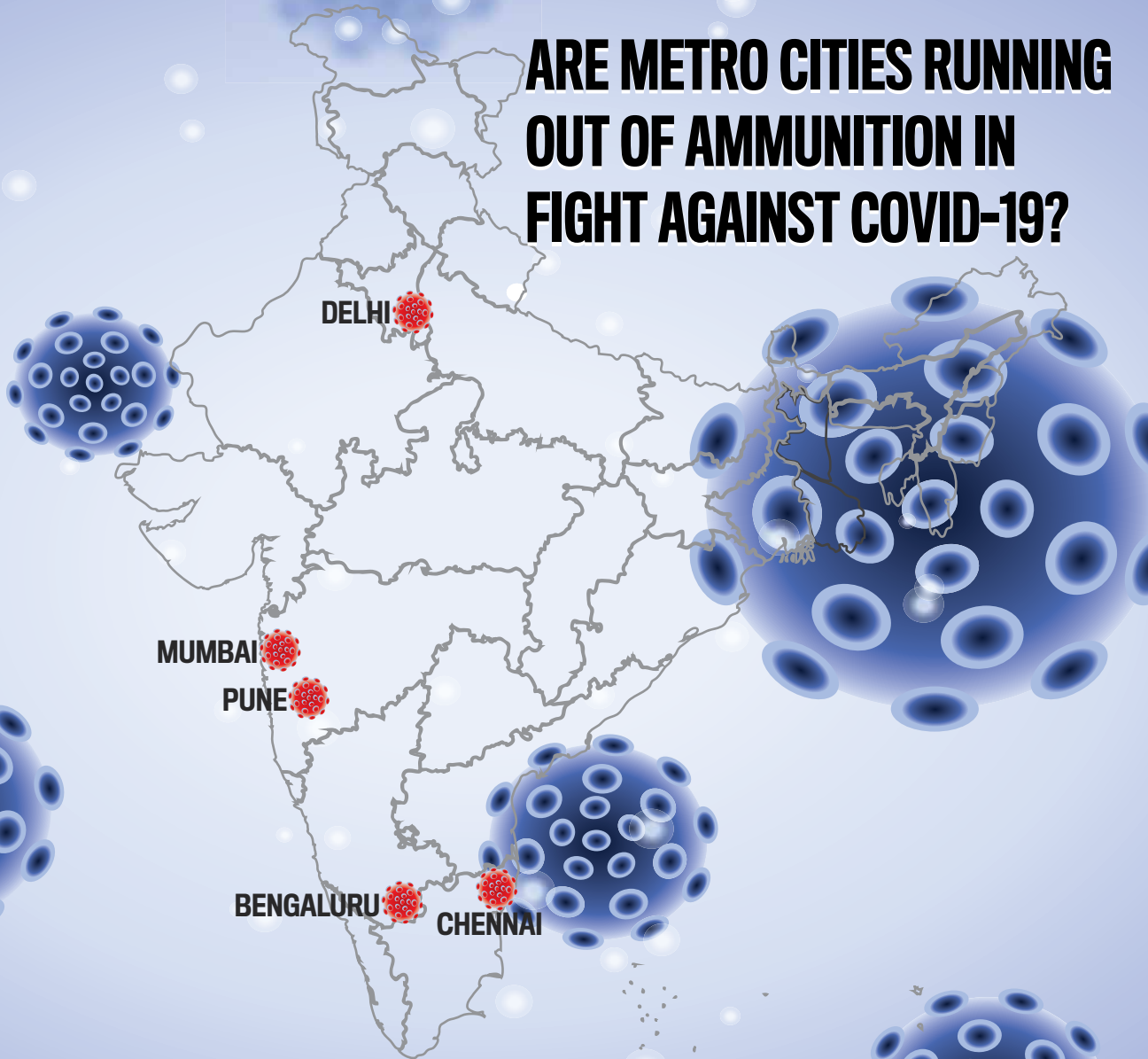


Urban Update

Volume VI, Issue III

JULY 2020

ARE METRO CITIES RUNNING OUT OF AMMUNITION IN FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19?



Leaderspeak

Cities to play major role in global economic revival



European Union



AIILSG

KNOWLEDGE LAB FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE



ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

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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@aillsg.org

UrbanUpdate

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

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Volume VI - Issue III

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

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The project is funded by the European Union.



AIILSG

The project is implemented by the AIILSG.

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

THIS PANDEMIC MUST NOT DERAIL PROGRESS ON OTHER FRONTS



Rajiv Agarwal
Editor-In-Chief
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Newspaper headlines in recent weeks have mentioned instances of trauma faced by non-Covid patients, citizens who are in need of medical assistance on account of other health problems, including emergencies. As medical infrastructure in terms of hospital beds and other resources are getting increasingly tied down with coronavirus cases, other patients seem to be facing difficulties. Are our cities, faced with limited resources, losing some other battles as they combat the coronavirus battle? Needless to say, our cities with steeply growing populations have limited resources be it financial, human, or physical infrastructure. They are stretched to the extreme to address and fulfil even the day-to-day service delivery requirements of their populations. And when there is a large scale emergency like the current pandemic, these already stretched systems could give way. Further, as most resources are used to fight the pandemic, resources for other activities may get curtailed.

Take for instance the plastic ban. The nation, most states, and cities had achieved good traction in terms of building awareness and commitment among citizens to shun single use plastic. Or consider the Swachh Bharat movement. Due to some commendable work at all levels, notably at the level of local bodies, achievement has been significant. The Swachh Survekshan exercise to rank cities on Swachhata has seen keen involvement of all stakeholders. One fears that the momentum gained thus far may be somewhat diluted atleast in the near term.

This could be for a number of reasons. One as we noted could be the dilution of attention and effort in these areas due to the urgent and severe nature of the pandemic. Another more worrisome reason could be that the fight against coronavirus may run contra to other fights. Consider the plastic ban. Could the use of large numbers of disposable masks, gloves and personal protection equipment (PPE) add to the load of plastic waste greatly? Are cities well equipped to safely dispose of the tons of such waste that could be generated every week? Another worry with respect to plastic. We had made good progress moving away from disposable cups, glasses, spoons, plates and bags towards reusable ones. This move had the potential to bring about big gains in elimination of plastic waste, reduce load on local body waste management infrastructure and reduce landfill volumes. But now could people prefer disposable items fearing possible spread of the virus through reusable ones? This would be very unfortunate.

Will the need for safe commuting push people away from crowded public transport towards seemingly safer private transport? Will the focus on water conservation and safe preservation of water bodies be diluted, now that other matters have come centre stage?

It is yet early to predict the future with respect to these. However one hopes that in due course the trajectory of progress on various initiatives, especially those relating to climate change and the environment are regained, the progress made so far is not rolled back, and further progress is made. This is yet another reason for mankind to quickly get the corona pandemic under control by overcoming the virus. ■



Narendra Modi
Prime Minister, India

During lockdown, rules were strictly abided by. Now, governments, local administration and citizens again have to show similar caution. We need to have a special focus on containment zones. If you see someone flouting norms, tell them to not do so



Audrey Azoulay
Director General, UNESCO

In the throes of the most unprecedented disruption in the history of education. The social and digital divides have put the most disadvantaged at risk of learning losses and dropping out



PIN POINT



Jeff Bezos
CEO, Amazon

Tackling climate change requires innovation, leadership, and partnership – no one can do it alone.



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director General, World Health Organisation

Some countries are now experiencing a resurgence of cases as they start to re-open their economies and societies. Although many countries have made some progress, globally the pandemic is actually speeding up."



BUZZ



Venkaiah Naidu
Vice President of India
@VPSecretariat

We must develop a model of education that reflects Indian culture and ethos. We need to inculcate cultural, moral, ethical and spiritual values among children



Durga Shanker Mishra
Secretary, MoHUA, Gol
@Secretary_MoHUA

ICCCs have been of utmost importance during these COVID-19 times. They have made availability of services to citizens convenient & have helped in collecting, tracking & monitoring quarantined citizens/ households to control spread of infection



Bezwada Wilson
Convener, Safai Karamchari Andolan
@BezwadaWilson

Governments must provide safety gear to all persons engaged in essential services including sanitation workers on par with the medical staff. #covid19



Ratan N. Tata
Chairman Emeritus, Tata Group
@RNTata2000

In past difficult times, entrepreneurs have displayed far sightedness and creativity that could not have been believed to exist. These became the flagpoles of innovation and new technology today

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With increasing COVID-19 cases, the metro cities are losing their lustre. Many outstation workers, especially those in worst-affected cities, have gone back to their home towns and are finding avenues locally to avoid the hassles of living in a metro. Some cities have fought back strongly and graduated towards a normal life. This article tries to analyze the ground reality in worst-affected cities and also in the cities which have done fairly well in the fight against the virus

LEADERSPEAK

24 Cities to play major role in global economic revival

Will cities be able to support the world at large to get back on its feet? The answer is yes. Cities will pave a way for swift economic recovery and teach us the new way of life through innovation in preventive health care and improvements in existing health infrastructure in urban centres

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CAPACITATING CSOS & EMPOWERING WOMEN & GIRLS THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Girl Power project, funded by the European Union, is being implemented by the All India Institute of Local Self-Government along with its project partners- MGIRI, SGF and MSS. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations for empowerment of women, and build their role as self-regulating agents for social change and executing actions, which will bring positive developments into the lives of women in the state of Jharkhand.

PROCEEDINGS WITH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Most of the project activities which can be implemented digitally, are being taken online. In person formal meetings have now been taken over by online meetings, like the Girl Power CSO-Partner meetings or the CSO-AG meetings. Surveys are now being conducted through mobile phones and emails, like the CSO Skill Gap Analysis Survey. Keeping up with the Project objectives, networking and partnership building activities were the prime focus of the month of May, focusing on Girl Power Project networking and CSO support activities. The project aims to build sustainable networks, to promote meaningful and structured participation in programming and policy processes. It also aims at building stronger institutional arrangements and accountability within the project and to build relationships with stakeholders. Following are the brief of activities conducted in May:

NETWORK BUILDING

This project aims to create a network of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women entrepreneurs, which will act as a support mechanism base for fostering rights and support to women in the

state of Jharkhand. There are several likeminded programs and schemes going on from government of Jharkhand, which will help us to learn and implement the tools used in the project, and this will only be possible through active networking with government organizations, CSOs, SHGs and other stakeholders. There is an effort to develop strategies to build effectiveness with respective departments of government to fulfill the broader network building and partnerships approach imbibed in the objects of the Project.

Network Expansion

The Gender Network for Social Entrepreneurship Jharkhand (GNSE-J) has been established to promote multi-stakeholder participation in the state of Jharkhand. This network will also act as an overall advisory network to share best practices, knowledge sharing and problem-solving. It will support the Best Practice Forums. The GNSE-J is made up of an Advisory Committee including selected officials from State government, elected legislators, CSOs, Women Entrepreneurs, academia and women and girls key stakeholders from Jharkhand. As a step further towards network building efforts are being taken to associate with various government officials from the state government departments like Women and Child Development, and Social Justice and Welfare. In order to add strength and expand the network of CSO-AG and GNSE-J, official communications have been established through e-mails and e-meetings with private sector experts, as with CSOs for GNSE-J membership and with state level organizations too, for the extensive support for this project.

CSO SUPPORT

CSO support is the fundamental part of this entire project. Therefore keeping

this idea alive there was an initial brainstorming cum strategy building meeting within the Girl Power project team regarding how the CSOs' knowledge resource can be utilized and how they should be motivated as a facilitator organization for this project. The output of the team discussion was to organize a web CSO meet and supporting activities, the details of which are as follows-

CSO Meet with Implementing Partners

An important activity was to conduct a meeting with the CSOs, via online mode on 25th of May, 2020, as an effort towards the larger network building. The meeting was conducted with the objective to formally introduce all the selected 20 CSOs to the Project Partners (MGIRI, SGF and MSS) and also to answer several queries of the CSOs regarding project details and its linkage to provide them better understanding on the Girl Power Project. The focal point of the discussion was how the CSOs can get the benefit from the support of the implementing partners and their networks and accordingly capacitate themselves through this process. Also various training programs, modules, technical supports, which will be provided by AILSG and implementing partners was discussed in the meeting.

MOU with Partners

The purpose of this MOU is to facilitate coordination between the Participant CSOs and the implementing organization, to create a formal agreement for carrying out the project objectives and activities. This MOU signing is a mutual agreement, which will help to coordinate project activities. The MOU aims at building agreed terms, conditions and guidelines which all CSOs will follow as a direction for the Girl Power Project. This MOU describes the Background of the project,

scope of work, areas of cooperation, consultation, publicity & confidentiality, duration, amendment, termination & other matters.

CSO Surve & Data Collection

This activity was aimed on understanding gaps, present status, and future prospects for women in the social entrepreneurial space in Jharkhand. For this purpose, the project has undertaken desk research to seek and analyze the appropriate market entry points in social entrepreneurship.

Adding knowledge to the existing set of information base is a major rationale of any project. Therefore considering this idea of a research study, an onlinebased CSO Survey&data collectionhas been initiated in the first round with 20 selected CSOs. In second round the same survey was conducted with 26 other CSOs, the objective of which was to understand the skill gaps and skill mapping of the CSOs, current challenges in the market/ local areas, identification of training needs compliance, participation of local level SHGs in the entire process, etc. The survey also focused on how and what products are profitable across several districts and a demand centric approach both at local level and state level. The survey is currently at data analysis stage and shortly it will show the findings which will provide help and direction in further understanding of the demands and needs of the CSOs and their capacity building which can be met through the help of the Girl Power project.

Preparation of Training Modules and Curriculum

The Capacity Building activity for training of the CSOs aims to train the 20 selected CSOs/Self help groups to become trainers themselves, who will in turn train other CSOs, by enabling and imparting them training and skill building exercises. These CSOs will essentially be working in the field of enhancing and empowering women in social entrepreneurship. These trainings will be conducted based on the topics and themes identified through the CSO survey after which the respective training curriculum will be developed. The CSOs

will be trained over a period of 7 days on the various topics and demonstrations kits will also be distributed to each of the CSOs at the end of the training program. Based on the above, the selected 20 CSOs will be directed to train 80 other CSOs/ Self-help Groups. An initial roadmap has also been identified from various online resources and research, for building the training modules and curriculum for the capacity building of the CSOs. Major inputs have also been taken from CSO survey& data collection in this work.

Delineation of Partner's Responsibilities for Market Connect

The brief objective of the Market Connect is to provide a market platform to potential women entrepreneurs in the project areas. This will connect them with ready marketplace for their business growth and expansion. This attempt will also provide women entrepreneurs with a focused direction, where they can get direct access of their goods, products and services for better profitability. Considering the goals and objectives of Market Connect, the Market Connect Program initial assignments has been assigned to the Market Connect Team. The expected outcome from this activity is to see strong and empowered clusters of women entrepreneurs who can develop better bargaining power & equality through market access and market connect platform for their ventures. This financial independence will install self confidence in them to stand against the age old traditional patriarchal set up. This effort aimed at bringing a social change will develop a new and positive layer of social structure, where these marginalized women will see themselves as the leaders of tomorrow.

Designing of Collaterals

To promote our project goals, objectives and processes, and to ensure the reach of project, several project collaterals have been designed like the Girl Power project Letterhead, Visiting Cards, Banners and Standees, T-shirt, Coffee Mug, and posters. This is an IEC promotional activity under Girl Power Project and

will help the project to expand to various stakeholders and connect them within the broader objective of network building within the projects so that the project can grow and expand its reach to several other women and CSOs.

Expanding the Network through Social Media

To make the most effective use of social media with limited time and effort, a comprehensive media outreach strategy has been framed through various social media platforms. To keep the entire idea informed and for knowledge outreach with officials and stakeholders through the social mediaplatforms, social pages are nowlive for Girl Power Project digital network building. Social Media Platform is for anyone and for everyone, this project can help to reach to the masses and promote efforts and methodologies to the world to make the society a better place for potential women entrepreneurs. Additionally this will build a habit of digital sharing of success stories among the CSOs and women entrepreneurs.

The Girl Power Project aims at facilitating women entrepreneurs in society withthe enhancementin skill set of CSOs & Women entrepreneurs throughthe digitalsharing platform. The project aims at improving employability and skill up-gradation of CSOs and women groups.

In the due course of implementation of the project activities,the project will make efforts to utilize the digitization process and hence will understand how fruitful and knowledge oriented it could be to fulfill our goals and expectations in the project. The network building and CSO support activities are aimed to capacitate the CSOs and expand their larger network. Similarly Market Connect is expected to provide the female entrepreneurs with direct and digital platform for gaining access to the market and become self-independent. Finally, the Girl Power Project aims to bring about an overall improvement in the economic conditions of the women in Jharkhand, leading to the overall objectives of socio-economic development at state and national levels. ■

120 million children in South Asia could be pushed into poverty: UNICEF

NEW DELHI: Making clear the most serious effects of COVID-19, a report by the United Nations Children’s Fund has revealed that the pandemic could push an additional 120 million children in South Asia into poverty. The South Asian region, which is home to nearly a quarter of the world’s population, has seen a rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in various countries in the region. The report titled, “Lives upended: How COVID-19 threatens the futures of 600 million South Asian children,” noted that children are at a lower risk of being infected by the virus due to their strong immunity, they are probably the ones that are going to be most affected by the economic and social effects of the pandemic.

