

**26 MIGRANTS DEAD, 17 IDENTIFIED:** **Arjun Chauhan, 22** (Kushinagar, UP); **Kedar Yadav, 25** (Gaya, Bihar); **Mukesh Vishwakarma, 30** (Bhadohi, UP); **Satendra, 21** (Gaya); **Govardhan Kalindi, 25** (Bokaro, Jharkhand); **Ganesh Rajwad, 25** (Purulia, West Bengal); **Chandan Rajwad, 24** (Purulia); **Uttam Goswami, 30** (Bokaro); **Doctor Mahato, 20** (Bokaro); **Kirti Kalindi, 35** (Bokaro); **Milan Badhokar, 28** (Purulia); **Kaanilal, 45** (Bokaro); **Rahul, 28** (Bokaro); **Somnath Goswami, 26** (Bokaro); **Raja Goswami, 28** (Bokaro); **Ashok Yadav, 25** (Gaya); **Ajit Mahato, 26** (Purulia)

# Tragedy and Shame

CM suspends SHOs after trucks carrying migrants collide in UP; DGP admits numbers on move "huge"

**ASAD REHMAN**  
AURAIYA (UP), MAY 16

TWO TRUCKS carrying migrant workers from Rajasthan, Delhi and Ghaziabad collided on NH-24 at Mithauli under Auraiya Police Station in Uttar Pradesh around 3 am on Saturday, killing 26 people. Seventeen of them had been identified by Saturday evening.

Circle Officer (City) Surendra-nath Yadav said 32 people were still in hospital, while four had been discharged and sent to a quarantine facility in the district after treatment.

The collision involved a trailer truck and a truck. While 45-odd men were travelling in the trailer truck, that was carrying sacks of wall putty, around 22 were in the truck. "The trailer had slowed down at a *dhaba* when the truck hit it from behind, causing both vehicles to fall into a ditch by the roadside. Twenty-four of the dead were travelling in the trailer truck. They got buried under sacks or the truck," Yadav said, adding that police were at the spot within half-an-hour.

Police suspect the driver of the truck may have fallen asleep at the wheel, ramming into the other vehicle. They are yet to identify either of the drivers.

On Saturday afternoon, the spot of the accident lay strewn with the belongings of the workers, including a blanket, clothes, a belt, water bottles, slippers and the *rotis* they were carrying.

Kaajal Kumar, 21, a native of Bokaro in Jharkhand, told *The Sunday Express* he was travelling with three others and that most of them in the trailer were lying amidst the putty sacks when a sudden jolt woke them up. "The whole truck was on us. I got buried under the sacks, but managed to breathe as my head

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Food being carried by migrants at the site of the accident on NH-24, at Mithauli near Auraiya in Uttar Pradesh, Saturday. *Vishal Srivastav* FULL COVERAGE P7

## Among those in truck: Some who failed to get on train, workers denied wages

**ASAD REHMAN & ABHISHEK ANGAD**  
AURAIYA, RANCHI, MAY 16

THE GENERAL ward at Combined District Hospital in Auraiya district has only four patients on Saturday afternoon. The four are survivors of the early Saturday morning accident in Uttar Pradesh's Auraiya district, where a truck carrying migrants from Delhi and Ghaziabad crashed into a truck trailer from Rajasthan, killing 26 people, at least eight of them from Bokaro, Jharkhand.

On bed number 14, Umesh Kumar Kalindi, 27, native of



Govardhan Kalindi's family survived on his earnings. *Express*

Jharkhand's Bokaro district, is resting with tears in his eyes and wall putty on his clothes and hair. Kalindi lost three members of his family in the accident.

"I lost my brother Yogeshwar, my nephew and my cousin in the accident," says Umesh, who worked at a marble factory in Jaipur. Another of his nephews, Vikas, survived the accident.

Umesh says he along with 30 others from the marble factory left on foot from Jaipur after a labour unrest over delayed payment of salaries.

"It was impossible to continue without money, so on May CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Can't help but cry at migrant plight, says Madras HC, seeks report

**ARUN JANARDHANAN**  
CHENNAI, MAY 16

"ONE CANNOT control his/her tears after seeing the pathetic condition of migrant labourers shown in the media for the past one month," the Madras High Court said on Friday, and sought a detailed report from the Centre and the state on their numbers and status in the next six days — by May 22.

