

The Dispatch

Towards a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society

FRIDAY | MAY 22 2020



TOTAL CASES: 1,18,447



ACTIVE CASES: 66,330



DEATHS: 3583

ISSUE 02

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

OUR BUREAU

The pandemic has us on the run. It has multiplied at a rate far higher than our best efforts to cope. The most disadvantaged and the poor have been hit the hardest. The uncertainties they face are higher than many of us can imagine. They don't have the option to "work from home" - truth is they have no work and many have had to give up their homes.

This kind of distress is exemplified by a few stories; whether it is exhausted migrants getting run over by a train while resting on a railway track near Aurangabad, a tale of a cyclist pedaling a 1000 km journey from Delhi to East Champaran, and being run over by a car as he rested on a divider, people losing their lives travelling atop a mango truck near Agra or indeed of the 12 year old girl who worked on a chili farm in Telangana and died within a short distance of home in Chattisgarh. Deprivation, hunger, hopelessness and death have hit us thick and fast.

"What have we done" pays tribute to the 12 year old girl who went to work on a chilli farm in Telangana and could not make it back home. Her journey lasted well over a hundred kilometres over 3 days and met a sad end. Her shadow hangs over this issue of The Dispatch and beyond.

This part of our reality should make us angry and sad. And build our collective will to knuckle down and contribute the best of what we have to battling this crisis. That girl is lost forever but can we find redemption in our actions?



A cross to bear

AN EDITOR AT LARGE

I picked up an elderly gentleman walking under a sweltering sun. He was 78, a Kashmiri Pandit, trying to find his way to an office to pay his overdue medical insurance premium.

It was the early days of the Covid lockdown in Bangalore, and that day I met many people navigating the city for things that could not wait - a man out buying medicine for his child, a woman carrying a gas stove for repair, a pregnant woman and her husband on their way to the doctor, a man on his way to his recently wedded daughter's home - visits that had turned ordeals.

In that and subsequent days, I saw for the first time, the large slum-like sprawls that had come up all around the city - blue tarpaulin and tin sheeted shacks housing those who build and clean our homes, man security gates, wait at tables, cut hair, stitch, carve, weld, tinker - the Bangalore boom hiding mind-boggling inequities only a stone's throw from its rich gated communities.

The near-empty outpatient lobbies in some of the city's busiest hospitals were empty, these moments of uneasy calm foreboding the pandemic that will soon unfurl and consume these spaces, much as it has elsewhere.

Difficult days are ahead. These times will show us that our privilege, our blessing, is but a curse, it is the cross that our brethren bear. When did our poor become lesser citizens than us? Why are the images and stories of the millions of men, women and children - the largest migration we have seen in our lifetimes - not wrenching us apart?

These are stories of those who have chosen to act, doing what they can - from volunteers in Bangalore working through the night to serve migrants leaving the city, to Government teachers in Pithoragarh asking those leaving town to stay back with the promise of care - people whose actions tell us that not responding in these times is not an option.

Wipro's Pune IT facility to become 450-bed COVID-19 hospital

OUR BUREAU

Wipro Limited, a leading global information technology, consulting and business process services company, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Maharashtra under which it will repurpose its information technology campus in Hinjewadi, Pune to a 450-bed intermediary care COVID-19 hospital in four weeks and hand it over to the state government by May 30. The hospital will be converted back to an IT facility after a year.

The 450-bed hospital, to be equipped to treat moderate cases, will also include 12 beds to stabilise critical patients before shifting them to a tertiary care facility. The facility also includes 24 well-appointed rooms to accommodate doctors and medical staff.

Wipro will provide the physical infrastructure, medical furniture and equipment besides appointing an administrator and skeletal support staff to help operationalise the hospital quickly with the required medical professionals.

Uddhav Thackeray, Chief Minister, Maharashtra said, "This humanitarian contribution by Wipro will further strengthen our medical infrastructure and benefit the medical fraternity who are at the forefront of our fight against the pandemic."