In eight countries that have been included in the study, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, an estimated 340 million children already live in ‘multi-dimensional poverty’. This means that 240 million children residing in these eight countries experience poverty in various sectors of life – poor health, lack of education, poor sanitation, poor quality

of work and sometimes even forced child labour.

The report quoted a research by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, according to which in the worst situation, there could be additional deaths of as many as 881,000 children aged 5 or under and that of 36,000 mothers over the next twelve months in South Asia. The maximum number of deaths would happen in India and Pakistan, although Bangladesh and Afghanistan could also see considerable levels of additional mortality. According to the report, the pandemic may push an additional 120 million children across the poverty line within the next six months. It pointed out that India and Nepal, among other countries face a particular problem where the communities need to be assured that hundreds of schools being utilized as quarantine centres are safely disinfected before children are permitted to go back to class.

Jean Gough, Regional Director (South Asia), UNICEF, said that the side effects of the pandemic across South Asia have been damaging the children in numerous ways. This not

only includes the economic and social effects of the pandemic but also the measures taken by the government to stop it.

He went on to add, “But the longer-term impact of the economic crisis on children will be on a different scale entirely. Without urgent action now, COVID-19 could destroy the hopes and futures of an entire generation.” Reduced access to schools, lack of nutrition, a pause in vaccination and other health awareness programs and risk of sexual, mental and physical abuse during the lockdown are some of the problems that children in South Asia stand to face in the coming months, said the report.

UNICEF cited seven outbreaks of measles or 250 cases in Nepal during its lockdown and a 55% drop in the number of routine vaccinations given to Bangladeshi children in April, as compared to February.

According to the report, immunization, nutrition and other vital health services have been severely disrupted, potentially threatening the lives of young children and mothers. And with the closure of schools, the report estimates that more than 430 million children have been shut out of their classrooms.

In many cases, remote learning has taken the place of actual classrooms, but the unavailability of internet connection or electricity in rural areas meanshas limited access in many places. The report further noted that while the pandemic has had a devastating effect on the economies of all eight countries under scrutiny, their governments have done little or nothing to handle the situation. Those countries that have managed to extend social security schemes and introduce emergency measures have not been able to do so efficiently and so that effects of these measures go to waste.





‘Diseases emerging in children with prior exposure to COVID-19’

ILLINOIS: As of now, there are more than 10 million cases COVID-19 cases being reported from around the world, out of which almost 6 lakh confirmed cases have been registered in India. While the elderlies and those with a weak immune system are at a high risk of severe infections and deaths from the highly infectious coronavirus disease, there are certain reports that suggest less severe symptoms in children from the contagion. However, one such study conducted in the United States of America has found a multisystem inflammatory condition has emerged in children in association with prior exposure or infection to SARS-CoV-2 which can cause life-threatening complications in children between the age group of 0 to 19 years.

A new case series published in ‘Radiology’, a scientific journal, examines the spectrum of imaging findings in children with the post-COVID-19 inflammatory condition known as Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). The array of findings includes airway inflammation and rapid development of pulmonary edema, coronary artery

aneurysms and extensive intra-abdominal inflammatory changes. In April 2020, Evelina London Children’s Hospital in London, U.K., witnessed a rise in the number of children suffering from a multi-system inflammatory syndrome. Various symptoms including fever, headaches, abdominal pain, rash, and conjunctivitis were found in children. Clinical features and lab findings have noticed its similarity to Kawasaki disease shock syndrome, which causes inflammation in the walls of blood vessels.

Shema Hameed, M.B.B.S., consultant pediatric radiologist, Evelina London Children’s Hospital, study’s lead author said that their hospital saw an unprecedented group of children showing MIS-C, a new hyperinflammatory syndrome related to the current COVID-19 pandemic and recognition of which led to a national alert.

For the study, researchers performed a retrospective review of clinical, laboratory and imaging findings of the first 35 children under the age of 17 who were admitted to Evelina London Children’s Hospital from April 14 to May 9, 2020, and it included 27 boys

and 8 girls, with a average age of 11 years old.

In 94 per cent of the children, the most common clinical presentation was fever, abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea was observed in 86 percent, rash in 37 percent and conjunctivitis in 26 percent of them.

Twenty-one children among them were found in shock and the clinical status of those 24 of 35 children (69 per cent) in the pediatric intensive care unit, of which 7 (20 percent) required mechanical ventilation and 20 (57 percent) inotropic support was severe enough to warrant supervision.

Two children required extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) due to severe myocardial dysfunction. Lab tests revealed that all of the children had abnormal white blood cell counts.

The emerging pattern of the imaging findings indicated airway inflammation, rapidly progressive pulmonary edema, coronary artery aneurysms, and extensive abdominal inflammatory changes within the right iliac fossa in post-COVID-19 MIS-C.

The chest X-ray of all the 35 children was taken due fever, sepsis, or features of multisystem inflammation and 19 X-rays among them were found to be abnormal in which the most common finding was bronchial wall thickening.

The predominant findings on chest CT were basal consolidation, or part of the lung filling with fluid, and collapsed lung with pleural effusions, or build-up of fluid in the outer membranes of the lungs.

Abdominal ultrasound findings included inflammatory changes within the right iliac fossa, with mesenteric fat stranding, lymphadenopathy, and bowel wall thickening, as well as free fluid in the pelvis.

The authors of the study recognized that because of a small study population, their findings cannot be generalized so they mentioned the need for further investigations. They added that the results from the study are still important in improving knowledge to understand how COVID-19 affects children.

'Urgent assistance to India's migrant workers must comply SC ruling'



UN Experts urged the Indian Government to follow the Supreme Court ruling to ensure the wellbeing of more than 100 million internal migrant workers suffering hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. As per the Supreme Court's directive, the government has to register them, ensure them free travel by train or bus and provide them with food, shelter and water until they reach their homes. The experts also pointed out that the lack of coordination among states for transportation of migrants and most workers not being able to qualify for relief packages makes the efforts simply inadequate.

NCERT joins hands with UNICEF for safe e-learning

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has collaborated with United Nations Children's Fund to release a handbook, 'Safe Online Learning in Times of COVID-19', focusing on prevention of students from the growing menace of Cyber Bullying and its impact on them and their education. The handbook points out that education departments have made efforts to ensure continuity of learning through various digital platforms which makes them vulnerable to Cyber Bullying. The handbook also explains how to prevent and counter cyberbullying by not responding or retaliating to it. It advises students to have a strong password and security setup for various digital accounts.

India to get 200 urban forests soon



NEW DELHI: Prakash Javadekar, Union Environment Minister, announced the central government's new scheme to develop 200 urban forests across various cities in India. Under the 'Nagar Van' scheme, the Forest Department will be collaborating with municipal bodies, NGOs, corporates, etc. to ensure public participation in giving cities better lungs. These forests will be constructed on the vacant land, which would be offered to the government by the urban local bodies, or preexisting forests would be modified.

Javadekar highlighted that the Warje Hill urban forest will serve as a pioneer to the new forests that are to be constructed across the rest of the country. Built on

barren land under the Maharashtra Forest Department, the forest had depleted due to many encroachments by slums and builders. However, the Maharashtra Forest Department collaborated with TERRE Policy, a local NGO; Tata Motors and Persistent Foundation, to convert the land into a forest rich in biodiversity, the minister informed. The minister also highlighted Smriti Van's ascent in becoming an urban forest rich in biodiversity.

Javadekar said that village forests have been an integral part of our society for ages. Under the new scheme, the urban forest would be used to fill the gap in urban areas for green spaces, which can act as carbon sinks.

NGT asks CPCB to impose revised environment compensation for CETPs

NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to gather and submit information regarding compliance and non-compliance of effluent and sewage treatment plants (STPs) across the country. NGT has also asked the green body to evolve an environmental compensation (EC) structure for all non-complying treatment plants across India.

This comes after CPCB submitted a compliance report to the NGT in May 2020 in response to an order issued by the latter regarding pollution caused by non-complying wastewater, sewage and effluent treatment plants. According to the report, a total of 191 common effluent treatment plants (CETP) operate across India out of which, 63 do not comply with the standards set by the NGT and CPCB. Show-cause / closure notices have been issued to 22 non-complying CETPs; legal cases filed against 9 CETPs, and no action has been taken so far for the remaining 32 CETPs. A majority of the non-complying CETPs are located in Gujarat (17), followed by Rajasthan (11), Tamil Nadu (9) and Delhi (9). During the inspection, it was found that some of these CETPs were operating without any consent/license renewals. This issue of EC regime for CETPs was discussed in February and March 2020. Based on the discussions held in the committee meeting, NGT asked CPCB to prepare and finalise a revised environmental compensation regime for non-complying CETPs. The CPCB, therefore, is now in the process of revising the EC regime for CETPs.

Education of children suffers due to technological disparity: UNICEF

NEW YORK: With 1.2 billion children out of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing learning crisis has now become even more divisive and deepening, as there are disparities in access to technology and material to continue studies. According to UNICEF data, 71 countries around the globe have less than half the population with internet access. Nearly three-quarters of governments in 127 countries are using online mediums to deliver education during this time. Robert Jenkins, Chief of Education, UNICEF, said it is very important to provide learning tools and accelerate access to the internet to support these children. Jenkins further said that a learning crisis before COVID-19 was already going on and it would only grow in severity following it. As per UNICEF's data, in 40 of 88 countries, the children living in urban areas are found to be twice as likely to have a TV than those living in rural areas. The largest disparity can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa where only 1 in 100 homes of rural Chad have TV in comparison to 1 in 3 in cities. Governments in many countries are using television as a medium to deliver education despite the difference in TV ownership. Different approaches are being used like Television, Radio, Internet, paper-



based, with the help of local service providers, offline recorded lessons being uploaded onto solar-powered tablets, video lessons through social media channels such as WhatsApp and Facebook and tablets equipped with connectivity and educational content provided to students to meet the current demands.

MGNREGA employs over 49.5 lakh people in Rajasthan alone

JAIPUR: It is quite evident how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every sphere of life to some extent. Due to the pandemic and the consequent lockdown in India, national unemployment rates have skyrocketed and are expected to rise even further with time. However, during this time, the central government's flagship employment scheme – the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has recorded great success this year. In Rajasthan alone, in the month of June 2020, over 49.5 lakh people were employed under MGNREGA. This marks an increase of 17 lakh people as compared to the same time last year.

However, according to officials, the spike was not only because of the large number of people who have returned home. A large section of the people who got employment under MGNREGA this year are locals who lost their jobs owing

to the COVID-19 lockdown. PC Kishan, Commissioner, MGNREGA Rajasthan, said that a total of 49,52,496 people in 9,983-gram panchayats across the state have been employed under the scheme. Kishan also stated that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the scheme has been a success amongst migrant workers who have returned to the state amid the lockdown. This is evident from the fact that a large proportion of the people employed under the Act also belong to the border districts of Rajasthan. A large number of people who returned from other states are now residing in these border districts.

The state government has also lauded the success of the scheme, along with several gram panchayats and experts. According to officials, Rajasthan is currently at the top in terms of employing people under MGNREGA.

ICMR recommends quick tests in containment zones



In a bid to ensure a quick diagnosis of the virus infection and, hence, quick action, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recommended the use of Standard Q COVID-19. The test detects antigens via nasal swab and the Council has recommended its use in containment zones as well as in medical settings. The test allows result determination in up to 30 minutes. ICMR said that people living in containment zones who have influenza-like symptoms must be checked for the virus using this test. Asymptomatic people, who have come in contact with the aforementioned, must also be checked regularly between day 5 and 10 of coming in contact with the infected.

Hydroxychloroquine ineffective in treating COVID-19: FDA

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on June 15 revoked emergency use of malaria drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine, which was granted late March, and was backed by President Donald Trump, amid growing evidence that it was ineffective to treat coronavirus and also cited reports of heart complications and other side effects from the drug. So far, no study has been able to prove the safety and affectivity of the drugs, but a string of recent studies has made clear that it does more harm than good.

Health Ministry issues new advisory for healthcare workers



In their latest advisory, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has reduced the quarantine period for healthcare workers (HCWs) with high-risk exposure to COVID-19 from 14 days to one week. MoHFW also directed the nodal officer or head of the department to form a sub-committee to assess the level of exposure and the risk for the healthcare workers managing COVID-19 cases and further ensure that they are being provided with chemoprophylaxis under medical supervision. The Nodal Officer will also make sure that healthcare workers are using Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) while on duty as per their risk profile.

Rajasthan caps charges of various COVID-19 testing

The Government of Rajasthan has capped the testing charges in the state's private labs at Rs 2,200. Earlier, the charges were capped at ₹3,500 to ₹4,500. Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan, took the decision in a meeting held on Friday, June 19, to review the measures taken to fight COVID-19 in the state. In the two-hour long meeting, Gehlot also announced the decision to cap the maximum charges per bed at ₹2,000 and for beds with ventilator at ₹4,000. He said that strict action would be taken against those who violate the rules of the government regarding COVID-19 testing and treatment.

US government approves \$340 million investment loan for projects in India

NEW DELHI: The Government of United States has, with the aim of uplifting underserved communities, approved loans and investment worth \$340 million for Indian firms and organisations.

A major proportion of these loans were part of the \$1 billion in investments approved by the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)'s Board of Directors to advance and facilitate development in Africa, Latin America, the Indo-Pacific and other emerging markets around the world.

According to a statement by the US Embassy in India, the projects that will benefit from the loans will majorly support developing countries reeling from the impact of COVID-19.

As part of the initiative, ReNew Power has been granted a \$142 million loan to construct and operate a 300 MW solar power plant in Rajasthan to advance India's energy security. Another \$50 million will be made available to Sitara Solar Energy

Private Limited to build and operate a 100 MW solar power plant in Rajasthan to further enhance power supply in India.

Up to \$371,000 in technical assistance will also support Milk Mantra to produce and sell dairy products in eastern India. This technical assistance is intended to enhance the impact of an approved DFC loan to the project by sharing the costs of services. According to Adam Boehler, CEO, DFC, the investments made as a result of the \$1 billion loan will help uplift some of the most underserved countries and economies in the world. This set of investments also marks one of the largest tranches approved by the board of directors of DFC. The projects approved under the initiative will help strengthen health systems, bolster food security and support other impactful development outcomes. Several projects expand access to financial services for women, small businesses, and other underserved groups.

Migrants to get 20% wage hike, employment benefits after BRO-Jharkhand agreement

RANCHI: The Government of Jharkhand and the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) have reached an agreement to ensure that labourers of the state get prescribed wages and healthcare, accident, travel allowance and housing benefits. According to an official statement by the state government, a total of 11,815 labourers from the Santhal Pargana region in Jharkhand will get an opportunity to work for BRO. Apart from this, they will also enjoy all employment benefits. A statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office in Jharkhand said that the deliberations between the two organisations began when Hemant Soren, Chief Minister, Jharkhand, visited the Birsa Munda Airport to meet the first batch of migrant labourers flying back to the state from Leh on May 29. While welcoming them, he heard the grievances of the labourers and the fact that they were forced to



work in unsafe conditions and were not even given minimum wages by their employers. After days of deliberation, a written agreement under the Inter-State Labour Act, 1979 and the Workmen Compensation Act, 1923 was reached.

Following the agreement, the state government has permitted the BRO to engage labourers who will now get wages with a 20 per cent hike, which will be deposited in their accounts.

INNOVATION FOR CITIZENS

CARRYING A MASK and hand sanitiser has become a new normal of our lives today. At times, we forget to carry. And, if you are in Jharkhand, you are in big trouble. You could be fined Rs One lakh for not wearing

a mask. Poland has shown a way to municipalities for easing people's lives. With scientists and businesses coming out with innovations to battle COVID-19 and ease citizens' lives, municipalities in Poland have

installed mask and hand sanitiser vending machines 'Maseczkomat'. The vending machines enable citizens to get a cashless opportunity to purchase protective masks, gloves and hand sanitiser.



Delhi gets first mobile COVID-19 testing lab



Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched its first mobile testing van in New Delhi. The mobile lab was inaugurated by Dr Harshvardhan, Union Minister of Health, and has testing capacity of running 50 Covid tests simultaneously. The Ministry of Science and Technology's Department of Biotechnology, in collaboration with MedTech Zone, Andhra Pradesh, developed the infectious disease diagnostic lab. The unit can be used to diagnose other diseases as well and will be used post-Corona as well. The government is planning to develop 50 more such mobile labs in a bid to eradicate diseases by timely identification in remote rural areas of the country.

57 girls in Kanpur shelter home test COVID positive

Multiple cases, as many as 57 cases, of COVID-19 infections in girls at a child shelter home in Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh have been reported as of June 21. Brahma Dev Ram Tiwari, District Magistrate, Kanpur, said that the Child Welfare Committees of Agra, Etah, Kannauj, Firozabad and Kanpur, under the POCSO Act, had referred the 5 girls. Along with the 57 girls, one employee has also been found corona-positive. The first case came on June 15, following which immediate necessary action was not undertaken by the district administration. 33 cases in the same home were registered on June 17.

500 railway coaches for Delhi to increase COVID-bed strength

NEW DELHI: Given the rapid growth of corona positive cases in Delhi, the Centre has agreed to provide 500 railway coaches to the city to bridge the shortage of beds for quarantining patients of the city. Amit Shah, Union Home Minister, announced the Centre's decision after his meeting with Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister, Delhi, on June 14.