Host states must be made accountable for the safety and well-being of migrant workers, the court said.

The court was hearing a habeas corpus plea moved by advocate A P Suryaprakasam seeking a direction to the police of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra to locate and produce over 400 Tamil workers alleged to be under illegal detention in Maharashtra.

The division Bench of Justice N Kirubakaran and Justice R Hemalatha said that while governments have taken care of every section of the society to the maximum extent possible, "guest workers and the agricultural work force are the neglected lot and they are the sufferers to the maximum".

"In this Covid-19 crisis, the persons who fed the entire nation are the agriculturists and not the people in any other occupation, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## For every dead in Auraiya accident, a lakh are waiting to return home

**ABHISHEK ANGAD**  
RANCHI, MAY 16

FOR EVERY migrant worker who died in the Auraiya road accident, a lakh more are waiting to return to their native homes in states.

On May 2, Jharkhand started an online portal asking its stranded people to register if they want to travel back home. Between May 2 and May 14, 6.92 lakh people registered, according to an official in the state's labour department. "More than 10 lakh people are stranded in various states. The number of registrations are only expected

### DEMAND vs TRAINS

2.5 lakh migrant workers from West Bengal, 2.69 lakh from Chhattisgarh, 10 lakh from UP, 5.5 lakh from Rajasthan, 2.7 lakh from Bihar believed to be stuck

**JHARKHAND:** 6.92 lakh registered, 50 trains to state so far

**WEST BENGAL:** 2.5 lakh registered, 8 trains

**CHHATTISGARH:** 2.69 lakh registered, 8 trains

to increase," the official said. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Odisha are some of the other states besides Jharkhand which primarily feed the labour markets in Maharashtra, Gujarat and the southern states including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Kerala.

Many migrant workers do not want to wait to return home, especially since they the Shramik Special trains have not been able to meet the huge demand. While Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal blamed the states for not giving permission to receive the trains, chief CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## West Bengal will cover cost of migrants' train journey home: Mamata

**ATRIMITRA**  
KOLKATA, MAY 16

CHIEF MINISTER Mamata Banerjee on Saturday announced that her government had decided to bear the entire cost of the return journey of migrant workers from West Bengal stranded in other states, even as the administration said an international flight carrying 160 citizens from Dhaka would land in the city on Monday.

Earlier this month, the Centre had said 85 per cent of the cost of CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### SUNDAY STORY

PAGE 9



### Begin Again

It's back to the start for the migrant workers back home

**RAHUL MEETS MIGRANTS; OPPN ATTACKS GOVT**  
P3, 6, 7, 8, 11

### WORLD



**IN WUHAN, A NEW FEAR: COULD MASS TESTING REKINDLE DISEASE** PAGE 12

# Train lottery leaves migrants in lurch: 'When will my turn come?'

**IRAM SIDDIQUE & VISHWAS WAGHMODE**  
MUMBAI, MAY 16

LONG BEFORE dawn on May 15, Om Prakash Tiwari slipped out of Mumbai with his family of six on a 1,500-km journey in his taxi to home in UP's Pratapgarh district. He had registered 10 days ago for tickets on the special train for migrants, but couldn't wait any more for the answer to his question: "When will my turn come?"

Around sunset on May 8, Adil Khan, a 25-year-old zari

worker in Jogeshwari left the city on a special train to UP. He had submitted his application just three days earlier at the local police station.

Wedged between the two journeys is the despair that has forced thousands of migrants away from railway stations and onto highways in a desperate and dangerous bid to reach their homes, driven by the lack of jobs and rapid urban spread of the coronavirus.

For many, getting a seat on these special trains is like a lottery, based on a convoluted reg-

istration process and completely dependent on the destination states that either approve or put on hold district-based lists with no clear explanation.

In Maharashtra, the country's industrial powerhouse and key destination for migrants from across the country, the numbers are telling: 2.25 lakh people left on 191 Shramik Specials between May 1 and 15 — of the first 100 trains, 50 were to UP and 25 to Bihar; over 1 lakh others are estimated to have left in private vehicles and buses, based on permits issued.



