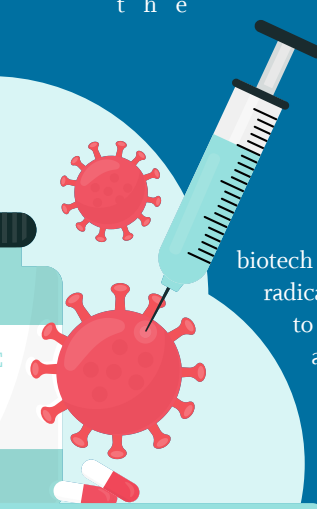
BNT162

Jointly developed by the German company BioNTech and US pharma giant Pfizer, BT162 is a group of four potential vaccines based on the messenger RNA, or mRNA, concept. The vaccines are about to be tested and is currently in combined phase of i/ii trials. and are likely to enter trials in the United States as well. The four vaccines use different mRNA technologies developed by BioNTech and more or less aim to get the body's own cells to produce the novel coronavirus's spike proteins. Just like with mRNA-1273, the technology used by these vaccines is radically new and so, remains largely untested.

Timeline: BT162's initial trials are expected to take about a year to complete.

EFFORTS IN INDIA

Indian efforts to develop a vaccine against the novel coronavirus are currently in various stages of pre-clinical research. According to a latest report at least six Indian firms are occupied in developing a novel coronavirus vaccine, either independently or in partnerships with international companies. Four of these potential vaccines are currently listed on the World Health Organisation list. These include efforts being made by the Ahdamabad based pharma major Zydus Cadila, Hyderabad-based biopharma firm Biological E Limited and Pune-based vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India.



Work, business, and progress IN A NEW UNCERTAIN WORLD

The vicious fallout of the Coronavirus pandemic has been the most profound in recent history – the most impactful in the last several decades that one can recall. Its outcomes will unfold gradually as we see phased relaxations in the series of lockdowns. The impacts will manifest in the way we conduct our daily lives, and the way businesses and economic activities reorient themselves. As we start preparing for wide ranging, disruptive changes, here's a look at some possibilities...

Life will not be the same anymore' is a common sentiment expressed by large sections of our population, whether they belong to the corporate world, own small businesses, are working professionals, or workmen. There are several reasons for these outbursts which are now coming forth in the aftermath of the lockdowns put in place in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and the potential health hazards of the virus. Primarily large sections of the working

population especially the migrant workmen who left their villages and towns (and their families) to seek remunerative livelihood options in the cities have been put to severe hardship due to loss of livelihoods, incomes and basic necessities while often living away from their families. This section of the population has been very much in the news. Many of them tried to make it to their distant homes and families on foot given the absence of transportation. Governments including local governments swung into action by discouraging them to travel and to stay put where they were, while providing them shelter and food.

Railways soon started large numbers of 'Shramik Special' trains especially for these persons to travel home.

IMPACT ON INDUSTRY

However, having tasted the difficult times being away from their families, worrying about their own well-being and that of their families, many of these migrant labourers expressed

the desire to stay back in their home towns and not return to the city even if their livelihood was at risk. This has significant implications for industry in and around our cities. There is likely to be a big vacuum and a shortage of labour for industries such as construction and manufacturing. A recent report has quoted FMCG companies in the processed foods sector stating that they have big demand but need to deploy more workmen and run additional hours and have sought permissions from authorities for the same.

As more industrial units, construction sites, and others open up depending upon the level of relaxation allowed by the authorities, there could be a surge in demand for workmen. Other aspects of life, especially in the cities may have big impacts. Social distancing, wearing of masks and new hygiene protocols are already prevalent and will be a part of our everyday lives in the future. What are the potential impacts for businesses like cinema houses and multiplexes? Will current seating patterns be discarded? Will it be possible now to operate movie shows back-to-back or will there be a minimum time gap between shows to allow for easy exit and entry of viewers. What about stadium events including blockbuster cricket matches? It is almost certain that authorities will put in place regulations with respect to all these to control spread of the virus – the Corona Virus now, and other potential public health dangers of the future.

Several experts and restaurant





V VIJAYKUMAR
Sr Advisor, AIILSG

business owners are concerned about the future of this industry. Will take away food and home delivered meals become the norm?

TRANSFORMATIVE WORK PRACTICES

We can expect big changes in the way activity takes place in our workplaces. A large Indian software company recently announced that in the next 4-5 years, it would transform work practices in such a way that at any time, all but 25 per cent of its workforce would work from homes. In other words at any time only one of four employees would be working from the office. The experience during the lockdowns has given confidence to such industries for conducting work offsite. While other industries particularly manufacturing may not be able to work with such models to such an extent, here too functions such as HR and Supply Chain can do with limited in-office presence. Not every employee needs come to the office every day.

This trend has big implications for the real estate industry with greatly reduced requirement for office space. How this industry reinvents itself is to be seen. From these new work practices emanate some ominous signals for other industries too. Aviation for

example. Business travel is likely to be extremely muted for a long time. With virtual, online meetings, and webinars in place of conferences, exhibitions, and other large gathering events, the need for travel has fallen greatly. The impact on the hospitality industry is equally worrisome. As salary cuts, and even job losses stare in our faces, leisure travel will dwindle too. Therefore, travel, aviation, hospitality could see difficult times ahead.

WILL EDUCATION BE IMPACTED?

Given the large numbers of the student community in any setting in schools and colleges, difficulty in maintaining social distancing practices and so on, one wonders what kind of new methods could be adopted in this sphere. Less students per classroom and other norms will be difficult to implement in our cities. Will distance learning receive a fresh impetus and greater acceptability in the country? One needs to wait and see how the scenario unfolds.

THE BRIGHTER SIDE

One can make a guess as to which industries could be positively impacted by new practices and lifestyles. As more and more people work from home, there could be need to equip homes with gadgets such as laptops, printers and scanners. Hence likely greater demand for such equipment; a plus for the office automation products industry. And more importantly, there will be greater need for data connectivity with higher reliability and speeds. Telecom service providers are already offering special 'work from home' data packages.

Home gadgets like dishwashers are already seeing traction in demand and there could be more innovation leading to newer home convenience products and growth of this industry.

Institutions and businesses involved in healthcare, well-being, and hygiene will surely see an uptick as citizens adopt safer practices and take better care of themselves. Preventive healthcare will receive a big boost including traditional/alternate systems in which a great amount of interest has now been generated.

BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

Scientists, doctors and policymakers are more or less unanimous in the view that the Corona Virus is here to stay – for some time. At the same time there are, as is to be expected, multiple efforts across the globe to find a vaccine and a proven cure for the disease. Till these research efforts are turned into commercial saleable products, there could be elevated anxiety and extra care among all. Therefore the impacts will stay. Or could it be that just like other viruses like the influenza or the common flu which is still around after several decades, the new one too will be a part of the ecology? And just like the common flu, most get cured and return to normal after a few days of rest and recuperation? Let's wait and see. In any case, many people have learnt new lifestyles which involves more 'staying at home', less 'strolling on the streets', less 'eating out', less 'biking' or 'driving around' and so on. While due to this, it seems that many aspects of business and commerce are being adversely affected, a big gainer in the short and medium term could surely be the environment – less air and noise pollution, cleaner rivers, ponds, and lakes, and so on. It seems that after a long, long time, nature is stretching its legs. Rare species of birds and previously unseen animals are moving on city roads, revisiting their old habitats. With factories shut and reduced vehicles on roads, the skies are so much bluer. Indeed Mother Earth is healing herself! ■

INSTITUTIONS AND BUSINESSES INVOLVED IN HEALTHCARE, WELL-BEING, AND HYGIENE WILL SURELY SEE AN UPTICK AS CITIZENS ADOPT SAFER PRACTICES AND TAKE BETTER CARE OF THEMSELVES. PREVENTIVE HEALTHCARE WILL RECEIVE A BIG BOOST INCLUDING TRADITIONAL/ALTERNATE SYSTEMS IN WHICH A GREAT AMOUNT OF INTEREST HAS NOW BEEN GENERATED



WFH: THE NEW Urban Work Culture

While the world can only guess when the pandemic will come to an end, many white collared workers are already predicting the new office routine. With companies forced to keep their employees home, everyone has gotten clarity on a few things. As soon as the pandemic driven lockdown is relaxed and everyone gets back to their routine of travelling to the office daily, some might stay home and work from there. This ‘work from home’ culture is now being defined as the new normal for many industries and opening opportunities for many to work in a global market. But the new culture in which we all are trying

to blend in has its own complexities.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD!

The work from home culture is now being seen by many individuals as a new way forward to work in the globally digitalised world. Where many individuals are now able to give more time to their families, they are also saving up on the cost of commute financially and otherwise. Even some large multinationals and early-stage start-ups are looking at it as a way of cost-cutting. However work from home which is seen by many individuals as beneficial has created health problems for some.

A 2019 survey by Airtasker revealed that 54 per cent of remote workers felt “overly stressed” and 45 per cent “experienced high levels of anxiety”

during the workday. Before the pandemic, people working in offices had fixed hours of work; as the clock hit a particular time, it was a signal for pack up, which means shutting down your computers, leaving the work desk and going back home. Working from home has taken away that demarcation, and employees feel they are working 24x7 at home.

While many large corporations like Twitter, Facebook, and JP Morgan have begun to introduce new HR policies for work from home, some have shown their concern for the employees’ health and well-being if work from home continues even after the lockdown. Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft has warned that permanent work from home can have serious consequences on employee health and company culture. Nadella

Work from home, now a ubiquitous phenomenon, abbreviated as WFH, is a system that works for many white collar workers but is an unlikely option for most blue collar workers. The system which seemed like a change to come about in five years, has been enabled by the pandemic in just five weeks

PRATEEK SINGH

Digital Marketing Associate

said all virtual setup of office space world is “replacing one dogma with another dogma”.

While there is a tiff between the opinions of large & small corporations, employees, doctors, and others, many new giants have stood up in the video conferencing industry to provide a seamless option to make remote working smooth.

VIRTUAL THE NEW NORMAL

With the ongoing pandemic forcing the world into a cage, and putting a stop to many industries, one industry/market saw a surge in the user base and the number of stakeholders in the market. During March 14-21 videoconferencing market saw its biggest boom when they topped 62 million downloads across IOS and Google Playstore. Apps like Google Hangout Teams, Zoom Cloud Meeting and Microsoft Team saw the most growth with Zoom topping the worldwide chart in February and March. Not only the video conferencing apps which are used

for conducting office meetings and other official work, HouseParty a social video conferencing app saw rapid growth in Europe and other markets among Gen Z users. With more use of video conferencing apps by everyone, the large players in the market introduced new features or free options in their software. Google announced an advanced version of the Hangouts Meet video conferencing feature to its G Suite clients. Microsoft has rolled out six month trial for its higher version of Microsoft Team. Cisco and Zoom lifted the time limits in their apps on meeting for their free users. Eric Yuan, CEO, Zoom said, “The growing epidemic has broadened my view on what it means to be a video communications technology provider in times of need”. Not only the companies providing the video conferencing application are looking at it as the new routine for everyone, many individuals working in IT and ITES industries see this as a better option. According to a survey conducted by UdeMy an online learning platform, at least four in five working Indian professionals are likely to work in a remote setup more often. Not only Indians, as per a survey conducted by IBM, 54 per cent of 25,000 adults polled in the United States want to work from home and 75 per cent want to do it occasionally. Some companies especially the small ones see work from home as a boon for them. With people now getting comfortable working from home, small scale companies are looking at it as a medium to reduce costs. As the employees are getting comfortable with striking a balance between working and their personal lives while at home, start-ups which rent out office spaces are looking at it as a way for financial and operational cost-cutting. Though WFH the new shift in the market is liked by many employees, companies, and businesses given its financial and other advantages to both employees and corporates, it is not something which can be enforced in every industry.

IS WFH FOR EVERYONE?

Work from home might sound a good option for new parents, people with disabilities, and others who don't blend in the traditional office work culture but this might not be for everyone. Some services can be done from home like human resources, consulting, or some tech role, but when looking at the cross-section of the industry, some roles cannot be performed from home like delivery agent job, people working in beauty salons, or people in restaurant service. Aman a food delivery executive said, “There is no work from home for us, either I can sit at home and do nothing or I deliver your food on time to earn bread and butter”. The work from home option might be the most feasible for people working in IT/ITES industries, as at any given time 20-30 per cent of people working in these industries are working remotely, with COVID-19 situation this might have risen up to 90 per cent.

But the same thing cannot be a feasible solution for employees working in the manufacturing and service industry. As per the experts in the manufacturing sector, only a few functions such as human resources, finance, and planning are amenable to work from home. But most manufacturing units cannot give their employees the option to work from home, given that work from home is not an evolved model and this concept is not widely practiced.

Further, while some bigger companies who have the IT infrastructure would be able to exercise WFH for their employees, it may not be possible for smaller units.