The move will add 8,000 more beds to the existing strength of beds in Delhi, while also increasing facilities and equipment to treat the infection simultaneously. Delhi has a total bed capacity of 9,698 out of which 4,248 are vacant at present, Delhi's coronavirus app says. Even as the cases continue to mount, authorities expect worse, as Manish Sisodia recently announced that the capital alone is likely to witness over 5 lakh cases of the virus in the near future. In order to incorporate the expected



increase in cases, Delhi Government is also planning to use over 40 hotels and 77 banquet halls as makeshift hospitals.

Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Health Minister, and Anil Baijal, Lieutenant Governor, Delhi, also attended the meeting. Officials of State Management Authority were also present.

As the cases continuously ramp up in the city, Vijay Dev, Chief Secretary, Delhi, announced that testing facilities are to be ramped up to 10,000 and would also ensure 100 per cent testing in the containment zones.

Rajasthan offers COVID-19 testing facilities to neighbouring states

JAIPUR: While COVID-19 cases are increasing drastically in neighbouring states, Rajasthan has offered testing facilities of upto 5,000 samples daily to neighbouring states. During a meeting to review the pandemic situation in the state, Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan, said that in times of crisis, states surrounding Rajasthan, which are overloaded with cases and short of testing facilities, can get tests done in Rajasthan. The state has the highest number of tests being performed daily in the country.

Gehlot also announced that by July end, all government hospitals in Rajasthan will have pipeline supply of oxygen instead of a cylinder based supply. He went on to note that the state managed to go from zero tests to over 25,000 tests daily while also noting that the recovery rate in the state touched 75 per cent. He said that constant monitoring and screening of patients is responsible for the high recovery rate in the state.

Jitendra Chaudhary, head of the lab technicians association at SMS hospital, said using the CB-NAAT machines and pool testing technique has helped to ramp up testing capacity in the state. 72 CB-NAAT machines are being used for COVID testing. ICMR approved these diagnostic machines, which are used for testing TB, to be used for COVID testing. Currently, testing is being carried out in 16 districts in the state though the chief minister and health minister have said that testing facilities will soon be developed in all 33 districts.





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Surge in global COVID-19 cases due to simultaneous peaking: WHO

Dr Michael Ryan, Emergencies Chief, World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that the number of COVID-19 cases are rising because the pandemic is peaking simultaneously in some big and populous countries at the same time, reflecting a change in the global activity of virus. He added that the virus has established itself very well as several countries have noted increase in hospital admissions and deaths and increased testing can't explain either of the two. The situation was "definitely accelerating" in a number of countries, including the US and others in South Asia, the Middle East and Africa, the premier health organisation said.

Unemployment back at pre-lockdown levels: CMIE



The unemployment rate in India, which shot up during the lockdown to 27.1 per cent in the week ending by May 3, has returned back to pre-lockdown levels. The rate now stands at 8.5 per cent, economic think tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) discovered. The survey conducted by CMIE has shown that the gain can be attributed to the employment boost in rural areas. Mahesh Vyas, Managing Director and CEO, CMIE, has said that bigger gains are expected to be made in the coming months in rural areas.

India, France sign 200 million euros agreement to fight coronavirus

NEW DELHI: France and India have signed an agreement under which both the countries would be committing 200 million euros in a bid to increase the state and central government's capacities to support the most vulnerable people in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. According to a statement by the French Embassy in India, the agreement was signed by C S Mohapatra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, and Bruno Bosle, Director, AFD (French Development Agency) in India, in the virtual presence of Emmanuel Lenain, Ambassador of France to India.

The program design has been developed by the World Bank, in collaboration with Indian authorities, and seeks to optimize and scale up the Indian government's existing social protection measures. The Agreement is focused on boosting the recently launched Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY) and to provide other

benefits to low income families so that the health, social and economic shocks arising from COVID-19 do not endanger people's well-being or jeopardise their contribution to the overall growth of the Indian economy in the long run. Under the programme, the government will also ensure better safety of frontline workers, particularly those working in healthcare, sanitation and security services, by providing them with a state-sponsored health insurance. Social assistance programmes will also be set up for low income urban families and migrant workers who will be unable to avail services and benefits of the PMGKY.

Lanain, while recalling France's approach to handling global catastrophes through multilateral cooperation, said that both President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have worked together tirelessly so that excellent relations between India and France translate into an outstanding response against COVID-19.

WHO warns COVID-19 entering 'new & dangerous phase'

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the COVID-19 pandemic is entering a new and dangerous phase as daily corona cases hit record highs. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO chief, said that the cases are accelerating after the numbers of cases reported daily are breaking all previous records. He added that almost half of the cases were reported from the Americas with a large number coming from Southern Asia and the Middle East.

He also noted that people are fed up of being at home and countries want to reopen their economies, but this time calls for extreme caution as the virus is spreading fast and many are still vulnerable. WHO had previously told the world leaders that there can be no going back to usual following the COVID-19 pandemic which has brought down the economies and wreaked havoc on nearly every country across the globe. The countries need to manage around the coronavirus in the near future as the cases are declining in some countries, while rising in others and reappearing in the areas where it was previously reported to be under control.



COVID-19 has shown that no one is safe until all are safe and a difference can be only made if politics is kept aside and everyone is working together. There is no vaccine for coronavirus as of now, and therefore, prevention from the disease is the only way for the entire world to stay safe, WHO said.

MoHFW issues revised guidelines for home isolation during COVID-19

NEW DELHI: Amid the COVID-19 pandemic spreading wildly in India, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India, has issued a revised set of guidelines for 'home isolation' for COVID-19 patients. People with mild and pre-symptomatic COVID-19 can opt for home treatment provided they are isolated in a separate room, with access to an individual toilet and an adult attendant/caregiver, said the advisory.

The patient in home isolation also has to give regular health updates to the District Surveillance Officer for further follow up by the surveillance teams. As a new and important addition to the guidelines, the doctor in-charge of the patient has to be satisfied before he/she is advised/approved to remain in home isolation, based on medical assessment

of his/her residential accommodation. The patient, on the other hand, also has to sign an undertaking to remain in home isolation and follow all the rules of home quarantine.

A team of well-trained doctors will also keep the patients under surveillance regularly. Both the doctor and the patient will have to follow the required guidelines during discharge and report updates as per norms. MoHFW has asked states to keep an eye on the medical establishment and those asked to remain in home quarantine and to make sure that the norms mentioned in the revised guidelines are followed strictly.

The statement from MOHFW on the guidelines considered this to be of utmost importance in the battle against COVID-19.

Delhi to revise COVID-19 pandemic management plan

NEW DELHI: Given the rapid increase in the number of positive cases in the National Capital, the Centre has asked the Delhi Government to redefine containment zones. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) suggested changes



in the state government's approach to deal with the pandemic on the basis of a report presented by a committee led by Dr VK Paul, Member, NITI Aayog. Dr Randeep Guleria, Director, AIIMS Delhi; Dr Balram Bhargava, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), were also part of the committee. The meeting was chaired by Amit Shah, Union Home Minister, and attended by Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister, Delhi; Manish Sisodia, Deputy CM; Anil Baijal, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi and Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Health Minister, amongst other senior officials. The key recommendations for Delhi by the Centre were: A better containment tactic to be developed; contact tracing to be broadened; antibody testing; better utilisation of police to enforce social distancing. Moreover, it was also recommended that an epidemiologist be employed at district level to improve healthcare services. For better contact tracing, better use of Aarogya Setu and Itihas apps should be done. The recommendation also included conducting a serological survey among 20,000 people between June 27 and to June 7. Associating each district with a specific hospital was also suggested. Further, MHA suggested that Delhi Government must also assess each death and report back on each patient's status after being admitted into a hospital. If the deceased was earlier in home isolation, whether they were brought to the hospital in time must also be key.

IMF further contracts India's, world's predicted growth rate in FY21

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected a deeper economic growth for both India and the world in financial year 2021 (FY21), citing longer lockdown durations and slower than anticipated economic recovery rates. In the June update of 'A Crisis Like No Other, An Uncertain Recovery' of its flagship World Economic Outlook (WEO), the IMF has projected a -4.5 per cent growth rate for India and a -4.9 per cent global growth rate for FY 21. The IMF further said that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a stronger-than-anticipated effect on the world economy, the real recovery rate is much slower than that anticipated.

Indian Railways cancels all regular trains till August 12



Ministry of Railways, Government of India decided to cancel all 'regular' trains starting July 1 till August 12. "It has been decided that regular time-tabled passenger services including Mail/Express, passenger and suburban services stand cancelled up to 12.08.2020," the Railway Board said in a notification. All tickets booked by the public for regular time-tabled trains will be cancelled and the fare will be refunded to the travelers. However, all special Rajdhani, mail and express trains that resumed operation from May 12 and June 1 will continue to operate.

Delhi sets up plasma bank amidst questions on the efficacy of the treatment



The Delhi Government has set up a plasma bank at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Science. Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister, Delhi, while addressing an online press briefing, said that hospitals will have to approach the plasma bank to get the facility. A separate helpline would be set up to cater to the queries related to the donation of plasma. The decision was taken after the Delhi Government had conducted trials on plasma therapy and results were encouraging, Kejriwal said. However, the Centre has issued precautionary advisory over this and questioned its efficacy, which is yet to be established.

Mizoram records 80% COVID-19 recovery rate



The Mizoram Government has reported that more than 80 per cent of the total COVID-19 infected patients in the state have recovered from the deadly virus as of July 1, 2020. Of the total 151 patients so far, there are 29 active cases and 122 have been cured and discharged, taking the recovery rate of the state to 80.7 per cent. The state has not registered any death due to infection.

Barcelona Opera reopens with concert for plants

BARCELONA: Gran Teatre del Liceu on June 22nd, reopened for its first concert following the three-month coronavirus lockdown to an audience of thousands of plants. 2,292 potted plants, rather than music lovers, attended the unusual event, which came from the Spanish conceptual artist Eugenio Ampudia. A string quartet named UcaLi sang an eight-minute rendition of Giacomo Puccini's *Crisantemi* for its leafy audience that was also made available to human listeners via livestream on Liceu's website. As the concert ended, the musicians bowed to plants, while sounds of wind blowing through the trees played in the background seemed like the leafy audience was giving them an applause. Ampudia said that it was important to tell the plants what we have been going through this time in the form of music, which is probably



a language they can understand. He added that at a time when a large part of humanity has been confined to reduced spaces and been forced to relinquish mobility, nature has crept forward to occupy the space we took from it. The performance also aimed to emphasize on the possibility of extending the concept of empathy to other species.

All 2,292 plants came from nurseries across the city of Barcelona and will be donated to healthcare professionals who have been battling the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

IIT-Bombay scraps all offline classes till year-end

MUMBAI: The Indian Institute of Technology – Bombay (IIT-B) became the first major educational institute in the country to scrap all face-to-face lectures for the rest of the year.

Subhasis Chaudhuri, Director, IIT-B, in an announcement made late night on Wednesday, June 24, said that the institute would teach the next semester “purely in the online mode so that there is no compromise on the safety and well-being of the students”. He went on to say that the staff and faculty at IIT-B are trying to rethink the way they impart education to its students. In order to avoid any further delays in starting the next semester, IIT-B decided to extensively work on shifting completely to online classes, the details of which will be informed to the students in due course of time.

This is the first time in the Institute's 62-year-long history that a new academic year starts without students on campus. Other IITs are likely to follow suit with similar announcements in the near future. Noting that a considerable proportion of students at IITs come from economically weaker sections, the Institute has also called for raising funds to help bridge the technology gap between the students and the Institute. The money raised from these funds will be used to buy laptops and internet data plans for students so that they face no difficulty in attending online lectures regularly. “We do not want a single student to miss out the learning experience for the lack of money. We have estimated that we need about Rs 5 crores to help those needy students. Our alumni have committed a good amount of support, but that is not enough for all these needy students and I solicit through this message your donations, however small it may be,” Chaudhuri wrote in his Facebook post. Subsequently, heads of different departments sent emails to all students enquiring who all do not have access to a personal computer or laptop and internet connection.

Researchers rushing to develop COVID vaccine; may succeed by year-end

NEW DELHI: As the world is dealing with an increasing number of COVID-19 related cases and deaths, research and development of vaccines and medicines to treat the disease has been going on around the world and as many as 13 experimental Coronavirus vaccines are currently under clinical trials. Between these, the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified Oxford's COVID-19 vaccine-AstraZeneca as the front-runner since it has more scope as compared to other vaccines, given their plans and vaccine trials.

University of Oxford and AstraZeneca's experimental COVID-19 vaccine has entered the final stage of clinical trials, making it the first such vaccine. In the next stage of trial in the UK, the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine, which has been licensed to AstraZeneca, will be administered to 10,260 adults and children. The scientists at the University of the Witwatersrand have started the first clinical trial in South Africa. The team will test the Ox1Cov-19 Vaccine, as part of the VIDA-Trial that aims to find a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2. In an agreement of \$127 million signed

by Brazil, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine will be produced locally. Serum Institute of India (SII) has also invested \$100 million to mass-produce one billion doses for India and other low-and-middle-income countries.

The vaccine is made from ChAdOx1 virus, a weakened version of the common cold virus (adenovirus) that triggers infections in chimpanzees. The virus has been genetically changed to protect humans from the infection.

Professor Andrew Pollard, Head, Oxford Vaccine Group, said that the clinical studies are progressing very well, and they are now beginning studies to assess how well the vaccine induces immune responses in older adults and to test whether it can provide protection in a wider population.

If the trials are successful, reports say, the Oxford Vaccine Group may launch the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of this year, making it the fastest COVID-19 vaccine since the outbreak.

As per WHO's data, apart from Oxford's vaccine, there are 12 other experimental vaccines in clinical trials and another 129 in the preclinical evaluation stage till June 22.

US Moderna Inc. and China's Sinovac

Bitotech are also contenders next in line in terms of entering final stages of human trials. These vaccines will be ready for human trials by July 2020.

In India, four companies are partnering to develop Covid-19 vaccines that are in the preclinical trial stages, to test their pharmacological effect and toxicity. This includes Delhi-based Panacea Biotec partnering with Refana Inc. in the US to develop an inactivated whole virus vaccine; Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, working on three vaccine candidates; SII in partnership with Oxford-AstraZeneca, US-biotech firm Codagenix, and Austria's Themis Bioscience; and lastly Zydus Cadila in Ahmedabad and Indian Immunologicals Ltd in Hyderabad have also formed partnerships for the vaccine's development.

Another such human trial in the UK, after the Oxford Vaccine, began in the Imperial College, London after its tests in animals suggested that the vaccine candidate was safe and triggered an effective immune response. On June 24, the first healthy volunteer was dosed with its vaccine developed using self-amplifying RNA (saRNA) technology. In the trial led by Professor Robin Shattock and Imperial researchers during the the initial stage of the trial, 15 healthy volunteers are receiving the vaccine and about 300 people will be vaccinated over the coming weeks.

According to Imperial College, If the vaccine is safe and shows promising immune response, a further trial involving 6,000 people is expected to go ahead in October.

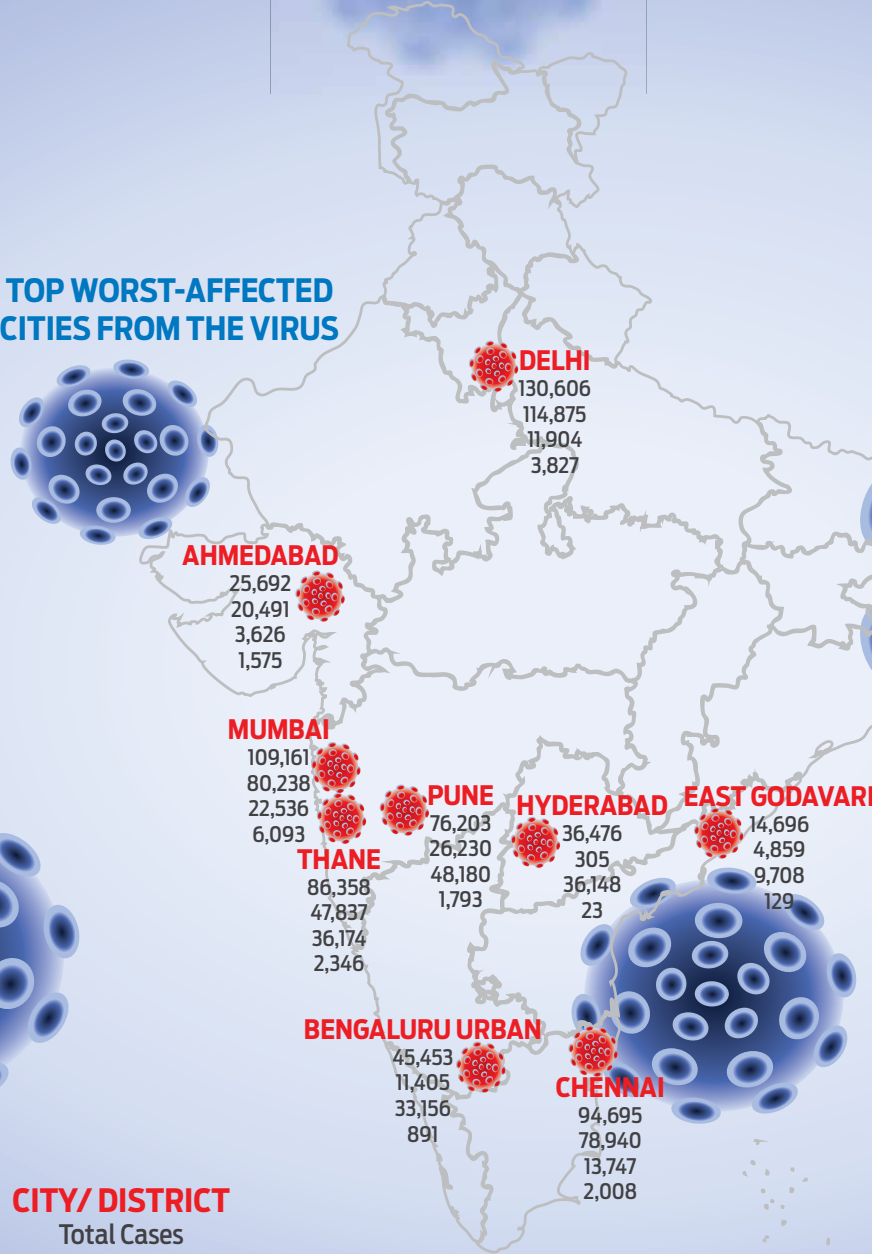
Dr Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious disease expert, said that he is hoping that there will be a COVID-19 vaccine by the end of this year or early next year. WHO is currently drafting guidelines for the ethical distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.