Police try to control a queue to catch trains to Uttar Pradesh, outside CSMT Station in Mumbai on Saturday. *Ganesh Shirsekar*



Nirmala Sitharaman announcing the fourth part of the Covid-19 economic package, in Delhi on Saturday. *PTI*

## Tranche 4: Mining to aviation, Govt pushes reforms it has already pushed

**AANCHAL MAGAZINE, PRANAV MUKUL & ANIL SASI**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 16

MOST OF the measures for eight sectors announced Saturday under the fourth tranche of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Covid economic package were either a new push to old reforms proposals or an aggregation of earlier decisions.

The latter includes: commercial coal mining; coal gasification projects; building a hub for aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO); privatisation of airports, and optimisation of Indian airspace.

The renewed push for commercial mining is a proposal over two years old. A way to auction coal mines/blocks for sale of coal under the provisions of the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015, and the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, it was approved by the government in early 2018 and an order was issued on February 27, 2018. Subsequently, the Coal Ministry said it had identified "15 large coal blocks" for the pilot round of bidding in December that year.

In January this year, the Cabinet cleared an ordinance to introduce the amendments needed to relax conditions in the two laws to open up the sector to commercial mining.

The government said coal gasification and liquefaction will

### BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



### EXPLAINED

## Less of a stimulus

THE FOURTH tranche entails a stimulus of a little over Rs 63,000 crore, of which the cost to the exchequer is only about Rs 8,100 crore. The focus is more on industrial reforms but many of these measures have been mired in implementation issues.

### DEFENCE TO CUT IMPORTS

PAGE 8

be incentivised through rebate in revenue share but project roll-outs have already begun.

A revival of Talcher unit of CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

**LOCKDOWN DAY 53** **CASES: 85,940** **RECOVERED: 30,152** **DEATHS: 2,752** **TESTS: 2,134,277** **DOUBLING RATE: 13.45\*\***



KEY STATES TO WATCH	TOTAL CASES	SURGE IN 24 HRS	7-DAY AVG. GROWTH*	DOUBLING RATE**
■ Maharashtra	29,100	1,576	6.23%	11.56
■ Gujarat	9,932	340	4.29%	16.79
■ Delhi	9,333	438	5.21%	13.83
■ Tamil Nadu	10,108	434	7.71%	9.34
■ Rajasthan	4,635	207	4.21%	17.12
■ West Bengal	2,461	84	5.62%	12.80

\* Compounded Daily Growth Rate over last 7 days \*\* Calculated over 7-day growth

**CONCERN** HIMACHAL PRADESH: Numbers small, but almost 30 new cases in last week

**CAUTION** KERALA: A resurgence seen here too. 52 cases in last three weeks

**A GLIMMER** PUNJAB: A slight slowdown in last three days, though one of fastest growing states

Based on daily data by Centre, ICMR, state governments



# 3 THE OUTBREAK WEST BENGAL



A health worker checks a passenger on arrival from New Delhi, at Howrah station on Saturday. PTI

## 26 KILLED IN UP ACCIDENT

# Rs 2 lakh relief for kin of 4 dead Purulia natives

Migrants' crisis result of botched-up lockdown: Trinamool

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, MAY 16

THE STATE government on Saturday announced a compensation of Rs 2 lakh each for the next of kin of four people, all natives of Purulia in West Bengal, who had been killed in a road accident in Uttar Pradesh's Auraiya district. The deceased were migrant workers who were trying to return to the state following the nationwide lockdown imposed to contain the coronavirus pandemic, sources in the state government said.

"GOWB offers its condolences over the unfortunate death of 3/4 persons today in Auraiya district in UP. They died in UP, on their way home in Purulia. Compensation@ Rs 2 lakh per head is reaching next of the kin here asap," read a tweet from the official Twitter handle of the Home Department.

At least 26 migrant workers were killed and 53 were injured when a trailer rammied into a sta-



Injured victims at district hospital in Auraiya, UP, on Saturday. Vishal Srivastava

tionary truck, both carrying passengers, on a highway near Auraiya in the early hours of Saturday.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also expressed grief over the incident. "Extremely saddened to hear of the tragic road accident in #Auraiya, Uttar Pradesh. My condolences to the families of the migrant brothers and sisters who have lost their lives. May their souls rest in peace. Praying for recovery of those injured," Banerjee said in a tweet.