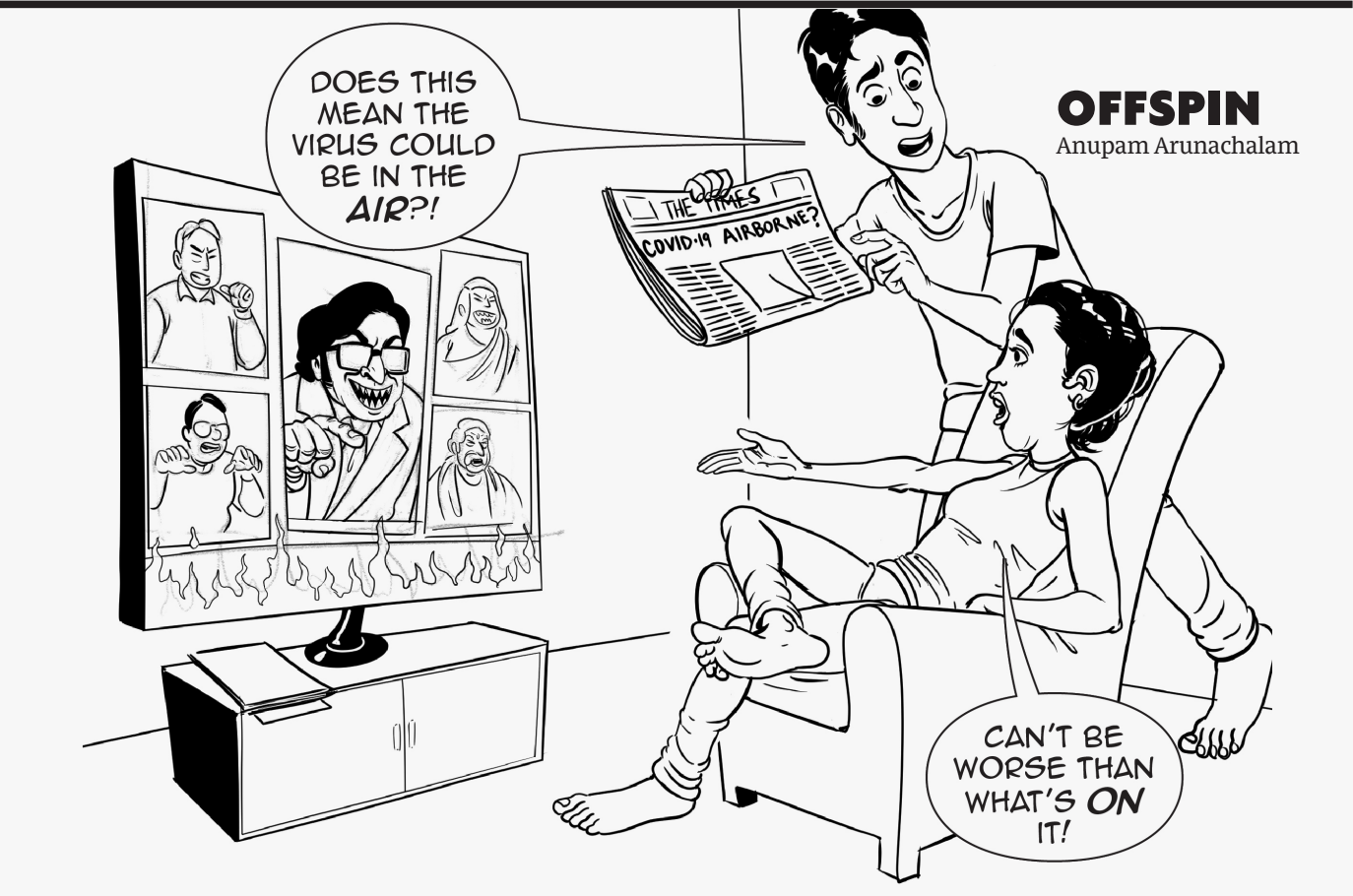
"We are completely committed to supporting the country's response to the pandemic and believe that we must all work together to deal with this crisis and minimise its human impact. We stand firmly with the Government of Maharashtra in its battle against COVID-19," said Rishad Premji, Chairman, Wipro Limited.