ARE METRO CITIES RUNNING OUT OF AMMUNITION IN FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19?

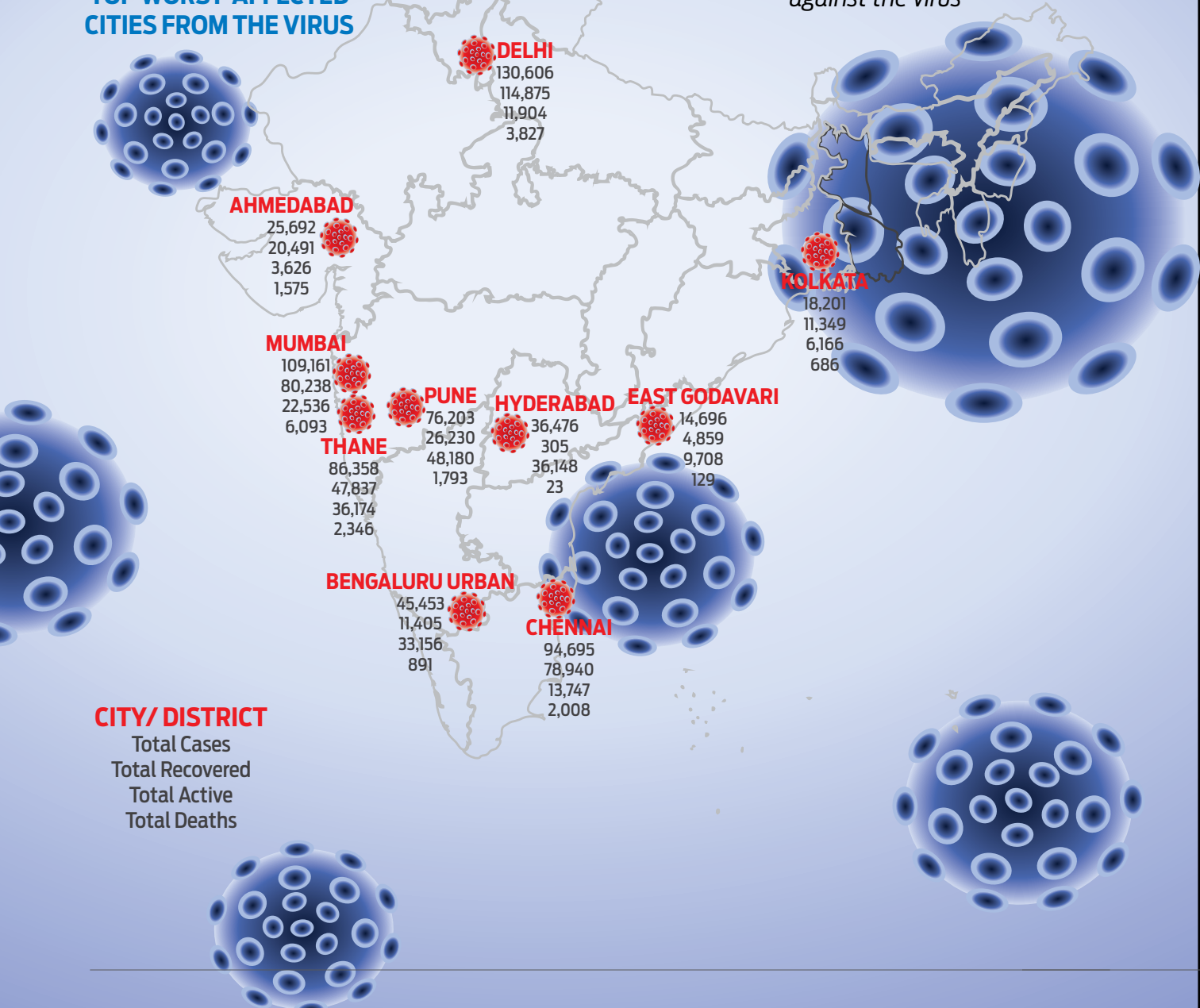
With increasing COVID-19 cases, the metro cities are losing their lustre. Many outstation workers, especially those in worst-affected cities, have gone back to their home towns and are finding avenues locally to avoid the hassles of living in a metro. Some cities have fought back strongly and graduated towards a normal life. This article tries to analyze the ground reality in worst-affected cities and also in the cities which have done fairly well in the fight against the virus

TOP WORST-AFFECTED CITIES FROM THE VIRUS



CITY/DISTRICT

- Total Cases
- Total Recovered
- Total Active
- Total Deaths





ABHISHEK PANDEY

Editor

The pandemic has changed the way city functions. There is a new rule every other day from the local administration. On one day, market places are open. Another day, there is a relaxation on the movement of people. And, if the number of cases spiked, all relaxations are withdrawn. People have to search the internet to know what is open or closed on a given day in a city.

Urbanists are optimistic that cities will bounce back first and fast when the vaccine is available and everything will be like before. The streets will be abuzz with vehicles and people, trains and metros will be jam-packed again, and the economic engine will rev louder than before. The pandemic

is also a reminder to rethink density, urban design, housing, social welfare programs and many urban policy issues. The transformation of cities will be a two-way process. On one side, policymakers will improve the facilities in the cities to utilize the economy of scale and on the other, the work in cities will also see a change. Many technology companies including Twitter and Facebook have already announced that they are in the process of changing their work culture by shifting largely to work from home.

Health facilities and sanitation facilities will also see a change. Cities will have to be prepared to improve their health facilities if they want to remain the hub of economic activities. Health infrastructure cannot be put on the back burner.

We all know that cities have emerged stronger after such pandemics and crises but at present, cities are on their knees. For the last one month in India, Delhi and Mumbai have been in a close race that no one wanted to win. That was of a maximum number of positive cases. Now, Delhi, the national capital, has beaten the economic capital by a huge margin. Delhi stands at 130,000 cases with the death toll of approximately 3800. While the cases

in Mumbai could be lesser at 109,000 but its death toll figure surpasses that of Delhi with 6000 reported deaths. Chennai is no better with 94000 cases and 2000 deaths but the death rate is far lower than the top two cities. The city has reported the majority of cases (over 45%) from Tamil Nadu.

There are a couple of cities which have improved their performance by losing the race of worst-affected cities. The central government has lauded the efforts of the Karnataka Government for using technology in tracking and tracing the cases. According to the media reports, technological interventions like the Seva Sindhu portal, Quarantine Watch and Apathmitra apps were hailed by the Centre as much as physical initiatives like physical and phone-based household survey which has covered more than 1.5 crore households, mobile squads for enforcement of home quarantine through community participation and field visits by ASHA workers. Indore and Jaipur have performed well in containing the spread of the virus. Both the cities conducted aggressively house-to-house surveys and contact tracing. While Indore had formed special patrolling teams for by-lanes, Jaipur had limited groceries or vegetable vendors in different localities to curb the potential super spreaders. Chennai city has been lauded for keeping the mortality rate below 1 per cent despite having reported a large number of cases. All these cases should be analysed and their learnings be circulated among administrations across the country to strengthen the fight against the virus.

There is a need to prepare a knowledge-sharing portal where each municipality or city administration can list its learning and innovative techniques of dealing with the pandemic. The city leaders and officials should also be enabled to raise their queries on a given problem to get a response from the cities that have already faced and solved a similar issue. Indian cities and local governments will have to unite and fight together to win the battle against the virus.

WE ALL KNOW THAT CITIES HAVE EMERGED STRONGER AFTER SUCH PANDEMICS AND CRISES BUT AT PRESENT, CITIES ARE ON THEIR KNEES. FOR THE LAST ONE MONTH IN INDIA, DELHI AND MUMBAI HAVE BEEN IN A CLOSE RACE THAT NO ONE WANTED TO WIN. THAT WAS OF A MAXIMUM NUMBER OF POSITIVE CASES. NOW, DELHI, THE NATIONAL CAPITAL, HAS BEATEN THE ECONOMIC CAPITAL BY A HUGE MARGIN. DELHI STANDS AT 130,000 CASES WITH THE DEATH TOLL OF APPROXIMATELY 3800. WHILE THE CASES IN MUMBAI COULD BE LESSER AT 109,000 BUT ITS DEATH TOLL FIGURE SURPASSES THAT OF DELHI WITH 6000 REPORTED DEATHS. CHENNAI IS NO BETTER WITH 94000 CASES AND 2000 DEATHS BUT THE DEATH RATE IS FAR LOWER THAN THE TOP TWO CITIES. THE CITY HAS REPORTED THE MAJORITY OF CASES (OVER 45%) FROM TAMIL NADU

CITIES TO PLAY MAJOR ROLE IN GLOBAL ECONOMIC REVIVAL

Will cities be able to support the world at large to get back on its feet? The answer is yes. Cities will pave a way for swift economic recovery and teach us the new way of life through innovation in preventive health care and improvements in existing health infrastructure in urban centres

The present health crisis has alerted city leaders to become more cautious about the effectiveness of their resilience and response system in a time of crisis. And, the alert is not just indicating towards the physical safety but also economic flexibility. The crisis has underlined that the problem could come from anywhere and cities will have to be prepared for anything and everything. Cities have been preparing themselves to be disaster resilient based on their assessment of their geographical conditions and risk profile. A majority of cities were not prepared to deal with a pandemic and cope up with its economic fallout, business closures, spike in unemployment rates, large scale migration, etc.

Cities have always been the growth engines but their role will be tweaked in the new normal post-COVID. Rural workforce has been coming to cities but the crisis had been a jolt for them as urban centres could not support them financially in the time of crisis hence India witnessed the biggest reverse migration in its history. Former Executive Director of UN-Habitat Joan Clos had said during his tenure (2010-17) that urbanization is a complex reality: it delivers wealth and prosperity, but at the same time it has a cost. A financial framework must be established to cover those costs through taxation, along with public policies to keep the city in good shape. Urbanisation sometimes seems to emerge spontaneously, often in

the form of slums, but it needs to be improved through formal processes such as urban planning, urban design, rules and regulations.” His thoughts are relevant. Cities will not just have to revive their economies but also create a sustainable financial model that improves quality of life of their citizens equitably and strengthen urban local governance.

Cities have always emerged victorious from crisis like situations and some of them have led by example in this pandemic. Some cities have learned their lessons and have begun their preparations to face such eventualities. The challenge is more daunting for the cities which have poor economic base and the crisis has weakened it further. The cities will have to look beyond the usual ways of going about their businesses and find out a suitable financial model to sustain their growth and rebuild the confidence of their citizenry and outstation workforce alike.

URBAN ECONOMY

It is well-known that cities account for almost 80 per cent of global GDP. If we look at individual cities in different countries, their share in GDP is far greater than their share of national population. In India, Mumbai, among 4000 odd municipal bodies, accounts for approximately USD 350-400 billion out of USD 2.7 trillion of national GDP. It means the city alone accounts for 7.5 per cent of India's GDP. Delhi is also close with contribution of approximately USD 300 billion. The trend is similar in other countries.

The former executive director

of UN-Habitat wrote in one of his articles about the role of cities in global economy. In the article, he has highlighted the contribution of some of the big cities of the world and their economic significance. For instance, Paris hosts 16 per cent of France's population but contributes around 26 per cent to national GDP. Kinshasa of the DRC accounts for 85 per cent of national GDP with only 13 per cent of its population. Metro Manila of Philippines contributes about 47 per cent to national GDP and has 12 per cent share of national population. There was no separate data available for New York City but some studies confirm that New York State contributes about 8 per cent and the majority chunk comes from the New York City. Considering the size of the US economy, the contribution of New York would be larger than the





RANJIT S CHAVAN
President, AIILSG

PARIS HOSTS 16 PER CENT OF FRANCE'S POPULATION BUT CONTRIBUTES AROUND 26 PER CENT TO NATIONAL GDP. KINSHASA OF THE DRC ACCOUNTS FOR 85 PER CENT OF NATIONAL GDP WITH ONLY 13 PER CENT OF ITS POPULATION. METRO MANILA OF PHILIPPINES CONTRIBUTES ABOUT 47 PER CENT TO NATIONAL GDP AND HAS 12 PER CENT SHARE OF NATIONAL POPULATION. THERE WAS NO SEPARATE DATA AVAILABLE FOR NEW YORK CITY BUT SOME STUDIES CONFIRM THAT NEW YORK STATE CONTRIBUTES ABOUT 8 PER CENT AND THE MAJORITY CHUNK COMES FROM THE NEW YORK CITY. CONSIDERING THE SIZE OF US ECONOMY, THE CONTRIBUTION OF NEW YORK WOULD BE LARGER THAN THE GDP OF MANY NATIONS INCLUDING SOME PROMINENT ONES SUCH AS SPAIN, CANADA, SOUTH KOREA AND EVEN RUSSIA

GDP of many nations including some prominent ones such as Spain, Canada, South Korea and even Russia.

GLOBALIZATION UNDER TEST

Coronavirus pandemic has put the globalization under test like never before. It will be hype to say that the pandemic will reverse the globalization trends but it is going to have some severe impact on the concept of

globalization as perceived in Before Corona (BC) world. In Europe, citizens from the member states moved freely. During the pandemic, the nations have sealed their borders and at some places countries even erected barriers and walls to stop free movement. Is it going to be a normal? This will completely depend on the time frame of this crisis.

This will surely have an impact on economies of the cities. Cities will have to rethink how to become self-reliant. Many governments including India have started focusing on becoming self-reliant. Many companies in the countries where there was no lockdown also faced severe challenges in operation because the supply chain was disrupted and the supply of essential components for manufacturing stopped. Countries also faced difficulty in getting the medical supplies including face masks, ventilators, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Many countries depend a lot on China for supplies as the country accounts for almost 16 per cent of global output. The world of business is not going to be the same again. However, globalization is not just about economic and trade relations. Scientists around the world are working on the same vaccine

together and making progress. The definition of globalization may see a tweak in After Corona world.

Covid-19 has once again brought our attention back to the sore relation between nature and humans. Thomas Friedman, a famous columnist of the New York Times, rightly said in one interview recently that the world has seen three and a half pandemics in last two decades. First, the geopolitical pandemic 9/11 terrorist attack, the financial pandemic-2008 recession, health pandemic-Covid-19, and the remaining half is about the ongoing climate change. He said that when the last one hits us, it will be the mother of all pandemics humans have ever seen.

This is a known fact that economic independence of cities strengthens local governance. The classic example is power of elected local representatives in Mumbai. The Mayor and corporators of BMC wield more power than any other mayor because the corporation generates funds for its expenses and is not dependent on the mercy of the state finance commission for grants. In the new normal, city leaders and policy makers should think in this direction too and make local governance stronger. ■



RACE FOR COVID VACCINE

A QUEST FOR 'NORMAL LIFE'



LOVEENA TANDON
Foreign Correspondent, India Today

The big question on the minds of most is, 'when will a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 arrive? When will life get back to normal? When can people go back to work without fear of life? When can we finally hug a friend with abandon?'

The quick answer is not in the immediate future, but University of Oxford-Jenner institute vaccine trail brings some promise with its preliminary results published in *Lancet*. 170 vaccines are now in development across the globe of which 15 are in human trial stage while Oxford-Jenner has published the results of its first and second phase in which 1077 healthy people between the age group of 18-55, participated.

Oxford-Jenner will soon be conducting trials in India as well.

INITIAL FINDINGS

Though a long way to go, the initial results have been "positive and promising". Oxford University is using the common cold virus taken from chimps to stimulate the immune system. The first and second phase result of the vaccine has revealed that it is able to generate, "anti-body" and "T-cell" response in the body, something that defines a good vaccine.

Anti-body works like body guards that stop the infection from entering the body while the T cells fight it out when the infection has entered the cells. As far as the side-effects are concerned they are nothing

major. These might be mild swelling in the arm where vaccine has been administered, slight headache and fever. All treatable by paracetamol. Results though have also revealed that for a 100% production of the desired anti-body and T-cells a booster dose might be required.