The UP government, too, has decided to give Rs 2 lakh to the

kin of each deceased.

Meanwhile, The Trinamool Congress slammed the Centre over the death of 26 migrant workers.

TMC MP Sougata Roy said, "The Centre should have ensured that the migrant workers return home safely. Instead of doing that the central government is busy blaming state governments for their misery. This has is the result of the Centre's sudden decision to announce the lockdown, which has forced many to hit the roads."

TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee said in a tweet, "The painful loss of lives of #MigrantWorkers forced to take desperate measures to return to their native places is a result of a botched up lockdown led by an arrogant and insensitive Govt that fails even to take cognisance of the existence & suffering of millions."

In last few days, several migrant workers were killed in accidents in different parts of the country while on their way back home.

Follow measures to prevent dengue outbreak: CM tells people

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KOLKATA, MAY 16

CHIEF MINISTER Mamata Banerjee Saturday urged people to follow preventive measures to protect themselves from dengue amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Banerjee, who also holds the health portfolio, commended health workers who fighting dengue at this time of crisis.

"Today on #NationalDengueDay I would like to commend our health workers who are working tirelessly to combat dengue amidst the #COVID19 pandemic. Effective community engagement is the key to Dengue prevention and I urge everyone to protect themselves and follow preventive measures," the chief minister tweeted.

The Union Health Ministry recently wrote to the state government, alerting it about a possible outbreak of the disease, following a spike in the number of dengue cases in neighbouring Bangladesh.

The chief minister has cautioned officials not to forget the efforts to prevent any dengue outbreak amid the coronavirus pandemic.

## SAMPLES TESTED ALMOST DOUBLED IN A WEEK: HOME SECY

# 7 more die; +ve rate decline brings cheer

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, MAY 16

THE STATE government on Saturday said the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) had claimed seven more lives, taking the toll to 160. If deaths due to comorbidities are taken into account, the count is 232.

Though 115 more infections had been detected till 9 am, pushing up the total number of positive cases to 2,576, the government said it was glad that the positivity rate had decreased from 4.69% to 3.33% in a week. The positivity rate is the proportion of positive cases among the total number of tests conducted.



Home Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay

"We are very glad to announce that, in our state the positivity rate of the infected persons has gone down significantly within a week," Home Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay told reporters in state secretariat Nabanna.

Meanwhile, according to the health department bulletin, 63 more patients were discharged from hospitals in the 24 hours till 9 am, taking the total to 892. The active case count rose to 1,452. "The recovery rate in the

### STATE COUNT

TOTAL CASES  
**2,576**

INCREASE **115** DEATHS\* **232**

892 RECOVERED

77,288 SAMPLES TESTED TILL MAY 15

\* INCLUDES 72 COMORBID DEATHS

state is 34.63% now, which is nominally less than the national average of 35.09%. We are almost now near the national average," said the Home Secretary.

Bandyopadhyay said the number of samples tested had almost doubled over the last week. According to the health bulletin, 7,745 had been tested in the last 24 hours, pushing up the total number of specimens examined to 77,288.

"Total number of tests has almost doubled in the last seven days. On May 8, it was 35,767," said the Home Secretary, adding that the government had started one more laboratory for testing samples. With this, there are 22 such laboratories in the state.

At present, 9,667 people are still in government quarantine, while 50,258 people are in home quarantine, according to the health bulletin.

### GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Appointment of Vice Chancellor of Central University of Tamil Nadu  
The Vice Chancellor, being the academic as well as administrative head, is expected to be:

- A person possessing the highest level of competence, integrity, morals and institutional commitment.
- A distinguished academician, with a minimum 10 years' of experience as Professor in a University or 10 years' of experience in a reputed research and / or academic administrative organisation with proof of having demonstrated academic leadership.
- Preferably not more than 65 years of age as on the closing date of receipt of applications of this advertisement.

#### Salary and Service Conditions

- The post carries a pay of Rs. 21,000/- (Fixed) per month with Special Allowance of Rs. 11,250/- and other usual allowances.
- The terms and conditions of the services will be those as set forth in the Act, Statutes and Ordinances of the University.