The Corona virus pandemic has brought about many transformative changes in the way we go about our day-to-day lives. WFH is one. How durable this trend becomes, how widespread across industries, and how businesses reinvent the architecture of ‘work’ all remain to be seen. However, in many settings, WFH is likely to become a new way of life soon. ■

NOT EVERYONE IS EQUALLY AFFECTED!

The section of the society that is most commonly affected by a catastrophe is the people working in the unorganised sector. Without any legal structure in place to address their issues, it becomes extremely difficult for them to avail any government benefits. What is their condition during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? Who is taking care of their safety and what is being done to help them survive?

Ashley Paul
Reporter

It was only in January 2020 that the Government of India decided to work on creating a centralised record of all those employed in the informal sector and the migrant workers. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the task, which was supposed to

take at least a year to complete, was stalled completely. It was only after the completion of this centralised database that the government would have been able to work on relief measures, economic and financial provisions and sector-specific labour laws for the informal and migrant-labour sector. The onset and spread of the pandemic did not only stall a chance for these workers to finally get help from the government but worsened their survival conditions,

being highly vulnerable to being affected by the coronavirus.

THE REALITY OF THE INFORMALLY EMPLOYED

Due to the lockdown, most shops, factories and offices have been shut. Along with this, all modes of privately-owned public transport and unregulated sellers have been banned from functioning. These include rickshaw pullers, drivers of e-rickshaws,



buses and autos and, vegetable sellers, among others. Without work, these people have no means of income till the lockdown is lifted. With no income and no long-term relief efforts being undertaken by either the state or the central government, it obviously becomes even more difficult for these people to survive the pandemic.

Ravi, a rickshaw puller in South-West Delhi, said that since the government is not allowing them to work, they are unable to earn and without money, they can't buy food for their family. "It is getting very difficult. Even the owner of our house is threatening to throw us out if we do not pay the rent. Our hands are tied," he said. While talking to Maya, a house-helper in South Delhi, we got to know that she has not been able to work since the past two months due to the lockdown and like Ravi, she too is facing similar problems in providing sustenance for her family. She said, "We could go back to our village but we have no surety that we will be safe there. Moreover, we do not know if we will be allowed or if the mode of transport will be safe for us and our children." Maya went on to tell us that a few policemen come over to their colony ever few days and try to counsel those living on rent to move back to their villages. She explains with a heavy heart that the pandemic has left their future uncertain, unsure of whether they will be able to work again and earn enough to feed their families three meals a day, or will they even be able to survive the pandemic in the first place.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The central and state governments are taking various measures in order to ease the difficulty that the nationwide lockdown is causing to various groups of the population.

The central government, in close coordination with the state governments, introduced the Shramik Special trains for those who are unable to earn and want to return to their hometowns/villages during the lockdown. This decision was taken



by the government after nearly 100 migrant workers and informal sector workers died in accidents or starved to death while walking long distances to reach their villages. Nevertheless, the government took action and was able to introduce the special train service. The trains have already transported more than 1 million passengers and are still continuing their journey between states.

The Delhi government is preparing and serving nearly 9 lakh free meals daily to various unauthorised colonies in Delhi NCR. The food is being prepared in all government schools across Delhi and is being distributed either at the school gates or by designated delivery personnel to various colonies. Every day, these delivery personnel make two rounds, one in the afternoon and one late in the evening, to deliver food to the those who are unable to earn during this time. The ones most prominently falling in this category are the informal sector workers. Other state governments, like the Kerala Government, have taken similar initiatives.

Maya expressed her relief and said that it is because of such deliveries that her family is able to survive with a full stomach. However, it has come to the attention of the authorities that in many places, the same food is being cooked and served daily and that the ones responsible for cooking the meals are not adhering to the weekly menu set by the state government. A volunteer working in the Delhi government 'community kitchens' told Urban Update that contractors are sometimes trying to save money by cooking with raw items

from the day before and cooking the same dishes two-three days in a row. While the Delhi government is trying its best to avoid such a thing from happening by strictly monitoring what is being cooked and served daily to the people, it is clearly not being entirely successful.

In addition to this, the central and Delhi government had also promised that a fixed monthly income would be given to the informal sector workers till the time their jobs are resumed and they start earning again. However, both the governments were unclear on the timeline that will be followed for the distribution of such compensations. Moreover, a report released by the International Labour Organisation titled 'COVID-19 and the World of Work (second edition)' stated that 90 per cent of the Indian workforce or 400 million workers that are employed in the informal sector in India are at an extremely high risk of being pushed deeper into the crisis of poverty due to the lockdown. This is because the lockdown in India is at the high end of the University of Oxford's COVID-19 Government Response Stringency Index. This means that the lockdown restrictions imposed in India are one of the strictest in the world and may lead to a massive economic fallout, despite any government measures being adopted. The informal sector will be the first and the worst-hit by such a fallout.

While most people in the world are more concerned about being affected by COVID-19, those employed in the informal sector in India have a lot more to worry about – an income, a place to live, food for their family, their safety and their health. ■



GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH THE SHADOW PANDEMIC

Akshit Pushkarna
Editorial Assistant

The coronavirus pandemic outbreak has led the world to a standstill for the better part of the year. But COVID-19 may not be the only health complication that affects people in this extraordinary situation. Cases of various other health disorders may rise in the near future as a consequence, as suggested by various experts. The most significant and apparent of these pseudo epidemics

that might ensue in the near future is not a physical disorder, but, mental. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and its parent body, the United Nations, have pointed out the urgency that is required to check the surge in mental disorders due to isolation. “After decades of neglect and under-investment in mental health services, the COVID-19 pandemic is now hitting families and communities with additional mental stress. Even when the pandemic is brought under control, grief, anxiety, and depression will continue to affect people and communities,” Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, UN, said. Studies

in countries like the United States have shown that mental health issues were prevalent in approximately 45 per cent of the country’s population. Similarly, for Australia, a country that has comparatively kept the outbreak under control, top resident mental health experts predict that the social impact of the lockdown may result in an increment of 50 per cent in the suicide rates of the country.

As governments across the world redirect their healthcare facilities towards dealing with the crisis at hand, psychosocial support and emergency mental care have taken the back seat. Also, the problems faced by the people with pre-existing mental disorders due to this have been generally underreported. India, not unlike the rest of the world, has seen a surge in the number of reported mental health issues since the lockdown has been imposed. A survey conducted by The Mavericks India titled ‘e-Rebooting 2020: A Story of COVID-19, and Shifting Perceptions’ has found that 61 per cent of Indians are currently dealing with mental health related issues due to the looming financial crisis and rise in unemployment due to the lockdown.