In a statement the institute said, "During the study participants who received the vaccine had detectable neutralising antibodies, which have been suggested by researchers as important for protection, and these responses were strongest after a booster dose, with 100% of participants blood having neutralising activity against the coronavirus. The next step in studying the vaccine is to confirm that it can effectively protect against SARS-CoV-2 infection." Professor Andrew Pollard, Chief investigator of the Oxford Vaccine Trial at Oxford University and co-author of the study said, "We saw the strongest immune response in the 10 participants who received two doses of the vaccine, indicating that this might be a good strategy for vaccination."

Vaccine is overall safe and generates desired immune response. The next step is to find out the, "strength of the immune response required to fight the infection."

"These encouraging results support further evaluation of this candidate vaccine in our ongoing large-scale Phase III programme, that is still needed to assess the ability of the vaccine to protect people from COVID-19," said Professor Sarah Gilbert, Professor of Vaccinology, at the University of Oxford Jenner Institute and co-author of the study. While in the first and second phase the vaccine was given to 1077 participants between the age group of 18 and 55 years in a randomised controlled trial now in the third phase to 10,000 people. In the UK infection levels have gone down but vaccine can be best tested in places where infection levels are high so it's being tested in Brazil and will

soon be in India too for the trials. Dr Sandy Douglas, an academic clinician, involved with the manufacturing side of the vaccine said, "we have plans of starting the clinical trials in India." He was appreciative of the, "commitment and efficiency," of the Serum Institute of India who they have collaborated with from the very beginning. Astra Zeneca, the British pharmaceutical giant responsible for the manufacture of the vaccine has partnered with nine companies across the globe and committed to the production of 2 billion doses once the vaccine is ready to be rolled out. "We are encouraged by the Phase I/II interim data showing AZD1222 was capable of generating a rapid antibody and T-cell response against SARS-CoV-2. While there is more work to be done, Oxford Jenner Vaccine plans to conduct part of their clinical trials in India too, as told today's data increases our confidence that the vaccine will work and allows us to continue our plans to manufacture the vaccine at scale for broad and equitable access around the world," said Mene Pangalos, Executive Vice President of BioPharmaceuticals Research and Development at Astra Zeneca.

The answer that all are seeking is when will the vaccine be out? The Oxford-Jenner team did not put a figure on a month but



did indicate that if all goes well then, an end of the year result could be expected. Even if that happens then the first in the queue will be the old and the vulnerable. UK is already committed to buying 190 million doses of different vaccines; these include 100 million doses of the Oxford vaccine; 30 millions of BioNtech/Pfizer vaccine and 60 million of Valneva inactivated coronavirus

IMPERIAL COLLEGE TRIAL

Yet another trial that has shown some promise is the one going on in the Imperial College London. The Oxford and the Imperial teams have been in close contact with each other even though their approach to achieve the same result of boosting the immunity is different.

Imperial college is using the generic material from the virus itself to achieve the same result of helping the immune system in a person to fight the virus. It is based on synthetic strands of RNA, rather than a part of the virus. The final vaccine consists of RNA strands packaged inside tiny fat droplets. When injected, it instructs muscle cells to produce virus proteins. It does not create copies of the virus and does not cause changes to the cell's own DNA. This protein can help kick in the immune response to fight the COVID-19 virus. Instead of using weakened or modified form of virus, like done traditionally the Imperial vaccine uses synthetic strands of genetic code (called RNA), based on the virus's genetic material. If successful it will be an advance in the manner in which vaccine trials are conducted rather revolutionise vaccine development and enable scientists to respond more quickly

to emerging diseases. It went onto human trial stage in June of this year, results are yet to be published.

TREATMENTS

A treatment that received approval is that of widely available mild steroid, dexamethasone being termed as a “major breakthrough” as it can reduce deaths due to Covid by 30%. While congratulating the “fantastic team of scientists right here in the U.K who conducted the first robust clinical trial anywhere in the world,” PM Boris Johnson said, “we have turned the tide but not beaten it yet.” Prof Martin Landray, the lead researcher of the trial in which 2,000 hospital patients were administered the drug explained that one in every 8 patients who was on ventilator could be saved while one in every 25 patients on oxygen showed positive signs of recovery. Dexamethasone though is not a complete treatment for all Covid patients.

Dr. Amit Gupta, Clinical Lead, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Oxford University Hospitals said, “It is important to note that dexamethasone is of no benefit if the patient does not need oxygen and should not be used in this group.” Also, it's worth noting that dexamethasone widely and commonly used for reducing inflammation thus useful in treating conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, gut inflammation (ulcerative colitis) and allergies also has side effects. “The side effects include an increase in blood sugar (worsening of diabetes), weight gain and delayed wound healing. It is, therefore, used under strict supervision and only in specific conditions,” says Dr. Gupta.

ANOTHER TREATMENT THAT NEEDS TRIAL

The University of Southampton and a UK biotech company, Synairgen conducted a study on 101 people during the period 30 March to 27 May 2020 that they claim can reduce hospitalisation of Covid-19 patients by 79%. It can be safely termed breakthrough if proven. The proposed treatment is like an inhaler stimulating the formulation of interferon beta protein which could reduce hospitalisation of COVID-19 patients that could stimulate an immune response leading to cutting down the odds of a COVID-19 patient requiring hospitalization or ventilator by 79%. Also, there was significant reduction in breathlessness in patients on whom the treatment was administered.

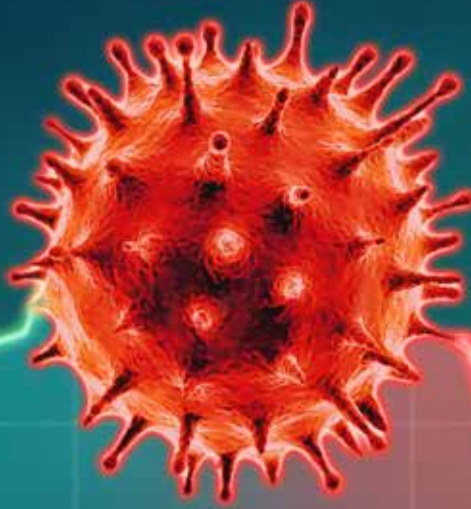
Professor Stephen Holgate CBE, Medical Research Council Clinical Professor of Immunopharmacology at the University of Southampton and Co-Founder of Synairgen, said: “Recognising that SARS-CoV-2 is known to have evolved to evade the initial antiviral response of the lung, our inhaled treatment of giving high local concentrations of interferon beta, a naturally occurring antiviral protein, restores the lung's ability to neutralise the virus, or any mutation of the virus or co-infection with another respiratory virus such as influenza or RSV, as could be encountered in the winter if there is a resurgence of COVID-19.”

“The double-blind placebo-controlled trial recruited 101 patients from 9 specialist hospital sites in the UK. Patient groups were evenly matched in terms of average age (56.5 years for placebo and 57.8 years for SNG001), comorbidities and average duration of COVID-19 symptoms prior to enrolment (9.8 days for placebo and 9.6 days for SNG001),” said Synairgen Richard Marsden, CEO of Synairgen, said: “We are all delighted with the trial results... This assessment of SNG001 in COVID-19 patients could signal a major breakthrough in the treatment of hospitalised COVID-19 patients. Our efforts are now focused on working with the regulators and other key groups to progress this potential COVID-19 treatment as rapidly as possible.” The company is yet to publish the full results and the trial would need to be expanded to wider population and tested for result. ■



OVERALL THE EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH CORONA VIRUS ARE GOING ON IN VARIOUS PLACES. RESULTS HAVE BEEN POSITIVE BUT NOT CONCLUSIVE. TILL THEN WASHING HANDS, MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCING AND TAKING OTHER PRECAUTIONS IS THE ONLY WAY TO PROTECT OURSELVES

EU RESPONDS TO CORONA CRISIS



European Union agreed on a recovery package worth 750 billion euros [about 65,000 billion Indian rupees] to deal with the impacts they are facing due to the coronavirus, which has killed nearly 150,000 people in the union and has put many economies on hold. Italy, one of the hard-hit countries in the bloc, alone will receive about 30 per cent of the package



ANWAR ASHRAF
Journalist, Deutsche Welle

It was the first face-to-face meeting of the European leaders in months. The pandemic has halted its regular meets and summits. They were about to discuss the ways to bring back the European Union on track in

the aftermath of the corona crisis including a package for recovery.

It was easy to see the initial divide among the leaders: While German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron were seen wearing face masks, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was seen without one.

The divide widened further during the marathon discussions that lasted over 90 hours – days and nights. It was tough to make a common decision. But in the end, the 27-member union agreed on a recovery package worth 750 billion euros (about 65,000 billion Indian rupees) to deal with

the impacts they are facing due to the coronavirus, which has killed nearly 150,000 people in the union and has put many economies on hold.

A little over half of the amount (390 billion euros) will be given as grants to the member states, while the rest will be provided on easy loan terms. Italy, one of the hard-hit countries in the bloc, alone will receive about 30 percent of the package.

It was a cheer-up moment after a deal was announced. The European leaders were seen relieved. But is everything well in the European Union?

GROUPS IN THE GROUP

The idea of the European Union started taking shape after World War II. Most of the European countries were badly affected by the war and this common ground brought them together. It developed further with time and resulted in visa-free nations (Schengen area) and a common currency (Euro). Although not all EU countries are part

of the Schengen deal and Euro is not the common currency of all European Union countries.

But the economic ambitions and political complexities have developed further groups in the bloc. The so-called rich and poor, north and south divide or recently the Frugal Four have brought tensions in the union.

The pandemic had different impacts on different countries. For example, the Southern European countries of Italy and Spain were badly affected and have seen over 60,000 deaths. These countries had to go for complete lockdowns for weeks. While the Northern state of Germany somehow managed to cope with the pandemic, thanks to the strong leadership and early tests.

The impacts have big economic fallouts. The German economy is supposed to contract a little over six percent but the Italian and Spanish economies would go for a tailspin and may fall about 10 per cent. The northern countries in the union are considered to be richer.

A recent survey by an EU agency [Eurofound] shows that the people in Italy, Spain, France and Greece have the least trust in the European Union. These countries give less than 4 out of 10 points when it came to faith in the union.

Recently a Frugal Four group (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria) has been developed within the European Union. The group advocates for responsible spending and believes in checks and balances inside the union.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

Lately, the group has also seen a political divide on the lines of populism and nationalism. Countries like Hungary and Poland are witnessing rightwing leadership. Populist and rightwing leaders are also gaining support in some other European countries such as Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. The ideology has already played a major role during the refugee crisis a few years ago.

There is also a wide gap among the countries on the issues of democratic standards and the commitment to climate change obligations.

IMPACT OF BREXIT

Brexit is another factor that is going to show its impact on the union. The United Kingdom has said goodbye to the group and the final formalities of its elimination are in process.

It is said that Brexit is a lose-lose situation for both the European Union and Britain. But it will certainly show big consequences on the union. Britain was one of the richest countries in the bloc and one of the world's most powerful nations. It is also one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and with its exit, the union is left with only one permanent member (France). For the European Union, it could be a huge significance on the global level.

Britain is also one of the leading economies in the world. It was one of the biggest financial contributors for the 27-member states and its exit has created a big financial gap in EU's economy.

GERMANY & MERKEL

With Britain's exit, Germany has become the engine of the bloc. Under the leadership of Chancellor Merkel, it has also become the most powerful nation in the continent. The recent summit was an example of Merkel's negotiating powers, where she has managed to convince the group that led to the deal.

Angela Merkel is one of the most senior leaders in the union and her experience counts at crucial stages. She was the key figure in the last three major crises the group has seen: The financial crisis, the refugee crisis and the corona crisis. Surprisingly, Merkel managed to handle all three of them brilliantly and the group remained intact.

But the countdown of Merkel's political career has already started. She will not be a chancellor candidate for the next general elections in the

country, which is going to take place next year. With populism on the rise in Germany, one cannot predict the form of the next government and the leader, to be specific. But certainly, the country will witness someone with less experience than Merkel. It is hard to say how it is going to impact the solidarity and unity of the European Union. Presently, Germany is playing a more important role with Ursula von der Leyen (a German) being the president of the European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union. Von der Leyen is a close associate of Chancellor Merkel and has served for different ministries in her cabinet, including the defence minister of Germany. It seems that the two most powerful European ladies are from Germany and there is great chemistry among them.

Germany is also the present president of the council of the European Union. Being the head of the state, Chancellor Merkel has the opportunity to show her expertise and power in the union.

But this will be over soon. The council has a policy of rotating the presidency and the member states get their turns every six months. The impact and execution of the corona package will be seen next year when the presidency will be handed over to relatively weaker countries: Portugal and Slovenia.

The group that was created on some common grounds is seeing divisions due to the lack of a common goal and for their economic and political ambitions. The combined European Union has a population of over 450 million people making it the third most populous "country", next only to China and India.

The union is known for its extraordinary democratic values, which gives one platform to different voices. It is also seen as a strong balancing power to the US and China. The world needs a strong EU. So far it has handled the crises, but the question is if it could survive the next one? ■



The pandemic has affected the most vulnerable the hardest but there are people who have come forward to lend them a helping hand them with their sincere efforts. In this article, Urban Update elaborates on the works of these unsung heroes and also got in touch with some of these heroes to know what keeps them going. This series of articles will continue in next month to feature more unsung heroes of our society

KASHISH DHAWAN
Reporter

DURING COVID TIMES

As the world fights an unprecedented health crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic, its ravaging effect has taken a toll on the world economy, individuals, businesses, and the education sector. It is so widespread that it has affected all spheres of public and private life and very likely it will increase poverty and inequality at global levels. But during these times there are millions of health care, sanitation workers and police officials who are on the frontline, working tirelessly in preventing COVID-19 from spreading further.

Similar to the works of these frontline warriors, there are a number of unsung

heroes in India and around the world who have been working dedicatedly for the society and for humanity. These unsung heroes are those who are rising above their own health and safety concerns and fighting to bring lives back to normal. These are people who are restoring humanity's faith by coming up with novel ideas.

DISTRIBUTION OF OXYGEN CYLINDERS

The coronavirus pandemic has brought to light the shortcomings of the healthcare system in India as reports of shortage of oxygen cylinders and ventilators starting pouring in. Medical establishments across the country started running short on ventilator support-systems for COVID positive patients in serious

condition. Meanwhile, the prices of oxygen cylinders also shot up due to shortage of supply and a sudden surge in their demand. During such times, Shahnawaz Shaikh, a resident of Malad, Mumbai, sold his SUV to buy oxygen cylinders to help those in need.

Shaikh, while talking to Urban Update, said that since the lockdown begun, he has been constantly helping people by providing them ration, sanitizing slums, buildings and stalls. He also helped migrant laborers reach their homes who were otherwise unable to do so due to lockdown restrictions imposed by the government. He added that seeing so many people die due to unavailability of oxygen cylinders, he decided to help and ensure that those who need life support systems to be treated for COVID must not be

left without help. The duo, who run an NGO called Unity and Deputy Foundation along with 15 other people, decided to do whatever they can to help them and initially bought 20 oxygen cylinders for those in need and the word quickly spread.

Shahnawaz said he spent all his savings on the social work he was doing during lockdown and that to meet the increasing demand of oxygen cylinders, they had to look for other sources to raise funds. He then decided to sell his SUV and use the money for the selfless cause. Before selling his SUV, he had used it as a free ambulance to ferry patients to hospitals. He went on to add that so far, his team has helped

more than 300 people by providing them with oxygen cylinders on time.

After sharing the information about free oxygen cylinders on social media, Shahnawaz said they have been getting 25 to 30 requests on a daily basis. He added in order to separate the ones who needed the cylinders more, the team required those seeking help to get a doctor's recommendation for the oxygen cylinder and to be able to pick up the oxygen cylinder from the NGO on their own. However, in exceptional cases, like when the family is quarantined, a team of volunteers in protective gear is sent to the location to deliver the oxygen cylinder to the patient in need. The delivery team does not enter the house of the patient in order to avoid direct contact and strictly maintain social distancing at all times.

SANITIZATION WORK ON STREETS, LANGAR TO DRIVERS, FEEDS FOR ANIMALS

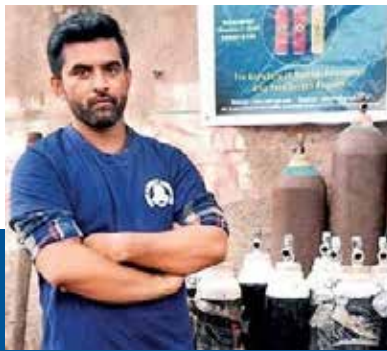
Due to COVID-19, not only humans but animals have also been affected. Since people were forced to stay indoors, animals on the street had no one to feed them. Seeing their plight, Zorawar Singh, a resident of Rani Bagh, Delhi, decided to help both people and

animals by sanitizing streets, providing food to truckers and to animals.

Singh, in conversation with Urban Update, said that he has been working for this noble cause with Teg Sikh Martial Arts Academy, which is also involved in social work. He said, "We saw people were suffering because of corona as their businesses and offices had shut down. Some were informed that their salary will be deducted in order to cover losses during the lockdown, while some others could not make money due to shutdown of businesses. As a result, many were unable to feed their families. So we decided to divide our teams and collect contributions from members and also asked children to be a part of the initiative by giving their savings or asking their parents to contribute the 10th part of their income for providing food to the needy or doing sanitation works in different societies." He went on to add that all the duties were divided, contributions were gathered, and 25 sanitization machines were bought for sanitizing streets. The team further went on to sanitize police stations, hospitals, chemist and ration shops, societies, religious places and other public spaces in North and West Delhi.