#### Procedure for appointment

- Appointment will be made from a panel of names recommended by a Committee constituted under the provisions of Central Universities Act, 2009.
- The advertisement and the format of application are available on the websites <http://mhrd.gov.in> and <http://www.cun.ac.in>
- The applications in the prescribed proforma should reach within 30 days from the date of the publication of this advertisement, by Registered / Speed Post to:

Deputy Secretary (Central Universities),  
Department of Higher Education, Ministry of HRD,  
Room No 213, "C" Wing, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi - 110 001

"Application for the post of Vice Chancellor, Central University of Tamil Nadu" should be super-scribed on the envelope.

This Department is not responsible for postal delay

Date: 17.05.2020

Bengal won't be part of Centre's ration card scheme: Minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, MAY 16

BENGAL FOOD Minister Jyotipriya Mullick on Saturday said the state will not be part of the Centre's 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme. The state minister, also a senior TMC leader, said the Bengal government's Khadya Sathi Scheme is sufficient to provide free ration to the people of the state.

"We had already decided that our state will not be part of the Centre's scheme. The decision was taken nearly six to seven months ago. We have our own Khadya Sathi Scheme. There are about 9 crore people who are beneficiaries of this scheme. So, I don't know how the Union Finance Minister's statements are applicable here," said Mullick.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the central government will make ration cards portable under the initiative 'One Nation, One Ration Card' to allow migrant workers access ration across the country.

"This will enable migrant beneficiaries to access foodgrains from any fair price shop in the country," she had said.

"When it comes to providing ration to migrant workers, our state has been doing this for the last one month. We have identified migrant workers from other states stranded here and free ration is being provided to them," added the state food minister.

### BENGALURU DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

(A Unitary University, Government of Karnataka)

#### THIRD ROUND ADMISSION NOTIFICATION 2020-21

- Five years Integrated M.Sc. (Economics) course with an option to exit after 3 years.
- Two years M.Sc. (Economics) course

Bengaluru Dr. B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics University (BASEU) invites applications for admission to the courses, Five years Integrated M.Sc. (Economics) and Two years M.Sc. (Economics) for the academic year 2020-21. Courses offered by BASE University are full time and residential.

#### ELIGIBILITY:

- i) **Five years Integrated M.Sc. (Economics) course with an option to exit after 3 years:**

The Candidate should have completed 12th Std./ Equivalent Exam with English as one of the Languages and Mathematics as core subject and obtained a minimum of 65% marks in aggregate (60% for SC/ST category students).

Application Fee: Rs. 200/- for GM, OBC and Rs. 100/- for SC/ST, PWD candidates: NIL

- ii) **Two years M.Sc. (Economics) course:**

Candidates should have completed B.Sc. or B.Sc. (Honours) in Economics, with Econometrics, Mathematics and Statistics as other major courses in the degree with minimum of 55% (50% for SC/ST) in aggregate.

OR

B.A Honours Economics with minimum of 55% (50% for SC/ST) in aggregate. The applicant must have studied mathematics at the higher secondary or higher level

Application Fee: Rs. 300/- for GM, OBC and Rs. 150/- for SC/ST, PWD candidates: NIL

The candidates are required to apply online application of Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) 2020 and appear for the common entrance test conducted by the CUCET 2020 and the marks obtained by them will be considered for admission. For appearing Entrance test of CUCET and more information visit <http://www.cucetexam.in>

For submission of online application to BASE University, please visit the School website at: <http://www.base.ac.in>

Online application commenced from: **16th March 2020**

Last date for online application extended upto: **30th June 2020**

M. Lakshminarayana IAS (Retd.)  
Director

M.B. Dyaberi, IAS (Retd.)  
Chief Executive Officer

Contact us: Rajaji Hall, Central College Campus, Bangalore University, Bengaluru-560001  
e-mail: [info@base.ac.in](mailto:info@base.ac.in) Active Helpdesk: 080-22243350 / 60 / 70. Mobile: 7349333323

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# Salute our Heroes



**P**OWERGRID salutes the heroes of fight against COVID-19 pandemic which is posing a threat to the existence of mankind. The fight demanded extraordinary policy and administrative decisions. But most importantly, their implementation required a complete dedication by officials in the forefront much beyond the normal call of duty. Words will never be sufficient to thank enough the heroes in the front, administration and police officials, doctors and medical professionals and sanitation workers. Personnel from other

essential services like electricity, telecom, water supply, bank, petrol pumps, LPG suppliers also deserve highest accolades for their unstinted support to the society.