“Depression has increased 20 per cent in the people who are living in their house. This is coupled with the anxiety around the risk of catching the virus. This is causing people to reach the peak of general anxiety that we call Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). This leads an affected person to become absolutely worrisome about small things which has further aggravated due to the pandemic,” Aanchal Chaudhary, an independent practicing psychologist, told Urban Update.

To understand the issue better, Urban Update reached out to Sanjivini Society for Mental Health and AASRA, two prominent mental health and suicide prevention helpline NGOs based in Delhi. Responding to the surge

in the number of mental health related calls, Kalpana Bapna of Sanjivini told us that the cases have increased so significantly that the with limited numbers of counselors tending to the people in distress they have to keep people in waiting lists. “Separation from family, unemployment, and financial issues have been the most common reported issues to Sanjivini,” Bapna told us. “People who didn’t deal with issues beforehand are also facing issues like anxiety and panic attacks. But for them it is much easier to deal with the problem at hand than for people who are already facing mental problems. Panic or fear over the virus and death goes to pathological levels for them. Those who already have preexisting anxiety issues don’t have the skills to deal with the aggravated problem by themselves. Hence, it is imperative for people who have pre existing mental conditions to seek help immediately. Counseling and reaching out to a psychiatrist is a must,” she said. There is a perceived stigma associated with reaching out to a psychiatrist, something that has become stereotypical in Indian society. Bapna, however, clarified that, in her experience, in the past 20 years that stigma has gone down significantly.

“Especially for younger people when they realise that something is wrong, they are open to see a psychiatrist. It is more the parents that have problems and we generally have to convince them that help is required,” she said.

Johnson Thomas, Director, AASRA, in conversation with Urban Update, told us that the pandemic would have a lasting mental effect on the population. “It is almost like being in a traumatic event for an extended period of time. Hence, most people would end up suffering from post-traumatic syndromes even after this is over. It is bound to happen as we’re basically trapped within four walls and there is no clarity when you can escape from this situation. And when you get outside for getting basic commodities, the fear of contracting the virus is always there”, he said. Bapna suggested medication is very efficient in taking the edge off the anxiety and dealing with the issue at an individual level.

Thomas said that it is best that one develops ways to get physical exercise, deep breathing amongst other ways, within their confines if the problem is not severe. “With this, you can feel calm and tackle the rest of the day smoothly”, he added.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH COMPLICATIONS

When asked about the most common cases that have come up to them post the lockdown, Thomas told us that most of the cases reported to them have been centered around domestic issues. “Domestic violence is one issue [that is frequently reported to us], lack of communication and aggression and cases of children not paying attention to their parents and vice-versa are some common problems. In a domestic violence case, there is a strong need for intervention. NGOs are doing their bit to provide emotional support as physical intervention is not possible at this point,” he said.

Rekha Sharma, Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, in the initial part of the lockdown, said that there had been a reported increase in violence against women in India. She further noted that there has been an increase in the number of cases of domestic violence day by day during the quarantine in a later interview and the commission’s lines of communications like email, online portal and social media outlets are functional for women facing issues in any part of the country.

Further, in India, 52 helplines have come up across the country, where victims of domestic violence/abuse can call for help. These helplines are being run by police departments, NGOs and women welfare departments, a Health Ministry official confirmed. The rise in the number of domestic violence cases, especially against women is a direct consequence of growing mental illness. A study conducted by Jacqui True, an Australia based researcher, titled “Gendered violence in natural disasters” observed, “If Gender-based violence and women’s particular needs are not addressed in disaster preparedness, disaster recovery plans, and humanitarian assistance, then women and girls’ vulnerability will increase. It is not going to stop. Women need to reach out for help,” Kalpana Bapna said. ■

“IT IS ALMOST LIKE BEING IN A TRAUMATIC EVENT FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME. HENCE, MOST PEOPLE WOULD END UP SUFFERING FROM POST TRAUMATIC SYNDROMES EVEN AFTER THIS IS OVER. IT IS BOUND TO HAPPEN AS WE’RE BASICALLY TRAPPED WITHIN FOUR WALLS AND THERE IS NO CLARITY WHEN YOU CAN ESCAPE FROM THIS SITUATION. AND WHEN YOU GET OUTSIDE FOR GETTING BASIC COMMODITIES, THE FEAR OF CONTRACTING THE VIRUS IS ALWAYS THERE”

JOHNSON THOMAS
DIRECTOR, AASRA

Experts weigh in on the urban story of COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 has largely caught countries, and consequently, cities off guard. As cities gear up to tackle the pandemic amidst a global lockdown, many faults in urban planning and disaster management have become a little more evident.

To understand these issues better, All India Institute of Local Self-Government, Urban Update, in partnership with UCLG-ASPAC, organised a webinar 'Urban Response to COVID-19'. Prominent experts and dignitaries like Edgardo Bilsky, Director of Research, UCLG World Secretariat; Tikender Singh Panwar, Former Deputy Mayor, Shimla; Ranjan Panda, Convenor, Combat Climate Change Network; Ashok Wankhede, Managing Editor, Urban Update; Ravi Ranjan Guru, Deputy Director-General, AILSG; Shouvik Dutta, Sr Programme Manager, European Union; Abhilash Khandekar, Senior Journalist joined the session while Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update, moderated the seminar.

In the opening address, Kumar Dhananjay highlighted that as a period of uncertainty looms over cities, most of the urban population has been confined to their homes. "The virus has infected over 7.5 million people, while around 180 thousand have lost their lives. India has been under lockdown for a month as of now and has managed to limit the spread of the virus but we must deliberate

about the problems that will arise post lockdown", Dhananjay said. He acknowledged that India has a unique set of challenges including inapt sanitary conditions, high population density, and poor living condition of migrant workers that need to be addressed.

Dhananjay lauded the operation of Bhilwara and Agra model of city response to coronavirus and opened the floor for the panelists to discuss how cities across India can deal with the issue more effectively.

Ravi Ranjan Guru said that the coronavirus pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time, a crisis at the level of WW-1. "This is not only a health crisis but a social, economically and political crisis as well. Urban Local Bodies have been caught unprepared to deal with the unprecedented situation of such proportion", he said. Guru lauded the efforts of the health and sanitation workers; law enforcement officials who have thrown themselves into the fray and became the first responders. He commended the efforts of several ULBs in India like Thane Municipal Corporation, who have initiated a door-to-door survey to check for the virus. He also elaborated on the various measures undertaken by ULBs to ensure adequate sanitisation of public places. He congratulated Goa for becoming corona free at this stage and appreciated the Kerala government's efforts. He promoted the concept of knowledge exchange at such times when cities could learn from each other's mistakes and successes.