Singh added that they distributed their phone number everywhere so that people who need food can contact them directly. Due to the efforts of the entire team, they were able to provide food to 200 people in one go. Moreover, with the help of nearly 30 families, they were able to feed close to 400 street animals every evening. The Academy helped in reaching out to nearly 2,000 truckers daily. They also served workers residing in the Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar, who were facing severe shortage of food supplies during the lockdown.

These are just a few of the examples of unsung heroes, who worked selflessly to help those in need survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Their actions and initiatives helped save the lives of hundreds of people who were either unable to afford the COVID-19 treatment or to procure food for their families. ■



Shahnawaz Shaikh





RANJAN K PANDA

Convenor, Combat Climate Change Network, India

ENSURING RIGHT TO WATER DURING PANDEMICS AND BEYOND

The COVID-19 pandemic is getting worse by the day and has seriously exposed the lacunae in our water policies and service infrastructure. Inequalities in availability and distribution of freshwater are more starkly visible than ever before

Water is the first line of our defence against Coronavirus and many people simply lack the right to the resource and required facilities. Time, we fixed the gaps as fast as possible, as well as worked towards building a resilient and just water supply regime.

It is estimated that nearly 800 million people across the world do not have access to clean water close to their homes. The problem does not end there. Almost two billion people, that's more than a quarter of the current global population, lack water service that is free from contamination.

Having access to water is not enough. People need to have sufficient and safe water to be able to live a healthy life. And when it comes to pandemics such as the current one, the requirement of water grows manifold.

Hand hygiene is considered to be the primary protection against Coronavirus and experts are advising people to wash their hands frequently, each time for at least 20 to 30 seconds with soap and running tap water. Then, cleaning surfaces with water and disinfectants is also a major need to kill the virus. Handwashing with soap has always been recommended to effectively disrupt the transmission of respiratory diseases. Soap molecules disrupt SARS-CoV-2's outer lipid membrane, thereby killing the microbe. Running water is recommended as it flushes away the viral fragments. It has been observed that locations around the globe, where people do not have the habit of washing their hands, have a much higher level of exposure to Coronavirus. On the other hand, people who do not have access to water, cannot imbibe the habit of handwashing frequently. So, they remain highly vulnerable to the virus.

40 PER CENT PEOPLE OF THE WORLD AT HIGH RISK

According to a factsheet shared by UNICEF, 3 billion people, that's about 40 per cent of the world's population, do not have a handwashing facility with water and soap at home. When it comes to the least developed countries, nearly three quarters of the people lack basic handwashing facilities at home. More than half of the people in the world do not have safe sanitation facilities yet.

A just published study in Environmental Health Perspectives, however, has found that in 2019, 2.02 billion people, that's about 26.1 per cent of the world population, lacked access to handwashing with available soap and water. The most acute shortages were found in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In case of sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, the study found, more than 50 per cent of the population were without access to handwashing in 2019.

According to this study conducted by Michael Brauer and others from the University of Washington, in 46 countries, more than half of the population lacked access, and in eight countries (India, Nigeria, China,

Urban WASH inequalities in handwashing facilities

Sub-Saharan Africa

258 million people
that's 63%

of the urban population, lack access to handwashing. It is estimated that 18 million urban South Africans, that's 17 per cent of the population, lack the facility at home. Compare that to the richest urban dwellers and they are 12 times more likely to have access to handwashing facilities.

Central & South Asia

153 million people
that's 22%

of the urban population, lack access to handwashing. In case of Bangladesh, 29 million urban people, that's nearly 50 per cent of the total urban population, lack the facility. Coming to India, 91 million people, that's about 20 per cent of the total urban population, lack handwashing facilities at home.

East Asia

41 million people
that's 28%

of the urban population, lack access to handwashing facilities at home. In Indonesia, 7 million urban people, that's 15 per cent of the total urban population, lack these facilities.

Our urban areas have contrastingly different characters than the rural areas. Risk factors of infections in pandemics grow higher in the urban slums as population density is too high and concentration of the people in habitation areas is too dense. Then there are more gatherings of different forms in the urban areas and the market going population is also high and more frequent compared to rural areas. Not having handwashing facilities at home and lack of awareness on hand hygiene and crowd behavioural etiquettes can have devastating impacts on the population.

Public handwashing and sanitation facilities are important to contain the spread of diseases and viruses such as Corona. However, the world is also lagging behind in providing adequate public facilities. Nearly half of healthcare facilities globally do not have basic handwashing facilities, while 47 per cent of schools in developing countries lack handwashing facilities with soap and clean water.

RIGHT TO WATER

The deadly Coronavirus has crippled human societies, stunted economic growth and pushed billions of people to poverty and food insecurity. Even though safe water is a human right, many facilities worldwide are charging money to supply water to people, including the poor, in the name of meeting operation and maintenance cost. This pandemic has not only made the existing facilities crumble but also has given us an opportunity to look at our policies and practices afresh. Pandemics make poor poorer and their affordability reduces drastically, sometimes vanishes completely with little chance to recover in near future. We have seen how the migrant workers in India have faced an erosion of income and gone through innumerable sufferings.

Right to water for everyone is important, not only the rich and other people who can afford safe water. While making water access at doorstep in a time bound manner is a mandatory requirement, factoring in climate change (that has already induced water scarcity and is going to have much devastating impact in future) in our water supply planning is also essential.

The world is fighting COVID-19 along with many disasters at the same time. Disasters aggravate water quality and quantity challenges. Especially in water scarcity regions, when such pandemics occur, the access further eludes the people. Making people pay for water in such cases would harm them to a great extent. Our approaches to ensuring water should therefore be based on a rights regime and people should be provided with water that is safe. It should be supplied by adhering to the principles of affordability, equality and justice. Water supply systems and infrastructure must also guarantee measures to ensure sustainability of the resources by adhering to principles and measures of ecosystem restoration.

Source: UNICEF Fact Sheet, March 13, 2020

Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia) the population that was estimated to be without handwashing access was more than 50 million. In India alone, some 499 million people lacked access. That's almost 36 per cent of the total population.

Even in wealthier countries some populations lack access to handwashing.

THE URBAN PROBLEM

We often have the perception that urban areas are well off, because, water supply coverage is always comparatively better than the rural areas. Region-

wise statistics available show how urban areas are also replete with gross inequalities. ■

See box: Urban WASH inequalities in handwashing facilities

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[The views expressed are the author's own. They do not purport to reflect the views of Urban Update.]

Eminent environmentalist of the country, Dr VB Mathur is the chairman National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), Chennai. Dr Mathur is the former head of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun. In a freewheeling interview with Abhilash Khandekar, he tells Urban Update how biodiversity governance is being strengthened in rural and urban India. Excerpts:



DR VB MATHUR

“Biodiversity mainstreaming is key to achieving SDGs”



ABHILASH KHANDEKAR

Senior Journalist

HOW DO YOU THINK THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ACT 2002 HAS HAPPENED OVER THE PAST 18 YEARS? HAS IT BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN LETTER AND SPIRIT? ARE YOU SATISFIED?

Considering the importance of biodiversity for human well-being and development, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, adopted the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). India became a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in the year 1994. In pursuance to the CBD, India enacted the Biological Diversity (BD) Act in 2002, and notified the Rules in 2004, through an extensive consultative process initiated in 1994.

The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) was set up in Chennai in 2003. India became a party to CBD's Nagoya Protocol on Access & Benefit Sharing (ABS) in 2014.

Hence, processes and the time lines go much beyond the 18 years. BD Act is implemented through a three-tier institutional mechanism, at national, state and local levels: National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at the national level, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) set up by the State Governments at the State level, and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) set up by the elected bodies at the local level. As per the provisions of the Act, all the three institutions set up under the Act are autonomous and statutory bodies.

Accordingly, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) have been established in all 28 states. Protection of forests and wildlife being in the concurrent list, twenty-six (26) states have notified the state specific rules in accordance with the provisions of the Act. At the local body level, 2,53,767 BMCs have been set up in all the 28 States and 3 UTs. 18 States and 2 UTs have notified the list of threatened species of Plants and Animals. 18 Biodiversity Heritage Sites have been notified across 11 States.

The NBA has recently empowered all UTs to establish the UTs Biodiversity Councils similar to the State Biodiversity Boards as part of the decentralization process.

Obviously my satisfaction level is mixed. While I am happy that many things have happened, but I do realize that many more things remain to happen. Further, the implementation of the BD Act needs to be further strengthened and more benefits to the local communities who are the 'conservers' of the biological resources have to be provided. I must say that efforts to speed up effective implementation are currently on with full intent and purpose.

WELL AFTER 18 YEARS OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE ACT, ONE FINDS GENERAL APATHY TOWARDS CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN STATES. ESPECIALLY AMONG THOSE WHO ARE EXPECTED, BY THE ACT, TO IMPLEMENT. COMMENT!

Conservation of biodiversity is a multi-sectoral endeavor and involves multiple stakeholder participation at various tiers of governance. The NBA has recently assessed that, at the Central Government level, there are 116 schemes implemented by

24 Ministries and 29 Departments that have relevance to biodiversity conservation in one way or the other. This means that apart from MoEFCC, the key ministry mandated with biodiversity conservation, there are 23 other ministries that have stakes in the conservation of biodiversity. Similar situation prevails in the States as well. Hence, mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors becomes very relevant.

Several stakeholders are now realizing the importance of biodiversity mainstreaming. To cite one example, Ministry of Panchayati Raj which is the key ministry responsible for efficient functioning at the local body level is considering to provide funds for preparation of Peoples' Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). The NBA has also approached Ministry of Corporate Affairs for inclusion of biodiversity conservation as part its CSR activities. Hence, of late there has been an enhanced sensitivity and innovative actions for conservation of

biodiversity. The NBA is also engaging with Institutions such as National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) to deliberate on mainstreaming biodiversity concerns in the Agriculture sector.

The NBA continues to engage with various stakeholders across the spectrum to take forward the conservation of biodiversity. These engagements percolate to the States as well. States and stakeholders have their own constraints and limitations in promoting biodiversity conservation. However, things are changing, perhaps slowly. There are some good initiatives and activities being done at the district and block/village levels which give me a positive traction. However, as I said NBA's engagement and resource mobilization needs to be further enhanced.

THE ACT PAVED WAY FOR FORMATION OF NBA AND STATE BIODIVERSITY BOARDS. WHAT ARE THE

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NBA SO FAR AND WHAT ARE FUTURE PLANS?

The answer to the first question is relevant here as well. Of late, there have been a slew of initiatives by the Government of India to strengthen the biodiversity governance in the country. To give one example, the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC), has decided to launch a National Biodiversity and Human Well-being Mission. Chairperson, National Biodiversity Authority is the Mission Leader for this important mission.

The Mission aims to bring biodiversity and conservation to the forefront of Indian science, policy, and society's attention.

HOW SATISFACTORILY ARE THE STATE BIODIVERSITY BOARDS (SBBs) WORKING? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE? WHICH STATE, AS PER YOU IS DOING WELL AND WHY?

The State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) are autonomous and statutory bodies viz a viz the implementation of the provisions of the BD Act and Rules are concerned. SBBs face similar challenges of financial and human resource constraints. Thanks to the case of Chandra Bal Singh vs Union of India & Ors (OA No 347/2016), before the National Green Tribunal Principal Bench, there has been a greater sensitivity at the States level for effective implementation of the provisions of the Act and Rules especially, the constitution of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and preparation of Peoples' Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). Presently 253767 BMCs representing 92 per cent and 132653 PBRs representing 48 per cent are in various stages of preparation. PBRs are dynamic documents and have to be continuously updated. States like Kerala, Goa and Telangana are performing well. This is largely due to the fact that a high level of biodiversity awareness prevails in these states and the state governments are more supportive. Others are also moving forward.

CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY IS A MULTI-SECTORAL ENDEAVOR AND INVOLVES MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AT VARIOUS TIERS OF GOVERNANCE. THE NBA HAS RECENTLY ASSESSED THAT, AT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL, THERE ARE 116 SCHEMES IMPLEMENTED BY 24 MINISTRIES AND 29 DEPARTMENTS THAT HAVE RELEVANCE TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. THIS MEANS THAT APART FROM MOEFCC, THE KEY MINISTRY MANDATED WITH BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, THERE ARE 23 OTHER MINISTRIES THAT HAVE STAKES IN THE CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY. SIMILAR SITUATION PREVAILS IN THE STATES AS WELL. HENCE, MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY ACROSS SECTORS BECOMES VERY RELEVANT

IN MOST OF THE URBAN AREAS (MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS), THERE IS SIMPLY NO AWARENESS NOR ANY CELL NOR OFFICERS FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION. ALSO, NO BUDGETS. HOW DO YOU SEE THIS?

I partially agree that there is little awareness for biodiversity conservation in the urban areas including Municipal Corporations. But the judicial pronouncements by the NGT in the case referred above were very clear that constitution of BMCs and preparation of PBRs have to be carried out at all levels of the local bodies and this includes municipal corporations as well.

This issue is also being addressed, in part through several such parallel initiatives of the Government of India such as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Smart City Mission, wherein greater integration of biodiversity components into urban planning is being done.

OTHER MINISTRIES SUCH AS AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, PANCHAYAT AND TRIBAL AFFAIRS ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO EXTEND SUPPORT TO MOEFCC IN THIS ARENA. WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE SYNERGIES AMONG THESE MINISTRIES?

There has been an ongoing effort of MoEFCC supported ably by NBA. As mentioned earlier, we are in dialogue with Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, Panchayat and Tribal Affairs to integrate concerns of biodiversity conservation in the various schemes and programmes being implemented these Ministries. Of late, a series of communications and stakeholder engagements have taken place leading to very positive outcomes.

Biodiversity mainstreaming in the development planning of all key ministries is a critical requirement for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for strengthening biodiversity conservation and this is being pursued actively by NBA.

BY NOW, ALL LOCAL SELF-

GOVERNMENT BODIES SHOULD HAVE HAD THE PBR READY. HOW MANY ARE IN EXISTENCE AND HOW MUCH SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE STANDARD ACHIEVED?

The preparation of the PBRs by the duly constituted BMC is one of the most important provisions of the BDA 2002. PBRs attempt to record people's knowledge and perceptions of the status, uses, history, on-going changes and forces driving these changes in the biological diversity resources in their own localities.

Presently, 132653 PBRs have been completed, or are in various stages of preparation. PBR preparation is a dynamic process involving multi-season data/information. The preparation and completion of PBRs is indeed a formidable challenge. Lack of financial as well as technical capacity

are two major constraints. Several options/alternatives are being tried. Quality of PBR is also an important issue. The Government of India has set up two Expert Committees to monitor the PBRs and the NBA has developed a PBR Quality Evaluation Framework. Such committees are also being set up at the State/UT level so that coverage of PBR quality evaluation is increased.

SAME IS THE CASE WITH BMCS. AS PER THE BDA, THE COMMITTEES SHOULD HAVE BEEN THERE ALL OVER. I AM TOLD ABOUT 2.50 LAKH COMMITTEES EXIST TODAY, MOST OF THEM ONLY ON PAPER. HOW WOULD YOU REFLECT ON THIS?

The first step towards operationalization of the BMC is to constitute them at every local body level and duly notify these BMCs. Hon'ble NGT passed

STATE BIODIVERSITY BOARDS (SBBS) HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN ALL 28 STATES. PROTECTION OF FORESTS AND WILDLIFE BEING IN THE CONCURRENT LIST, TWENTY-SIX (26) STATES, HAVE NOTIFIED THE STATE SPECIFIC RULES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE ACT. AT THE LOCAL BODY LEVEL, 2,53,767 BMCS HAVE BEEN SET UP IN ALL THE 28 STATES AND 3 UTS. 18 STATES AND 2 UTS HAVE NOTIFIED THE LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS. 18 BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE SITES HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED ACROSS 11 STATES. THE NBA HAS RECENTLY EMPOWERED ALL UTS TO ESTABLISH THE UTS BIODIVERSITY COUNCILS SIMILAR TO THE STATE BIODIVERSITY BOARDS AS PART OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS



Deer Park Delhi

multiple orders directing the MoE-FCC, the NBA and the SBBs to ensure compliance in the constitution of BMCs and preparation of PBRs within six months and directed the MoEFCC and the NBA to monitor the same. The orders also emphasised that in case of defaults, the states will be fined ₹10 lakhs per month each from February 1, 2020. I am pleased to say that the first stage compliance of Hon'ble NGT Order to constitute all BMCs has nearly been achieved with 253767 BMCs out of 275699 been constituted. Now is the next step of moving beyond constitution and operationalizing the BMCs in an effective manner, which is being done by the NBA now very rigorously.

LASTLY, HAVE THE AICHI TARGETS (LIKE THE SDGS) BEEN ACHIEVED?

THERE WERE 10-12 TARGETS DECIDED BY INDIA. WHAT WERE THEY AND WHAT IS THE STATUS AS OF TODAY?