Early April, Wipro Ltd, Wipro Enterprises Ltd and Azim Premji Foundation, together committed Rs 1,125 crore towards tackling the unprecedented health and humanitarian crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. These resources will help enable the dedicated medical and service fraternity in the frontline of the battle against the pandemic and in mitigating its wide-ranging human impact, particularly on the most disadvantaged of our society.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Dispatch invites all members of the Field, Philanthropy and University to contribute to the publishing of future issues. We want to tell stories of our COVID-19 response - stories that can inform, educate, enlighten and inspire us. They could be written, photographed, illustrated or oral. You could also send us thoughts, synopsis, sketches, plots and ideas that we could jointly convert into something that we can print.

Make haste. Write to:
thedispatch@azimpremjifoundation.org




OFFSPIN
Anupam Arunachalam

68 lakh people directly reached with humanitarian aid

500 partners

24 crore meals

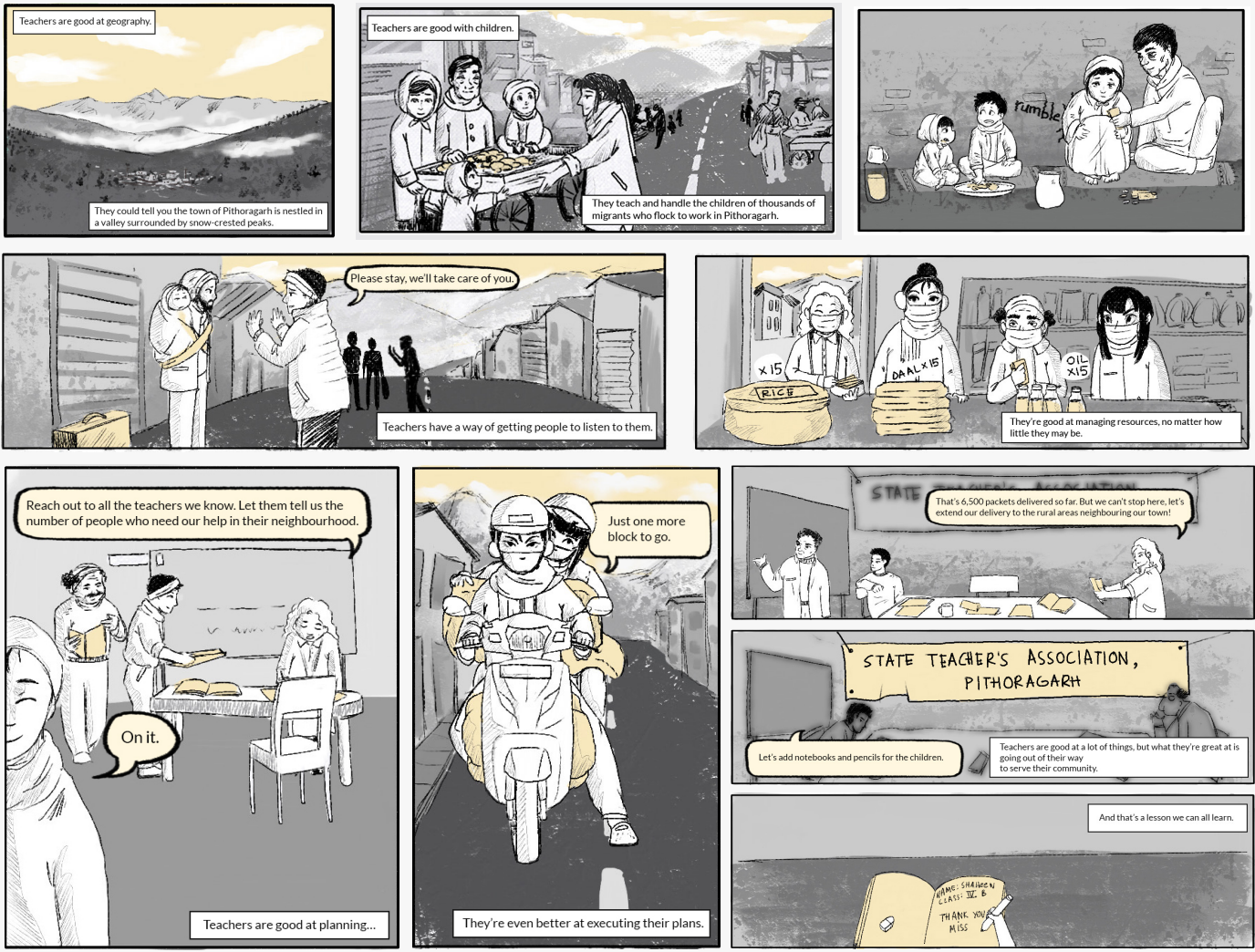
397 districts in 26 states and 3 union territories



This story is based on the work of the teachers of the Pithoragarh District Secondary Teachers Association in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand.