Tikender Panwar elaborated on the problem with the overall structure of

city operations in dealing with this situation and how cities have pretty much failed its poor. "We strive to achieve sustainability yet our cities were unable to hold migrant workers for seven days," he said. The migrant population lives at wages as low as ₹7500 per month. Panwar highlighted studies that show that willingness to work has gone down substantially and predicted that the migrant workers will move back to their native lands once the lockdown is lifted. He further pointed out the inefficiency of the ULBs by highlighting that local NGOs are providing more relief work than them. In addition to 700 corona deaths, almost 300 people have died of other reasons fighting the disease, which is a shame, said Panwar. Panwar said that the government must have focused on developing public housing beforehand and political entities must

INDIA HAS A UNIQUE SET OF CHALLENGES INCLUDING INAPT SANITARY CONDITIONS, HIGH POPULATION DENSITY, AND POOR LIVING CONDITION OF MIGRANT WORKERS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

need to take an active part in public housing for cities to curb outward migration at such times in the future. He also elaborated the need to understand disaster management better and implement a sounder plan of action at the city level. “City Disaster Management Acts need to be implemented,” he said.

In conclusion, he addressed the impending economic crisis and how cities can tackle it with by allocating more GDP to ensure employment to the poor, migrant workers.

Ranjan Panda highlighted that, although the lockdown is affecting the industries negatively, nature has finally gotten a breathing space due to it. “Water of Ganga river is now drinkable, which hasn’t been the case for decades. Air quality has significantly improved,” he said. He also stressed upon the need to ensure adequate water as sanitation and hygienic requirements have never been higher. He added there is a need to capture the lessons from this lockdown when we talk about environmental betterment and thus grow cities while simultaneously preserving the natural resources.

Edgardo Bilsky highlighted the methods that other cities from around the world were utilising in their fight against the pandemic. He elaborated

on UCLG-ASPAC’s initiative through which they collected smart practices on tackling COVID-19 from cities from all over the world and launched a call for support to people. Giving the example of Philippines, he said that the local governments were given more flexibility to deal with the pandemic, which enabled better coordination between various levels of governments via temporary coordination units that were established. “We need to mobilise our resources to face the issue. This will enable us to expand relief work, which at this stage is essential. Social support and financial support for people must also be ensured. He added that digital application like India’s Aarogya Setu to get information about positive cases of corona infected people and people who have been placed in quarantine must be available everywhere for people to move smartly, if they need to. Bilsky also advocated the transformation of public spaces to facilitate relief work. He further urged cities to guarantee the continuity of public services, reduce inequalities, protect public servants, ensure financial support packages and support multilateral operation during this time.

Ashok Wankhade was very critical about the lack of coordination that the various levels of government have exhibited in dealing with the pandemic.

He suggested that decentralisation of power is the need of the hour. He also emphasised that in order to curb the pandemic, people must also restrain themselves and adopt the mandated social behaviours that are suggested. “Indore is deemed to be the cleanest city of India but is unable to curtail the spread of the virus. This is because of the lifestyle choices and habits of the Indoris. Awareness must be stressed upon,” he said.

Abhilash Khandekar discussed that the exodus of the migrant workers has made the need of better developing rural areas of India more evident. “We must look into a more equitable model of development for all areas during this time to minimise such burden on cities and thus, avoid such situations”, he said. He also stressed upon the need to discuss the self-isolation during the lockdown in people’s homes, given that the urban poor have inapt living spaces.

Shouvik Datta said that the European Union is actively working in gathering resources to respond to the pandemic situation in Indian and Bhutan. For India, Dutta said EU is prioritising work with developmental banks to implement projects smoothly. They are also assisting in ensuring enough medical supply, masks, sanitizers etc. in India. “EU is doing its best to work best with the resources it has. We have allocated a budget of 500 million euros as a physical stimulus for the worst affected areas of Europe, while the EU has released a sum of 20 billion euros for global response,” Datta said. He further highlighted that out of the funds that EU had allocated to Bhutan Government, which were to be used for capacity building, work on natural resource of the country etc., 8.5 million Euros have been released to enhance the city response as of now. Further, 12 million euros are to be released in the coming months. “EU is also supporting Bhutan via ensuring technical assistance via the World Bank,” Datta added. He further said, “We are also trying to find out how government’s response can be optimised in the future.” ■

Organisers
 UCLG ASPAC UrbanUpdate

Webinar
Urban response to COVID-19
 April 23, 2020
 1100 hrs to 1230 hrs (Indian Standard Time)

Speakers

Dr Bernadina Irawati Tjandradewi Secretary General, UCLG-ASPAC	Mr Hitesh Vaidya NIUA Director	Mr Tikender Singh Panwar Former Deputy Mayor, Shimla
Mr Arun Prakash Municipal Commissioner, Agra	Mr Abhilash Khandekar Senior Journalist	Mr Ranjan Panda Convener, Combat Climate Change Network
Mr Ashok Wankhade Managing Editor, Urban Update	Mr Ravi Ranjan Guru Deputy Director General, AIILSG	Mr Shouvik Datta Senior Programme Manager, European Union

Moderator
 Mr Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update

All are most welcome to attend the webinar. For registration, please visit <https://bit.ly/2XNUyGc> or scan QR code

For any technical query for attending the webinar, please write to us at contacturbanupdate@gmail.com or call Prateek + 91 99909 78752

Mr Ranjit S Chavan
President, AIILSG

Mr Rajiv Agarwal, IAS (Retd.)
Director General, AIILSG

‘India needs to invest more in health, improve local response’

The second webinar in the series of e-dialogues, ‘Health crisis and cities: Fixing the system’, was organised by All India Institute of Local Self-Government and Urban Update, in association with United Cities and Local Government (UCLG-ASPAC). Medical practitioners and experts from different areas expressed their views on the ongoing health crisis and highlighted the problems in the healthcare system of India that were exposed in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers in the webinar also suggested a range of solutions that included increase spending on health care, focus on data collection and also encourage manufacturing of medical equipment in the country.

Ravi Ranjan Guru, Deputy Director-General, All India Institute of Local Self-Government; Dr Prakash Tare, President of the Association of Otolaryngologists – Indore Chapter; Dr Rajeev K Sharma, Chairman of Institute of Orthopaedics, Joint Replacement and Sports Medicine; Basudev Mahapatra, Senior Journalist from Odisha; Dr Prof Sneha Palnitkar, CEO, WMRC, AIILSG, joined the webinar as speakers. Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update, moderated the discussion.