Using the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its 20 Aichi Global Biodiversity Targets as a framework, India has developed 12 National Biodiversity Targets through extensive stakeholder consultations and public outreach, which now form an Addendum to the NBAP 2008 and NBAP Addendum 2014. Together they form the blueprint for biodiversity conservation in the country.

India's Sixth National Report the CBD provides an update of progress in achievement of 12 National Biodiversity Targets (NBT) developed under the Convention process in line with the 20 global Aichi biodiversity targets. Briefly, the Report highlights that while India has achieved two

NBTs, it is on track to achieve eight NBTs and in respect of the remaining two NBTs also, India is striving to meet the targets.

With well over 20 per cent of its total geographical area under biodiversity conservation, India has exceeded the terrestrial component of 17 per cent of Aichi target 11, and 20 per cent of corresponding NBT relating to areas under biodiversity management. Similarly, India has also made noteworthy achievement towards NBT relating to access and benefit sharing (ABS) by operationalizing the Nagoya Protocol on ABS. Having published the first internationally recognized certificate of compliance (IRCC) under the Protocol in 2015, India has since published nearly 67 per cent of the IRCCs published so far on ABS Clearing House. ■

Mayors underlines issues, solutions of pandemic response

Cities have suffered the most because of this coronavirus pandemic as the virus spreads rapidly in dense areas and our cities are dense. The health infrastructure in the metropolitan cities came under pressure when the pandemic came, and everyday new record highs got reported. The role of mayors in dealing with crisis of such a magnitude is crucial, they being the first representatives of their cities. Understanding how the 73rd and 74th amendment empowered the mayors and elected representatives and the loopholes in the system that can be revised or can be recommended to the government, All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG), in association with National Institute of Urban Affairs, organised the second instalment of "Mayors' Dialogues".

'Leadership and Pandemic Response' saw participation from Samyukta Bhatia, Mayor Lucknow; Govind Singh Tank, Mayor Udaipur, and Amarjot Singh Bedi, President, Una Municipal Committee and Pashim Tiwari, Technical Director, AIILSG. and Abhishek Pandey, Editor, Urban Update, moderated the dialogue.

"No doubt cities have been the worst affected from the virus. This is why the role of mayors and elected representatives is very important in dealing with the crisis," Abhishek Pandey said in his opening remarks. Talking about the role of elected representatives in making a city pandemic resilient, Pandey highlighted the administrative control and authority the mayors and public representative have and how its scope can be widened under the 73rd and 74th amendment of the Constitution. He further noted that there is need for a new governance model in the post pandemic world where the government and the urban local bodies work together in a coordinated manner.

He then asked Pashim Tiwari to throw light on issues cities are facing because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Tiwari noted that COVID-19 is just a symptom of larger issues existing in the urban scenario of India. India has always been a reluctant urbanizer and we have always looked at the rural side of India as strength and socio-cultural as well as socio-economic region which needs to be taken care of. Urban centers were mostly neglected post-independence. But the COVID-19 crisis has put light on the challenges urban centers face and as Abhishek clearly mentioned, 28 years ago the 74th amendment was in a way a step to empower the cities so that they actually can become the engines of growth which we want them to be. Cities being the largest provider of economic activities for most of the country and the GDP, need to be empowered in a way that they can control their own fate, Tiwari said. One of the powerful amendments was the 74th amendment, which actually did not get implemented in letter and spirit. COVID-19 is one of such crises, which has given us an opportunity to revise these amendments along with the support of the local government. The mayors and public representatives who have the major role, are playing it very well and because of whom it can be said that this entire system is in place and capable of working together. After the welcome remarks delivered by Pandey and Tiwari, the mayors individually presented their experiences, grievances, and insights during the pandemic, which showed their leadership and pandemic response. Here are the major takeaways from their addresses:

SAMYUKTA BHATIA MAYOR, LUCKNOW

From the very day COVID-19 was reported in the country, we started preparing action plans with vice chancellors of various educational institutes to tackle the situation. Beds for corona patients in the hospitals were prepared before hand and no shortage of beds or need for extra beds was reported. Under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh, the situation was managed

in a better and effective manner in comparison to other cities. The morale of sanitation workers was also boosted during these times by the municipality and they were motivated to work twice a day. I also made an appeal to the people to honor these workers who are working tirelessly during these times and their confidence was lifted when the people, well known individuals and elected representatives started paying them respect. A community kitchen was started in Lucknow by the municipality which became an example for the entire state and other cities also started following the idea. Every section of society supported the initiative and a total of 80,000 food packets were distributed to the people in the city. The maximum amount as well the grains for these food packets was given by the people and as a result of which the municipality had to spend a smaller amount. With people's support, municipality worked to better the crisis but they are not empowered enough under the 73rd and 74th amendment. The mayors and public representatives lack authority and administrative control; we hardly have any rights except for collection of house tax. Because of these pandemic times, there were not enough funds to pay the salaries of 8000 employees, their salaries were paid from the fund provided by the central government for development. I would like to suggest that more powers and rights should be given to the Municipal Committees as we face many challenges in terms of funds and facilities.

AMARJOT SINGH BEDI, PRESIDENT, UNA MUNICIPAL COMMITTEE

The municipal committees are facing problems not only during this pandemic, but these problems have been existing since a long time. The powers of urban local bodies (ULBs) and panchayats have usually been diluted and there has never been an intention to strengthen the ULBs. In Himachal Pradesh (HP), the crisis was easier to manage as the state is

secluded in the sense that there are not many routes to enter the state and the population here is controlled. From the very first day when corona was reported the entry into the state was prohibited. And today as well if I want to travel from Una to Chandigarh, an official pass is required, the entry of the pass is to be done and the reentry of the pass as well on return to Himachal Pradesh is to be done. The information about the travel has to be provided to the Nodal Officers who then keep complete check on our movement. All these measures are probably the reason for control of COVID-19 spread and zero deaths in Una. The everyday duties of municipal committees like ration distribution, collection of waste, sanitation work and other municipal activities were somewhat a challenge during these pandemic times but because of the confidence that the COVID-19 spread was controlled in Una or fewer cases were reported in HP, the work could be done with a little more courage. But again, I will come to the point that the mayors and municipal committees face many problems because of being less empowered. An example of such situation is the incident that happened two years ago in Oct 2018, I signed an agreement with a company, AG Dauters Waste Processing Private Limited, the first company in the world to come to India that promised a lot about garbage management. They were to segregate the waste and come with their own trucks to collect garbage and convert it into electricity and sell it to our area at half the cost. All this was done to follow

the Indore model and 28 panchayats and 4 ULBs were involved. But today it's been two years, the land hasn't been allotted for the purpose and funds to buy the cars for door-to-door segregation are available but the file is still stuck with the Urban Development Department questioning us why cars are required and why segregation needs to be done. As a Mayor or elected representative, we don't have cheque signing powers, that is as well given to the Executive Officers, if any payment is made, we will not have any clue. I would like to suggest that the mayors' or elected representatives' knowledge about their cities should be utilized and work between the State government and ULBs should be done in a coordinated manner. If I have to do the sewage work and someone else is responsible for providing water, it should be done together so that the money and efforts are saved, and less inconvenience is caused to the public. Before the implementation of any nationwide program it should be discussed with some mayors of different cities and there should be a way to directly distribute the funds to the ULBs. There is no ULB that is self-reliant or self-sustained; we have always been dependent on grant-in-aid, it should be given as a right as we are the ones who are questioned by the people.

GOVIND SINGH TANK MAYOR, UDAIPUR

The city of Udaipur has a population of 5 Lakhs, and as it covers mostly the tourist belt, people here had the fear succumbing

to the coronavirus pandemic. In the hospitals, special corona wards were set up, but the problem came up when the sanitation workers backed out. So, we decided to make them understand the ongoing situation and as directed by the District Administration, supplemented the cleanliness system. The entire system was 50 per cent supplemented which built the confidence in sanitation workers to work for the society. The sanitization was done of all the 70 wards in Udaipur as well as the areas where corona positive cases were reported, and curfew was imposed. As Udaipur is semi-hilly area with narrow streets, the sanitization cars could not go to some places so there through manual pumps sanitization was done. We made sure that water was not collected anywhere, drainage systems were well maintained, all the sanitation workers are honored, and food packets are distributed to all the 2000 sanitation workers as an incentive. The funds for the food packets were provided by the MLAs from their MLA led fund, maximum food packets were prepared by the Bhamashah of Udaipur while the distribution part was done by Municipal Committee officers. In the trains that were run during this pandemic to send people back to their native states, food, water bottles and other facilities were provided to them which as a result created a positive image of the Municipal committee among people. The State government and District administration are well coordinated with the municipal committees and the mayors in Rajasthan are given enough powers by the state government but the provision for funds from Central or State government during emergencies should be there so that municipal committees can work effectively. Apart from the taxes collected till date, I would suggest that the taxes from network providers like Jio, BSNL, who lay their lines by digging up roads, should also be collected.

Pandey concluded the session by lauding the efforts of mayors and municipal committees and said that by financially improving the situation of mayors and ULBs with some policy level changes, they can be empowered. ■

Organisers
 Urban Update
 www.urbanupdate.in

Webinar
LEADERSHIP & PANDEMIC RESPONSE
 Saturday, July 11, 2020
 11:00 hrs to 12:30 hrs (Indian Standard Time)

Speakers

- Govind Singh Tank
Mayor, Udaipur
- Sanyukta Bhatia
Mayor, Ludhiana
- Amarjot Singh
President, Una Municipal Corporation

Moderator

- Poojesh Vaidya
Director, TADA
- Abhishek Pandey
Editor, UrbanUpdate.in

For any other welcome to attend the webinar
 For registration please visit
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 QR code

For any technical query for attending the webinar, please write to us at:
contact@urbanupdate.in or
 call: Ashish Paul + 91 9811511338

Panel 1 Chairman
 President, ARJIS

Panel 2 Chairman
 Director General, ARJIS

Panel 3 Chairman
 IAS, ARJIS

Doctors, journalists, academicians discuss Corona crisis & way forward in webinar series

Through the month of June, Urban Update organized a total of four webinars as part of its 'E-Dialogues' series. Different topics, covering varied angles related to the COVID-19 pandemic, were covered through these webinars with the aim of making the public understand the real problems that the world faces during these tough times

The fourth webinar in the Series was titled 'Virus, Vaccine and Economy'. Covering three of the most relevant points – virus, vaccine and economy, the webinar was aimed at presenting a comprehensible view of the three completely different yet interdependent notions. For this, Urban Update invited Prof Sudipta Sarangi, Head of Department (Economics), Virginia Tech University; Prof Deepankar Basu, Department of Economics, University of Massachusetts; Dr Mathew Varghese, Orthopedist, St Stephen's Hospital, Delhi; Dr Soutmira Pathare, Director, Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, Indian Law Society; Rajesh Kumar Jha, Prasar Bharati Special Correspondent, Dhaka and Ashutosh Pandey, Editor and Financial

Correspondent, DW Network, Germany. The session was moderated by Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update.

Dhananjay introduced the theme of the webinar and spoke about how coronavirus has affected economies of the world. He went on to talk about how billions of dollars are being pumped into the economies to revive them and to get them ready to produce the required amounts of vaccines, whenever a vaccine is successfully developed. "Billions of dollars are being spent in research for the development of the vaccine but the question remains – when will the vaccine be ready and how effective will it be?" said Dhananjay.

Taking the discussion forward, Prof Soumitra Sarangi began by saying that though the vaccine trials have begun and the results are promising, the virus is here to stay. The real state of affairs around the world will be visible only after lockdown eases, when people are allowed to move out of their houses and resume economic activities, with certain modifications. "Citizen

responsibility plays a vital role in keeping the virus at bay post-lockdown," Prof Sarangi said. He went on to say that authorities must keep in mind that the effect of prolonged lockdowns will be uneven across different sections of the society, being more pronounced for women and the girl child.

Prof Deepankar Basu was invited next to share his views on the topic. He began by saying that governments around the world need to understand that the global health pandemic cannot be stopped without controlling the economic crisis that has accompanied it. "This is even more important for poor, under-developed and developing countries, where the government does not allocate adequate funds for development of healthcare facilities." He also pointed out that a straightforward solution to this would be the successful development of a coronavirus vaccine, the chances of which rise daily as more and more vaccine candidates move towards successive levels of vaccine trials. He also pointed out that micro, small and medium industries are the worst-hit

in various countries due to the crisis and making credit available to these industries will play a vital role in the eventual revival of the global economy.

Dr Mathew Varghese noted that India has always been on a back-foot in terms of investment in healthcare. “High-income countries are not successful in stopping pandemics because of the availability of a vaccine but because of long-term investments in healthcare, sanitation and proper sewage treatment facilities,” said Dr Varghese. Going on to laud the decision of the government in implementing an early lockdown, Dr Varghese said that the lockdown was aimed towards buying time for the government to prepare itself for handling the pandemic and not to flatten an already ‘flat coronavirus graph’. Simply stopping international flights from virus-hit countries before the lockdown took place could have greatly helped in stopping the virus spread in India and in avoiding prolonged lockdowns.

Lastly, though the lockdown was appropriately timed, other precautionary and preparatory measures must have been planned and implemented much earlier than they were actually implemented. The only way we can survive this pandemic is by observing safety measures, hoping

for the development of herd immunity and not solely depending on the development of a vaccine.

Dr Soumitra Pathare talked about mental and psychological issues that people are facing due to the pandemic-induced lockdown and said that the most vulnerable to these issues are those who have pre-existing mental health problems. Supply-chain disruption of medicines and being forced to stay confined to a space without any personal time, along with the stress of uncertainty of their employment together are responsible for their vulnerability. Second in line are those people who barely managed to keep their ‘heads above water’ pre-COVID and due to the lockdown, are now falling sick. For the majority of the remaining people, they have enough internal resources to be able to handle the stress of lockdown easily. “What governments must note is that in the post-pandemic period, a high suicide rate, a greater number of alcohol related problems and higher number of cases of depression are always experienced. The government must ensure that people are confident of the protection of their livelihood and their lifestyle if they wish to avoid a mental health crisis post the COVID pandemic,” said Dr Pathare.

Rajesh Kumar Jha, being a Prasara Bharti Special Correspondent from Bangladesh, explained how the Government of Bangladesh has achieved considerable success in keeping the virus contained, despite the country being an agrarian based developing economy. “The government has, from the beginning, tried to avoid use of the word ‘lockdown’ and has instead opted the term ‘general holiday’. This coupled with the decision of the government to allow its citizens to move out of the densely populated cities before the initiation of the general holiday, helped greatly in avoiding panic and in controlling the virus spread,” said Jha. Moreover, Bangladesh opted for a ‘soft lockdown’ as it realized the importance of the continuation of economic activities to help counter the pandemic. Thus, since the start, industries were allowed to function provided they followed appropriate social behaviour. This helped in slowing the virus spread, stopping the situation from getting out of hand and avoided non-COVID deaths in the country.

Ashutosh Pandey started by explaining how the European Union (EU), despite being a tightly knit alliance of nations, did not play an active role in the beginning. When the pandemic reached the EU, countries began haphazardly erecting borders, restricting supplies and resources and taking one sided measures to contain the virus-spread. It was only later that the European Commission realised that close cooperation among the European nations is the only way to stop the pandemic. Like all other countries, industries in EU countries also faced huge obstacles in functioning and led to a moderate economic crisis. Since countries like Germany had considerable economic room to implement measures, response to the pandemic was uneven across EU countries. France and Germany, the two biggest economies in EU, finally came together to implement an inclusive policy against COVID-19 and have so far managed to mobilise coordinated responses to the virus spread.

‘THE LOCKDOWN WAS AIMED TOWARDS BUYING TIME FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO PREPARE ITSELF FOR HANDLING THE PANDEMIC AND NOT TO FLATTEN AN ALREADY ‘FLAT CORONAVIRUS GRAPH’. SIMPLY STOPPING INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS FROM VIRUS-HIT COUNTRIES BEFORE THE LOCKDOWN TOOK PLACE COULD HAVE GREATLY HELPED IN STOPPING THE VIRUS SPREAD IN INDIA AND IN AVOIDING PROLONGED LOCKDOWNS. LASTLY, THOUGH THE LOCKDOWN WAS APPROPRIATELY TIMED, OTHER PRECAUTIONARY AND PREPARATORY MEASURES MUST HAVE BEEN PLANNED AND IMPLEMENTED MUCH EARLIER THAN THEY WERE ACTUALLY IMPLEMENTED.’

DR MATHEW VARGHESE, PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERT



and act on the virus spread,” said Sirohi. It was only after projections of the morbidity and mortality rates due to the virus started pouring in that President Trump decided to stop all flights to and from Wuhan and impose a nationwide lockdown. However, due to the upcoming elections, the economy of the country was hurriedly reopened and the lockdown was lifted. This led to a second resurgence in the US with more than 26 states showing uncontrolled spikes in daily COVID cases.

Vijay Singh, who was invited to speak next, put forth a more positive picture for the audience and talked about how a strong civic sense in the public and awareness about the spread of coronavirus around the world helped the situation from deteriorating further in France. As soon as the virus reached Europe, most of the people with means in the cities moved towards the countryside to avoid contact with the virus. Moreover, the people came together almost instantly to help in producing masks and protective equipment for those affected by the virus or the healthcare and sanitation workers. “All in all, an alert public and a rapid response to the virus helped things from getting out of hand in France,” said Singh.