POWERGRID is resolved to ensure 24x7 electricity and telecom connectivity in the country, without which our fight would have been unimaginable. The resolution was displayed on April 05, 2020, in managing a 30% swing in the Power Grid when entire Nation switched off lights for 9 minutes. The planning, co-ordination and execution was phenomenal and unprecedented. In this time of crisis, we all stand united to come out victorious soon and rebuild our great nation to its glory.

With warm regards,

**Mr. Rajesh Kumar**  
Executive Director  
**POWERGRID, Kolkata**



**W**e are heavily indebted to all the frontline warriors — the doctors, nurses, police, paramedic, sweepers/cleaners, delivery staff and this is a tribute to them who in such circumstances are fighting the battle of the pandemic. We also salute the spirit displayed by all the employees of JCI as also by the people of this country who have endured the lockdown. The team JCI has been ensuring continuation of all the operational activities through dedicated work by its entire workforce. We have extensive plans for the post COVID-19 economic scenario for supporting the jute economy through expansion of diversified operations. The team JCI has also trained itself extensively availing online courses utilizing the lockdown time and equipped ourselves for the future challenges as an organization that is continuously learning from the changing scenario and evolving itself to meet the new challenges. The team JCI is committed to living by the motto — 'Hum Honge Kamyab' and wishes to spread the same. Jai Hind.



**Mr Ajay Kumar Jolly**  
Chairman-cum-Managing Director  
**The Jute Corporation of India Limited**  
(A Government of India Enterprise)

Presently the whole world is affected by the Pandemic Covid-19 and our country is going through the Lockdown from 23rd March 2020 to till date.

**W**e, at BCCL, are heavily indebted to all the frontline WARRIORS like the Doctors, Nurses, Police, Para Medical Staff, Sweepers/Cleaners, etc. We are also indebted to Ministry of Coal, Govt. of India, State & Dhanbad District Administration and all those who are directly and indirectly contributing to the battle against this dreadful pandemic. We are also thankful to the people of our country who have observed lockdown and respected Government directives. We are certainly hopeful that we will ultimately win this war against the deadly COVID-19.



I am also indebted to employees and other stake holders of BCCL who even during this grim situation, have been putting their whole hearted effort by continuing uninterrupted production of coal to support the Energy Security of the Country. In such a situation it is of utmost importance to keep each and every employee of the company at workplace and its neighborhood safe and healthy.

I wish all to stay safe and healthy

**Mr. P.M. Prasad**  
Chairman-cum-Managing Director  
**Bharat Coking Coal Limited**  
A Mini Ratna Company

**T**he novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as pandemic on March 11, 2020, has spread significantly across the country. Given the high rate of transmission among the citizens since first case was reported in January 30, 2020, in Kerala, Government of India ordered a nationwide lockdown from March 24, 2020 with extended period till May 17, 2020, in three phases, to contain the contagion and win over the epidemic. With such unprecedented measures taken by both the central and respective state governments to contain the spread of COVID-19, the country's economy has been impacted and have caused hardship and disruption in people's lives.

MSTC Limited (MSTC), a Mini Ratna Category-I CPSE under the administrative control of the Ministry of Steel, Government of India, with major business vertical being e-Commerce services, catering to various government entities (both Centre and state government, CPSEs, banks etc across the country) through e-procurements, e-auctions and allied activities of mines etc, has made all out effort to run the wheel of activity of business serving the essential and agricultural sector from the second phase of lockdown. MSTC has slowly opened and started most of its pan India offices since April 20, 2020 after ensuring all compulsory preventive and precautionary measures as per the guidelines of MOHFW, viz. thermal temperature scanning at entry and exit, providing face mask to all employees and ensuring wearing of the same, providing hand rubs at entry and ensuring hand sanitisation at entry, maintaining social distancing, cleaning and frequent sanitisation of the whole workplace as per norms, special transportation facility with 30-40% capacity are being arranged as per requirement and more importantly ensuring use of Aarogya Setu app by all employees, stakeholders etc. As additional preventive measure and to maintain continuity of business, MSTC has also enabled work-from-home facility for its rest of the employees through its dedicated server with monitoring 24x7.