Vinod Upreti and Muneer C, Pithoragarh, Field

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Long Train Home

GIRIDHAR S, HYMA VADLAMANI

The ask was clear as the Government of Karnataka began arranging trains in coordination with the Railways to transport migrants back to their home states. Food, water and a hygiene kit for each of the travellers that would last them for the 24 to 40 hour journey. There were 6 trains scheduled, three from Malur (26 kms from Kolar) and three from Chikabanawara (10 km from Yeshwanthpur).

We had less than 24 hours. We got in touch with Ummer of Mercy Mission and Kaushik of Atria Foundation.

‘We will do it’ was their instant commitment. Thus began an impossible combination of sheer will, maniacal hard work and amazing logistics and management. Since cooked rice would not last a day, volunteers at Mercy Mission and Atria decided to make rotis.

Packages comprising food, water, soap, toothpaste and sanitary napkins were transported in tempos to Malur and Chikabanawara by volunteers. Vehicles were not allowed to the gates of the railway station. Undaunted, the volunteers lugged 7000 kits to the station. That night when the volunteers had served the last passenger on the last train it was past 11 pm. They had been on their feet for 40 hours.

This operation today, led by Ummer and Mercy Mission handles around 4 to 6 trains and around 5000 to 7000 people going home. This is made possible by multiple groups of volunteers at designated bays, some putting the rotis into a bag, some making and adding pickle, some creating pouches of dates for a boost of energy and the water bottles.

Each day, the team returns home at 1 am. The officer from the government who works shoulder-to-shoulder with them, Nishchith also goes home at a similar time. Like Ummer, Nishchith too has hardly seen his family since the pandemic struck. ‘How long will you sustain this punishing schedule?’ we asked Ummer and Nishchith. “Till as long as it is required” said both.

12 days, 50 trains, 64,000 people, 128,000 meals and a million rotis later, their fierce determination continues to deliver food and dignity to those taking the long train home.

Calicut commissions 100-bed COVID facility

CHINMAY MOHAPATRA

A new dedicated 100 bed COVID facility run by IQRAA hospital has just become operational in Kerala. Equipped with a screening kiosk, a 70-bed isolation ward, a 30 bed ICU facility, an isolation room and a diagnostic lab, the facility has just been fitted out and is ready to accept patients.

Kerala has been leading the way in the fight against the virus. All cases in the state are being treated by designated government hospitals. For now.

This could change very fast as flights from Manama, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Dubai, Riyadh and other Gulf Countries are expected to make a touchdown in Cochin and Calicut this week. Each flight will be carrying 150-180 passengers. Even though the testing protocol is strict at airports, the situation will need watching over.

The COVID dedicated facility is the result of a partnership between Daya Rehabilitation Trust and the IQRAA hospital. Daya Rehabilitation Trust is an organization supporting underprivileged families across thirteen districts of Kerala. IQRAA hospital in Calicut is a 350 bed super specialty hospital which offers a wide range of preventive, curative and rehabilitative services. They run special services for the marginalized and vulnerable as a part of their philanthropic efforts .

Were the number of COVID 19 cases to rise, the people of Calicut and Kerala can draw comfort in knowing that hospitals like IQRAA can make a positive difference by offering world class care. The honorable Chief Minister of Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan in a press conference, has recognized the Daya-IQRAA COVID hospital among the designated hospitals in Kerala with provision for free treatment of patients.

The COVID 19 dedicated facility has been made possible by support from the Azim Premji Foundation.

Livelihoods: The Mahua in Chhattisgarh

PURUSOTTAM THAKUR, NIVEDITA KRISHNA

“No, we don’t have any problem; our Mahua picking continues!”, says Chhabilal Markam a tribal woman from Bendrapani village, 30 kms outside Dhamtari district, Chhattisgarh.

But is all well with the Mahua trade in these COVID times?