In his opening statement, Dhananjay expressed that as the duration of the pandemic extends, people have gotten acclimated to the ongoing conditions of lockdown that have ensued as a part of the global exercise to curtail its further spread. “It will certainly leave a big impact on

our lives,” he said. Dhananjay further added that the abrupt pandemic condition has brought out the flaws in the level of preparedness in dealing with a crisis of such magnitude. For India, the health care infrastructure and the system is inapt for such a large population, as many reports have pointed out shortages of medical equipment in the country. He quoted a 2019 report released by the World Health Organisation, which said that low-income countries, from 2000 to 2017, have spent an average of \$41 per person on the health care of an individual, while high-income countries spent an average of \$3000 for the same.

Focusing on India, Dhananjay said, “There is a history of neglect for India, where health and education have always been left behind by successive governments.” Budgetary allocation for the public health in India stands

at a meagre 2.2 per cent, while GDP allocation at 1.29 per cent.

Ravi Ranjan Guru, in his statement, said that the pandemic is not only a health crisis but also a global social, economic and political problem. Guru noted that the spread of the disease has been curtailed to a great extent due to the imposition of the lockdown. Guru suggested that emergency operation centres be set up by the inputs of the Central and State Governments, especially in the states with weaker public health systems. Lauding the successful efforts of Goa, Agra, Kerala, amongst others, Guru said that other ULBs could look into their models and could use relevant information to develop their models.

Dr Prakash Tare said that Indore, which has been one of the worst affected cities in India, is dealing with a more virulent strain in the belt. This fact was observed by

Organisers
UCLG-ASPAC UrbanUpdate

Webinar-2
Health crisis and cities
FIXING THE SYSTEM
April 30, 2020
1100 am to 1230 pm (Indian Standard Time)

SPEAKERS

Dr Bernadita Iravati Tjandradewi Secretary General UCLG-ASPAC	Padmasree Dr M Wali Senior consultant, Sri Ganagarah hospital Former Physician to President of India	Dr Prof Sneha Palnitkar CEO, WMRC AIILSG
Mr Basudev Mahapatra Senior Journalist	Dr Prakash Tare ENT Specialist Indore	Mr Ravi Ranjan Guru Deputy Director General AIILSG

MODERATOR
Mr Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update

Mr Ranjit S Chavan
President, AIILSG

Mr Rajiv Agarwal, IAS (Retd.)
Director General, AIILSG

All are most welcome to attend the webinar. For registration, please visit <https://bit.ly/3a5wvz3>, or scan QR code.

For any technical query for attending the webinar, please write to us at contactforbanupatras@gmail.com or call Prakash + 91 99926 78252

the National Institute of Virology, after testing 57 samples from the hotspots of Indore. The doctor further attributed the situation of Indore to the initial negligence to the checking of travellers at arrival points of the city. Further, the screening process included only checking of temperatures, as testing kits were not available as per the requirement, and hence many asymptomatic cases went undetected. For the city, Dr Tare noted the lockdown was not very effective as people flouted the self-isolation guidelines carelessly in the initial stage. He further described the local government's initiative to segregate hospitals into three categories: Red, for active, severe cases of coronavirus; Yellow, for mild cases and Green for people with co-morbid condition. He recommended the government to prepare a specific plan of action to deal with such a pandemic in the future.

Dr Rajeev Sharma praised the response of the government and said that it showed that India currently has strong leadership. "The problem came without notice but has been handled very effectively. Successive governments from now on need to take note of such calamities and anticipate their oncoming for the future", Dr Sharma said. Although we lack infrastructure, the competency of the medical staff, even under an unprecedented challenge of such a magnitude, must be commended. He urged people to focus more on their health and improving their immunity. "We need a physically strong population. Improve immunity not by medicine but naturally, with exercise and appropriate diets. He also emphasised that hospital staffs' training must be world-class and several AIIMS-like institutions must come up in all parts of the nation. Further, he added that the condition of primary healthcare centres must be improved as they deal with issues at a smaller scale before they increase in magnitude. Dr Prof Sneha Palnitkar said that the local governments across India are working with

THE ABRUPT PANDEMIC CONDITION HAS BROUGHT OUT THE FLAWS IN THE LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS IN DEALING WITH A CRISIS OF SUCH MAGNITUDE. FOR INDIA, THE HEALTH CARE INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE SYSTEM IS INAPT FOR SUCH A LARGE POPULATION, AS MANY REPORTS HAVE POINTED OUT SHORTAGES OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT IN THE COUNTRY

COMMUNITY HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS TO BE CREATED THROUGH A NETWORK OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS/ VOLUNTEERS. SMART CITY CONCEPTS NEED TO BE INCORPORATED IN THE RESPONSE AND TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE LOOKED AS AN ASSET

great intensity in dealing with the pandemic, especially in a hotspot-ridden state like Maharashtra. She concurred with the rest of the panelists and said that the budget for health infrastructure needs to be substantially increased. Further, Dr Palnitkar said, "Community health infrastructure needs to be created through a network of community health workers/ volunteers". She also highlighted the success of the smart city concept during such testing times and the incorporation of the technological medical advancement, though not on a large scale, has been of help. She highlighted the example of Smart OPDs. "Using Smart OPDs, the interaction between the healthcare staff and the coronavirus positive patient is sufficiently reduced and, thus, further infections are prevented," she said. She noted that a quicker response by the local authorities could be established if

the data transmission system is made smoother.

Basudev Mohapatra addressed the successful measures that the state government of Odisha has taken to deal with the pandemic. As of March 30, the total number of cases in the state is reported at 128, with one death. Hence, Mohapatra noted, the state has been sufficiently able to contain the pandemic as of yet even though it reported its first case back in March. Mohapatra noted that Odisha, which has been frequently struck by natural calamities, banked on its prior experience in handling disaster like situation to cater towards its population in times of crisis. Immediate action was possible as state has been experienced in dealing with the issue.

The key to the success of the state government can be attributed to the state government's support to the Centre's decisions, he said. ■

OF CITIES & THEIR TREES!



ABHILASH KHANDEKAR

Senior Journalist

What lies at the intersection of history, culture and ecology of urban India?

Native or imported? Sacred and ordinary? Culinary and floral? Favourites of various kings and commenters over the centuries?

They are the most visible signs of nature in cities.

Well, you are right I am talking of beautiful green tress in sprawling urban India and their importance since ages. The book under review, perhaps, could not have come at a more opportune time when, in the name of development, trees are being mercilessly cut down by different government authorities all across in Indian cities. Sadly enough, cutting a tree is the easiest of solutions for city planners and engineers. The authority that gives permission to cut trees in urban areas, issues such permissions without batting an eyelid!