Loveena Tandon talked about how, although the United Kingdom was able to control the first wave of the

E-DIALOGUES 5.0

The fifth edition of the E-Dialogues series was based on the topic ‘Virus, Spread and Response – As seen from Indian Eyes in Global Metropolises’. Through the Webinar, Urban Update aimed to bring forward stories of front line reporters, people who worked on ground zero throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and worked tirelessly to bring the true picture to the people. As part of the Webinar, Urban Update invited Suvam Pal, Journalist, Beijing; Seema Sirohi, Senior Journalist, Washington DC; Vijay Singh, Journalist and Film maker; Loveena Tandon, Journalist, London; Anwar Ashraf, Journalist, Bonn; Shaneer Siddiqui, Journalist, Dubai and Vidya, Journalist, Mumbai. The session was moderated by Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update.

Dhananjay introduced the topic and said, “Since the past six months, the world has been grappled with the COVID pandemic. Like front line healthcare workers, frontline reporters have put their lives on the line, working in extremely difficult situation to get us the stories of success, triumph, sorrow – the reality.

The first to speak was Suvam Pal who began by talking about how rumours were spreading around China in December 2019 about a new virus spreading violently. However, with the help of news channels and media outlets, the government was able to subside the rumours and avoided panic amongst the people. Till late January, almost

2 months after China reported its first case of coronavirus, the government had not imposed lockdown, banned mass public gatherings or issued SOPs and instructions for people to follow while moving out of their houses. It was only after the USA reported its first case that China considered locking down its cities on January 23. Pal concluded by saying that China’s response to control the COVID-19 pandemic, although eventually successful, was delayed.

The next speaker, Seema Sirohi, pointed out that similar to the case of China, the US too displayed delayed response to the pandemic due to an ignorant state leadership. “Although, officials in the White House knew that the pandemic was deadly and spreading rapidly, President Donald Trump refused to believe their advice

‘AS SOON AS THE VIRUS REACHED EUROPE, MOST OF THE PEOPLE WITH MEANS IN THE CITIES MOVED TOWARDS THE COUNTRYSIDE TO AVOID CONTACT WITH THE VIRUS. MOREOVER, THE PEOPLE CAME TOGETHER ALMOST INSTANTLY TO HELP IN PRODUCING MASKS AND PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THE VIRUS OR THE HEALTHCARE AND SANITATION WORKERS. ALL IN ALL, AN ALERT PUBLIC AND A RAPID RESPONSE TO THE VIRUS HELPED THINGS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND IN FRANCE.’

VIJAY SINGH, FILMMAKER BASED IN FRANCE

novel coronavirus, the attitude of the authorities and consequently of its citizens is still casual towards the possibility of a second wave hitting the country. Loveena said that according to an open letter written by experts, the second wave could hit the country as early as December this year. However, questions are still being raised if the UK is adequately equipped to handle the second wave of coronavirus.

Talking about the benefits of a strong and informed leadership, Anwar Ashraf pointed out that Chancellor Angela Merkel, being a scientist, handled the first response against COVID-19 flawlessly. Ashraf said that although it seemed unbelievable but the government was able to arrange for spare hospital and ICU beds, face masks and personal protective equipment in a span of just 10 days. Moreover, regular press conferences by Chancellor Merkel helped the people in remaining calm amid the pandemic. Lastly, long term investments in the public health infrastructure of the country also played a dominant role. “Due to these reasons, Germany has been quite successful in arresting the virus spread, showing lesser than usual infection and mortality rates,” said Ashraf.

Shaneer Siddiqui explained how the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was successful in exceptionally controlling the coronavirus graph. “One of the biggest contributors to this was the government’s readiness in relaying precise and relevant information timely to the people. Being aware of the situation, the people barely panicked. Moreover, drive in COVID testing facilities and quarantine centres in five star hotels, vacant but complete infrastructure projects and community kitchens helped people to continue living their lives in lockdown, without fear of losing their life or their livelihood,” said Shaneer. Due to this, UAE is already on its way to reopen its economy completely and let its people resume their lives. Shaneer concluded by saying that this has been a milestone for the UAE government.

Being a hotspot of COVID-19 cases in India, Maharashtra, particularly

the city of Mumbai, showed a rather delayed response to the pandemic. However, according to Vidya, the authorities were still able to bring the situation under control. One of the reasons for this, said Vidya, was that residents of Asia’s largest slum – Dharavi, moved out of the area in time due to loss of livelihood and fear of the virus. This helped largely in controlling the virus spread in a place where an uncontrolled spread could have spelled disaster for India. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is now working on ‘Mission Zero’ with the aim of bringing down the infection rate in the city to zero.

Additionally, the state government has finally realised the importance of extensive testing and begun working towards that. “All in all, the virus spread is still rising in Mumbai but the government has displayed readiness in doing whatever it can in stopping the virus,” said Vidya.

Dhananjay concluded the session by stating that journalists are responsible for collecting and analysing data and presenting a clear, true picture in front of the public. They carry out this responsibility selflessly and efficiently.

girl child. The panel for this edition consisted of Sanjay Singh, Senior Journalist and Child Rights Activist; Prof Angela Taneja, Lead and Specialist (Education and Inequality), Oxfam India; Prof Ravi Kumar, Department of Sociology, South Asian University; Prof R Govinda, Former Vice-Chancellor, National University of Education Planning; Prof (Dr) Mukesh Kanaskar, Director, AILSG International Centre of Equi-T; Vagish K Jha, Academic Lead, Schoolnet India and Sourav Banerjee, Country Director, Room to Read. The session was moderated by Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update.

“Crisis breeds discrimination,” said Sanjay Singh, and continued talking about how the girl child is at the bottom of the discrimination ladder, how they are the last to be thought of. Singh said that this situation worsens in times of a pandemic. He cited the findings of a study titled ‘Young Lives Study’ by the Oxford University while saying that around 80 per cent of the girls in the state of Telangana do not have access to internet services or have even seen a computer ever. In such a situation, the sudden shift towards online methods

The image is a promotional poster for a webinar. At the top left, it features the logos of 'Urban Update' and 'E-Dialogues'. The main title is 'Webinar-6 Migration and Education WHERE IS THE SOLUTION?' followed by the date and time: 'July 2, 2020, Thursday | 6:00 PM (Indian Standard Time)'. Below the title, there is a row of speaker portraits with their names and titles: Prof. Ravi Kumar (Department of Sociology, South Asian University), Prof. Angela Taneja (Lead and Specialist, Oxfam India), Prof. R Govinda (Former Vice-Chancellor, National University of Education Planning), Prof. (Dr) Mukesh Kanaskar (Director, AILSG International Centre of Equi-T), and Prof. Vagish K Jha (Academic Lead, Schoolnet India). A moderator, Mr. Rajesh Agarwal (IAS (Retd.), Director General, AILSG), is also listed. On the right side, there is a photograph of a young girl in a school uniform pointing at a chalkboard. At the bottom, there is a QR code and a registration link: 'All are most welcome to attend the webinar. For registration, please visit: <https://bit.ly/2YFV0H4> or scan QR code'. There is also a note about the webinar being recorded and available on the Urban Update website.

E-DIALOGUES 6.0

The next edition of the ‘E-Dialogues’ series was titled ‘Migration and Education – Where is the solution?’ and focused on how pandemic-induced migration is affecting children’s education and life, particularly the

of teaching could breed disaster for the education services in most countries. However, governments are now moving towards widening the internet reach in their countries, aiming to make technology available to the remotest villages. “If done efficiently, this will

eventually help children, particularly girl child, in continuing with their education despite the adverse effects of the pandemic,' said Singh.

Prof Angela Taneja began by saying that the government's reliance on information technology is bizarre, especially at a time like this. Citing government data, Prof Taneja said that less than 15 per cent rural households in India have access to both a computer and an internet connection. Thus, shifting instantly to online modes of education is far-fetched and unrealistic and will take a considerable amount of time before being completed. "In terms of migrants during a pandemic, the problem of education has more to do with an economic divide, a class divide and a cultural divide, than with the girl child in particular. Thus, the government must focus on investing sensibly in the education sector if it aims to take education services online.

Prof Ravi Kumar spoke about how policy makers and experts are looking at the pandemic-hit education sector in a 'dehistoricised manner' and are not considering the effects of poor development and inadequate investments on the education sector in the past. Coupled with this, the migration to rural areas induced by the pandemic and the following reverse migration due to absence of job opportunities in rural areas is having profound effects on the children's education. "They have no access to technology and with the shutting down of all educational institutions in the country, their hopes of being able to educate themselves are quickly fading away," said Prof Kumar. Thus, whether a child will be able to get access to education in the near future not only depends on their geographical position but also on the economic position of its family.

'COVID-19 has disrupted an education infrastructure that was already in a bad-shape,' said Prof R Govinda. However, during the pandemic, the effect of a poor education infrastructure is all-pervasive and has not only affected the poor but children from all sections of the society. Prof Govinda said that

although the government is planning a shift towards online education, it is not an effective method of education. He then went on to talk about how the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the widespread poverty in India, despite claims of India being an influentially big economy in the world. It is because of this uneven, widespread poverty that online education is least likely to be successful and the government must think of local and not a common solution to the problems of education.

Prof Mukesh Kanaskar said that although the problem of education due to the pandemic-induced migration is quite recent, the problem has existed for the tribal and backward societies of India since centuries. Considering that India has an extremely large tribal population, close to 107 million, the task at hand is big and needs long term planning, investment and efforts by the government. Here, what must be noted is that there is not 'one solution for all' aspect but 'every problem has a different solution' aspect attached to it.

Vagish K Jha began speaking by talking about how children of migrant workers are always given second preference in the schooling system, whether in terms of government policies or in terms of activities carried out by schools. This is mainly due to their 'migrant' nature of stay where they keep moving between cities and villages to work throughout the year. "Thus, they were at a disadvantage anyway, irrespective of the pandemic," he said. Jha went on to say that this time must be seen as an opportunity for the government to carry out educational reforms where students are made to think creatively and out-of-the-box, to explore the world in their own way. Lastly, the aspect of online classrooms has also affected the teachers, who may have never been trained on how to work with online platforms for teaching.

According to Sourav Banerjee, the problem of migration brings with it the problem of language for the children. When their families migrate, either back to their village or to another city, the children are forced to learn in a different language than what they have

been taught in till now. This is more pronounced for children from families that practice seasonal migration. Here, COVID-19 has only added another layer of problems to children's education. Forced migration to rural areas for indefinite periods stop the schools from enrolling these children and makes it difficult for the children too to adjust to the sudden changes.

The session was concluded by Dhananjay who said that the one thing all panelists can agree upon is that India's education sector required massive amounts of work by the government, if the government plans to make education 'inclusive for all'.

E-DIALOGUES 7.0

The seventh edition of the 'E-Dialogues' series was based on the topic 'COVID Fighters - Enabling Safe Working Conditions for Sanitation Workers' and aimed to bring forward the problems faced by sanitation workers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the government can ensure safe working conditions for them. The panel for this edition consisted of Depinder Kapoor, Team Lead, Sanitation Capacity Building Platform, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA); Sanjay Kumar, Senior Sanitation Expert; Dr Amiya Kumar Sahu, President, National Solid Waste Association of India (NSWAI); Uttam Banerjee, Co-Founder and CEO, Ekam

Eco Solutions and Nitu Joseph, Senior Assistant Manager (Operations), Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group. The session was moderated by Kumar Dhananjay, Consulting Editor, Urban Update.

Dhananjay invited Depinder Kapur as the first speaker who talked about the problems faced by sanitation workers and what NIUA has done to solve these problems. “Majority of issues faced by sanitation workers have amplified during the pandemic, when they are forced to work without protective equipment or proper training to stay safe from COVID-19,” said Kapur. But, before the government can plan policies for their help and safety, they need to know how many sanitation workers



are currently employed throughout the country. This data is still missing in India. Sanjay Kumar reiterated this shortcoming and said that absence of comprehensive data on sanitation workers plays a huge role in the plight they face since decades. Being mostly a part of the unorganized sector, it is unlikely that data on their employment will be compiled in the near future. Thus, absence of data translates into absence of welfare schemes and policies to uplift them.

Moreover, even if these workers manage to reach out for help, there is no dedicated organisation for their help, for addressing their issues and to reach out to them even in

‘LESS THAN 15 PER CENT RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN INDIA HAVE ACCESS TO BOTH A COMPUTER AND AN INTERNET CONNECTION. THUS, SHIFTING INSTANTLY TO ONLINE MODES OF EDUCATION IS FAR-FETCHED AND UNREALISTIC AND WILL TAKE A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF TIME BEFORE BEING COMPLETED. IN TERMS OF MIGRANTS DURING A PANDEMIC, THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATION HAS MORE TO DO WITH AN ECONOMIC DIVIDE, A CLASS DIVIDE AND A CULTURAL DIVIDE, THAN WITH THE GIRL CHILD IN PARTICULAR. THUS, THE GOVERNMENT MUST FOCUS ON INVESTING SENSIBLY IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IF IT AIMS TO TAKE EDUCATION SERVICES ONLINE.’

PROF ANGELA TANEJA, LEAD AND SPECIALIST (EDUCATION AND INEQUALITY), OXFAM INDIA

normal circumstances, let alone during a pandemic.

Dr Amiya Sahu explained how, after visiting various countries, he realised that India was a country where sewage management was given least priority since a long time. Thus, he planned on starting NSWAI to work towards bettering this aspect of public life in India. Though there were organisations functioning parallel to NSWAI who worked towards the same aim, but the actual on ground work done by them was not adequate. Moreover, the reality was that a considerable proportion of these sanitation workers hired on a daily basis almost never worked seriously due to lack of training and sufficient wages. Thus, the condition of sanitation sector in India is grim and is not likely to get better anytime soon.

Nitu Joseph, citing a study conducted by Chintan, pointed out that around 71 per cent of the people who work behind the curtains in the sanitation sector are women. Although waste collectors got PPE kits from the government during the pandemic, same was not the case with these women working to segregate waste. Working with plastic throughout the day, unbeknownst to the fact that coronavirus particles are active on

plastic surfaces for long durations of time, they remained vulnerable to the disease. Being engaged in other domestic activities, these women automatically pose as threats to the rest of their families, putting them at risk of being infected with COVID-19 as well.

Uttam Banerjee took the discussion forward by talking about another problem the sanitation workers face in India – the problem of lack of awareness about waste segregation at the source. In India, till the onset of the pandemic, household waste was only categorised into ‘wet’ or ‘dry’ waste. However, the pandemic made the government realise that household waste can be a bio hazard too. This has helped in giving impetus to awareness amongst the people regarding waste segregation and proper disposal and will go a long way in improving the state of sanitation in the country.

Dhananjay concluded the session by stating that the state of India’s sanitation workers cannot be improved in a matter of days or months. Constant support, serious efforts and large-scale investments by the government, authorities and other organisations are required in order to ensure betterment and safety of the sanitation workers. ■

Women in cities during pandemic



ASHOK WANKHADE
Managing Editor

Women wear many hats from office CEOs, to mothers and home makers. Life during the lockdown has been harsher to them than men. The exercise of unlock down has begun but the new normal in cities really needs to be different for them from now on

There has been spike in domestic violence cases being reported to women helpline numbers and civil society organizations working with women during the long lockdown. This was just the one facet of serious problem of gender based issues; there are many more and these need due attention.

If we look at our cities and their planning, we will find that women are generally ignored. A noted a Dutch-American sociologist Saskia Sassen highlighted this in one of her articles in Harvard Design Magazine, a few years ago, saying, “Urban planning is not gender neutral. While there has long been research on how urban systems fail to respond to women’s needs, it was only a decade ago that the subject surged. Since then, countless cities have been host to initiatives addressing a version of the “urban planning gender gap.” Though “gendering” still refers overwhelmingly to a female-male divide, today it is taking on an expanded range of meaning within the household and the city.

If we think about the pandemic, urban services and gender issues, then women could become victims. A working woman in a metropolitan city would not leave a toddler in a crèche fearing COVID infection and it would result in devoting more time for family. As women take on greater care demands at home, their jobs will also be disproportionately affected by cuts and lay-offs. The COVID situation has increased ‘Unpaid care work’ with children out-of-school, heightened care needs of older persons and overwhelmed health services. This is a visible reality. If you have gone out in any city during this pandemic, you must have witnessed that

there are less women on urban streets than usual. And, the women those are out on work are in majority health workers.

It is to be noted that a majority of our health care workers in cities and villages are nurses. They are vulnerable to infection because they are the ones who are in contact with patients and they are the ones who go from village to village distributing sanitary pads, food, and so on. So, it is really important to engage them in decision making process and in laying guidelines for locking down or un-locking.

United Nations General Secretary has feared that with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic even the limited gains made in the past decades (in the area of gender equality) are at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. Similarly, there are many state governments in India which have proposed certain changes in labour laws and it is going to affect the women workforce in multiple ways. Many suggestions have come from women organizations worldwide to avoid making life difficult for female workforce.

There is a need for urban planners and policy makers to relook at urban planning and governance too to make life easier for women. The first start could be redesigning our public transport systems. They should become safe, convenient, affordable and accessible. And, another important step could be engagement of women from different strata of society in decision making and this can start at local level for having a positive spiral impact in everyone’s life. ■

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