This Mahua is that wonderful Mahua; the multi-purpose magical flower that serves as everything from astringent to alcohol to aphrodisiac. Growing wild in the forests, it carries strong utilitarian and economic value for adivasis.

Inspite of being advised not to venture outside during the lockdown, the villagers, not having too much of a choice, leave their houses early in the morning to collect Mahua. Each tribal collects the flower from 20-25 trees during the season, every single day. They must be collected before the bears get to them. “This is the season. If we don’t collect, then the flowers will be wasted. The rain has already damaged the flowers.” explains 60 year old Siyan Bai.

The government has provided them rice, dal, salt and



subsidised sugar that may last two months. So there is some food at home. “We are collecting the flower to keep it as savings for the future”, says Chhabilal.

The MSP (Minimum Support Price) of Mahua flower has been increased to Rs.30 from Rs.17. The dried flowers are bought by nearly 118 SHGs, identified specially to do this. This is a step in the right direction. “We used to sell Mahua in the market and buy items like salt, potato and onion. But the “Karuna” (Corona) has shut the village haats. There is no-one to purchase Mahua and prices of essentials have also gone up”, says Punaram Markam.

The Mahua tree is entwined with tribal life and is indispensable in rituals of birth, marriage and death. An icon of prosperity, it is believed that it is in the very nature of the tree to give plentifully to a population that accepts the bounty, humbly.

Will their livelihood survive the pandemic?

Jaan hai to jahan hai!

PURUSOTTAM THAKUR, NIVEDITA KRISHNA



Standing in Kumharpara, a potter’s colony with 120 families in Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh, on a very hot summer’s day one sees dozens of red clay pots. In an ideal world, the pots would be doing what pots do- cooling water in homes across the state.

20,000 potters in Chhattisgarh make clay pots, diyas and toys. This is their only income. Business has been bleak since Diwali because of fortnightly rains and the lockdown has stilled their business. The weekly haats are closed. Typically, most potters are landless too.

Admittedly, people may not die of hunger (the state government of Chhattisgarh has provided them rice (70kg) salt and Rs.500) but what of health, medical and other expenses? Summer is primetime both for earning and saving a little. Suraj Kumbhkar is a potter. His wife had her womb removed surgically. “It cost Rs.35000/- in a private hospital. I had to borrow money.” Suraj is in now in debt. He has two daughters and two sons. The children help with the pottery, the debt now will be shouldered by the family and will need to be paid off.

Bhubaneswari Kumbhkar has just returned with an empty bamboo basket. She rushes off with more pots on her head to sell in the nearby colonies. “I’ll have to return by 10 am as the lockdown will resume at 12pm”, she says.

A temporary market is organised at Dhamtari district head quarters from 7 am to 1 pm. Earlier, this used to be a vegetable market exclusively. But today there were a couple of potters with their wares and colourful clay figurines - a bride and groom? We enquire. “There is a festival called Akti (Akshya Tritiya) an auspicious day in the Hindu Calendar. Anything that is begun on that day will be met with success, it is believed. On Akti, the marriage ceremony of these toys, putra and putri, is a Chhattisgarhi tradition. I have 400 pairs of toys but have sold only 50. Let us see, there are two more days...” explains Purab Kumbhkar a young vendor of Kumharpara.

Suraj adds “Police used to come in the afternoon to stop our work. We have to listen to them. Because “Jaan hai to jahan hai na sir?.

For now, this community manoeuvres serious odds, are victims of inclement weather and the complete lockdown. They cope with their hard work. And hope.

Patchwork

FEEDBACK FOR THE LAST ISSUE

“Thanks for documenting the stories and sharing what goes on the field. I enjoyed the stories in the comic style. Good work. Great effort.”

“This is a great initiative, one that allows us to catch a glimpse of our efforts in the field to tackle these tough times. The idea of presenting Dr. Johnny’s humanitarian efforts through a picture story is very creative. I hope the work and lives of many such great people are presented in the coming issues.”

“The design is commendable. Particularly liked the background shades and font.”

“Fantastic initiative- The comic format was marvellous and so effective.”

“This is absolutely fantastic. To make this happen at a time like this and in such a lovely manner..... hats off to Team Dispatch.”