We have seen that in New Delhi

two years ago for the Sarojini Nagar redevelopment project large number of trees were to be hacked. Court intervened and it was stopped; then in Mumbai's Aarey Colony, the metro shed construction claimed hundreds of trees and in the name of Smart City development in various parts of the country, the old trees are the instant falling preys. In 2016, a large number of nature-loving Bhopal citizens, took out tree marches to protest against cutting trees for a Smart City site. How can a city be called 'smart' without its old gorgeous trees is anybody's guess. Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, has shown through its studies how trees are fast dwindling in our cities and giving rise to a host of problems. But nobody gives a damn to it.

The two authors of this tiny but important book are professors in the Azim Premji University and have been working in the field of environment, urban issues and related sectors for a few years. While I have many books on trees in my personal collection, this is perhaps the first significant book that

talks about trees and cities! Of course, not before the iconic *Trees of Delhi* (2005) by Pradip Krishen. That was, in recent decades, the first of its kind book, well illustrated and talking about trees, their anatomy, families, seasons of flowering and their relationship with the city-New Delhi!

Former Governor of West Bengal, while acknowledging *Cities and Canopies*, says a beautiful line: 'You close this book with just one thought: Thank you, trees, for just being what you are, where you are'. That to me is the meaningful gist of this book which underlines the importance of trees in times of climate change challenges such as global warming.

Divided into 22 highly interesting little chapters, the authors pick up a few well known trees such as jamun, banyan, palms, tamarind, amaltas, scarlet silk cotton, neem, peepul and drumstick and describe many uses of them, historical references and specialities in a highly absorbing manner. Then they also discuss, under chapter 10, 'The great eucalyptus debate' and go into the history of this known tree around which experts have always debated the pros and cons of having them or not, considering their environmental benefits and ecological disadvantages.

There are close to 900 species of eucalyptus found across many parts of the world--the vast majority of these originated in Australia. Because they are fast-growing trees that do not require much maintenance and can be sold for a lot of money, commercial eucalyptus plantations have now spread out across the world. After Brazil, India has the largest area under eucalyptus plantations. However, the tree has a chequered history of growth and

Book

Cities and Canopies--Trees in Indian cities

Authors

Harini Nagendra & Seema Mundoli

Reviewers Recommendation

Buy for personal library

Publisher

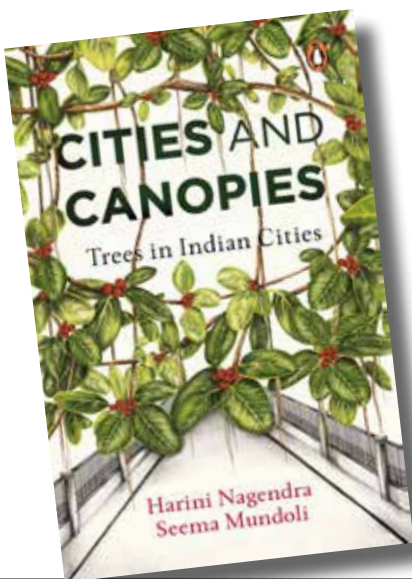
Penguin

Pages

244

Price

₹499/-



removal in India. The British were enamoured with these trees. British rule in India was filled with anxieties about environment and health, especially in cities. They were focussed on getting rid of miasma or bad air which was believed to be the cause of many diseases. For most of the nineteenth century, the British believed that the quality of air was the culprit for malaria, typhoid, cholera, plague and other fevers.

Eucalyptus is a useful tree and produces paper, packaging wood and paper boards, besides having its medicinal value. But there are opponents of this tree like the great writer Mahashweta Devi who had called for 'an anti-eucalyptus movement on a national scale'. Massive plantations on country side in the 70s and through the 90s were called by environmentalists as "green deserts". Those Britishers who liked the tree species, however, did not like them for cities or towns as they grew tall and proved to be obstacles for electric wires as also during heavy rains. But in Chandigarh when attempts were made to fell old eucalyptus in 2017, citizens protested saying the standing trees formed the cultural heritage of the city. In 2018, a plan to cut 3000 trees, most of which were eucalyptus, in Noida, was met with protests. The common accusation against this tree species is that it provides no habitat for biodiversity and birds and bees do not feed on their flowers or fruits.

Talking of trees and cities, the book argues: Indian cities derive so much of their character, identity and liveability from the trees that grow there. From tree-lined streets where we shop for vegetables and clothes to wooded parks and playgrounds where children play and adults gather to walk while they talk and sacred trees at intersections where nature is worshipped in the heart of madding crowd--our cities would be unrecognizable, unliveable, without their trees.

In India, we are most familiar with the pods of the fruit, the drum 'stick', from which the tree gets its name. Different parts of the tree have found their way into our diet and lives since historical times. Kings and queens

as far back as 150 BC, included the drumstick in their diets for improved mental and physical health. The tree is a powerhouse of vitamins, minerals and amino acids, the book says, quoting studies by the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition. Authors suggest that a city like Mumbai where urban children from poor families face child hunger, regreening the metropolis with drumstick trees could be a good idea. Taking stock of all species included in the book would be difficult for me due to space constraint but I can't help introducing two more species here in addition to what I have written about above. Authors begin the chapter twelve with interesting observations about prevailing urban scenario while describing the history and environmental values of golden chandeliers with buzzing bees--Amaltas. "Have you seen the maps of our cities in urban master plans and vision documents? They show increasingly smaller and smaller patches of green, indicating the decreasing spaces for trees. Our cities are turning grey as the built area is increasing. But just by planting flowering trees along city avenues we can transform them into multicoloured places of beauty, and not just on paper. What better colour to include but the gold of the Amaltas!

Amaltas is a deciduous tree native to India. The tree is medium sized and has a spreading, irregular-shaped canopy. It belongs to the legume family and is a relative of the familiar peanut and pea. The tree derives its fame from its spectacular golden blossoms that flower between April and June. It's a state flower of Kerala and the national flower of Thailand. There flowers attract many bees and butterflies and they help in pollination. For more about this beautiful tree, do read the book!

The other important tree that finds detailed mention in the book is the famous tamarind or what we commonly know in Hindi as 'Imli'.

Heroes come in different forms, even in the shape of trees. The city of Hyderabad suffered a devastating flood on 28 September, 1908. After heavy monsoon, a tropical cyclone resulted in

the Musi river overflowing. The floods killed 15,000 people and destroyed 19,000 homes. The death toll could have been more but for a 300-year old tree which more than 150 people, mainly patients from an adjacent Osmania General Hospital, clinged on to. This tree, despite its the nick name Tamarindus indica, did not originate in India. It came from far-off Central Africa. It came to India millenniums ago. And has many uses. Its fruits are of commercial use including for the poor tribals who collect and sell them. The average Indian housewife uses this in different forms and the old tamarind trees are found in many ancient cities from Varanasi to Indore.

Do cities need trees? There are heated debates about the need for trees in cities. Some feel that trees in the cities are a nuisance, offering a number of reasons. They shed leaves and fruits on roads and parked vehicles; they take up space on pavements and block street lights at night, etc. Many argue that trees are a luxury.

The authors, however, argue that trees in cities have innumerable advantages and they form part of healthy environment. While the Britishers also underlined the need for trees in cities, increasing vehicular pollution and rise in temperature can (now) be combated only through various types of trees in our surroundings. A Bengaluru study showed that street trees significantly reduce suspended particulate matter and Sulphur Dioxide levels.

The book is a nice attempt to further increase interest of those urbanites who are not aware of trees and their specific advantages in cities while simultaneously learning about their origins, history, species and flowering times, etc.

Happy reading during the lovely Spring when tress attire themselves with new leaves and flowers in some places of India. ■

(The author is a veteran journalist who writes on politics, urban affairs and the environment. He can be contacted at kabhilash59@gmail.com and [@Abhikhandekar](https://twitter.com/Abhikhandekar) --Twitter.)

Countries that kept Corona under control; some possible insights



ASHOK WANKHADE

Managing Editor

It's been almost 5 months since the novel coronavirus outbreak from China gained international attention. It has disrupted normal lives across the world since then and there is no clarity about when the tragic global event will pass while international powers like USA, India, Russia, UK amongst others reel under its effects. However, it would be fair to say that some governments across the world have displayed great agility and quickness in dealing with the situation, which is bound to grow in severity as days pass. Swift adaptive policy making and a sustainable approach in dealing with the virus have saved the citizens of countries like Taiwan, Australia and Iceland. These are some countries that have been relatively successful in dealing with the pandemic during these unprecedented times.

Iceland, one of the countries with the lowest death counts due to the COVID-19 outbreak, has attributed its success in containing the virus spread to extensive testing. The country has a confirmed case count of 1804, as of May 24, out of which 1,791 have recovered. "I didn't expect the recovery to be this fast," said Iceland's chief epidemiologist, Thorolfur Gudnason. The authorities have acted swiftly, quarantining infected people and their contacts in time by adopting a rigorous policy of testing and tracking. Using this approach, they were even able to track asymptomatic cases. The country has reopened malls, high schools, hair salons, etc. after only a 6-week long lockdown. The country differed in the imposition of the lockdown from other countries, as the social and economic activities weren't completely brought to a halt. Only the infected and their contacts were quarantined during the six weeks.

The first case of the virus was reported on February 28 in Ischgl. The area was designated as a high-risk zone on March 5, two days after the case was confirmed. Post this, every individual returning to the country from a virus hotspot was isolated and a test-and-trace approach was adopted. The country's testing capacity was enhanced by deCODE genetics, a biopharmaceutical company, which in early March teamed up with health authorities to ramp up public testing.

Speaking of a country with a far greater population, only 7109 Australians out of a total population of over 25 million have been infected with the virus. The country's response to the virus has revolved around immediate shutting of its border for further travel once initial wave of coronavirus positive cases were reported. Large scale testing, like Iceland, has been conducted in the country and timely contact tracing was initiated. Australia's response to the pandemic has largely centred on shutting its borders, limiting public gatherings and conducting large-scale testing and contact tracing.

The main reason for Australia's success is probably its strict travel restrictions, says Adam Kamradt-Scott at the University of Sydney. About 70 per cent of Australians who have tested positive for COVID-19 picked it up while they were overseas, making it important to stem this flow, he says, and being an island nation has made it easier for Australia to rapidly shut its border.

However, one of the most impressive success stories comes from China's neighboring island nation of Taiwan. A study conducted by Johns Hopkins University in January said that Taiwan was one of the most at-risk countries outside of Mainland China, due to its close proximity and ties with China. With the outbreak escalating in China, Taiwanese officials were quick to get into action and ramped up domestic production of PPE kit. They also initiated re-testing of people who had previously unexplained pneumonia. Medical officials held daily press briefs to ensure transparency and the government announced new punishments for people who spread misinformation about the virus. Another striking feature of the country's successful response to the pandemic is that unlike many other countries, it did not implement a strict lockdown to curb the spread. India has increased its testing by a hundred fold since March conducting over a lakh tests per day as of May 24 in comparison with 1,000 in March and hence, a surge in the number of positive cases has been observed. Further ramp up in testing, contact tracing and quarantine could help in quickly identifying infected cases and controlling the spread; and therein may lie further success in our efforts against the pandemic. ■

UrbanUpdate

Setting The Agenda For Tomorrow's Cities



Urban Update Weekly Digest
NEWSLETTER

Top News



Delhi may see the
fall in metro fares
soon by up to
30 per cent



No threshold for
General annual
debt/capex
BombayMTC



Electricity bills
back online for
users in India
railways



1,000 E-buses are
not sufficient,
experts warn to
transport Dept

WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER

Urban Update is a leading magazine on sustainable development of cities brought out by All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG). Bringing together the experience of the multilateral sector with that of the private sector and the local governments themselves, the magazine focuses on the challenges and solutions for city leaders and local governments.

Urban Update plays a special role – that of a primary, indispensable link among stakeholders that nurtures community. A wellspring of writing and imagery reinforces our vision of evangelizing Urban Infrastructure, Governance, Culture and Sustainability.

To get the weekly dose of Urban News

[SUBSCRIBE NOW
www.urbanupdate.in](http://www.urbanupdate.in)



urbanupdatemag



urbanupdatemgzn



urbanupdatemag

For any query, please contact our Subscription Department
e-mail at contacturbanupdate@gmail.com



Supported By



HE CLEANS OUR WORLD. LET'S SALUTE HIM WITH ALL OUR HEARTS.

Sanitation workers deserve more than what we give in return. They deserve our respect. Because they do our job with sheer dedication. We spread dirt. They spread cleanliness.

All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG) whole heartedly supports Swachh Bharat Mission and is committed to play a proactive role to realise its objectives. The institute is organising regular orientation workshops on SBM to augment the capacity of ULBs and also generating public awareness on cleanliness.



Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Government of India