With Government of India's notification dated 15.4.2020 towards allowing select additional activities against lockdown measures for containment of COVID-19 in the phase 2 and with effect from April 20, 2020 till May 3, 2020, MSTC has also resumed its essential office functions at the Headquarters and Eastern Regional Office at Kolkata. As MSTC acts as an e-commerce service provider to various departments of government of India, several state governments, CPSEs, banks etc towards conduction of e-auctions for coal, iron-ore, mine blocks, petroleum products, stressed assets under SARFAESI Act as well as agricultural products viz. pulses etc on behalf of NAFED and maintaining and managing data and financials to sustain the supply chain consequential to such activities and disruption of which has impacted the Country's economy and in turn caused disruption in people's lives. Besides, MSTC has started a unique initiative, viz. Jaivik Kheti online portal along with Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Department of Agriculture (DAC), to promote organic farming globally and facilitate organic farmers to sell their organic produce — grains, pulses, fruits and vegetables. And, to facilitate door-to-door delivery, MSTC has joined hands with India Post, Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, government of India. Further to augment the fight against coronavirus for the nation, MSTC has already contributed to PM CARES Fund to the tune of Rs 5.54 crores to support India's COVID-19 pandemic response.



**Mr. Surinder Kumar Gupta**  
CMD,  
**MSTC LTD**





**A**s you are aware that, the deployment of extraordinary measures by the Government to effectively combat the widespread COVID-19 pandemic including the nationwide lockdown is underway and the related facts and figures of the deadly coronavirus that continue to pour in, hold us in panic and distress. These are challenging times not just for us but for humanity at large, which call for extraordinary forbearance and resilience both physically and mentally.



I would like to commend our workforce for their unflinching dedication and commitment towards maintaining our industrial operations while following all the guidelines issued by the Government & World Health Organization and precautionary personal hygiene and social distancing. I would like to call these people as our Energy Warriors. It is a matter of great pride that, like in the past, the Energy Warriors of OIL have once again risen to the occasion and pledged to support the nation through their commitment and contribution of a day's salary to the PM CARES Fund, created to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Additionally, the company has also contributed Rs 38 crore to the above fund under its Corporate Social Responsibility. Also, as a responsible corporate, OIL has undertaken and continues to undertake various measures to arrest the spread of the virus in our operational areas. To name a few :

- ▶ Mass awareness generation campaigns amongst the public (both in rural and urban areas).
- ▶ OIL Officers Association has also supported nearly 2,000 needy families with necessary basic items like eatables, masks etc,
- ▶ Donated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to Guwahati Municipal Corporation.
- ▶ Regular sanitisation of our installations across the nation and also public places in Assam and Rajasthan including entire Dulaijan township, Border Security Forces Complex, Jaisalmer etc by OIL's Fire Service Department.
- ▶ In-house development of sanitiser by our Chemical Department.
- ▶ Our pump station has also created a UV sanitiser machine in-house from recycled products which can sanitise a N95 mask in 20 seconds and the same is used.
- ▶ Further, our OIL doctors and medical staff are providing free consultancy to general public on the dreaded disease. A dedicated control room handled by team of OIL executives has been operating to help and guide people on COVID-19, in and around FHQ, Dulaijan.

At the end I would like to convey to all of you that the challenges of fighting with COVID-19 have actually given us the chance of showing strength and uniting against the disease. We all are in this together and we shall emerge safe, strong and victorious. For the next few days of the lockdown stay at home, keep maintaining social distancing and follow strict personal hygiene. Take care of yourself, your loved ones and family and stay safe. Jai Hind.

**Mr. Sushil Chandra Mishra**  
Chairman & Managing Director  
**Oil India Limited**

**G**lobally we are been wrapped up by the dreaded Covid19. As if the whole world is fighting together just to survive. But we all know there is always a ray of silver lining hiding just behind the darkness. It's not too far when again we all will be living in a bright and beautiful world , more stronger than ever. Our heart fills with enormous joy and gratitude for the unseen heroes who are fighting day in and day out with a smile for the society. Let's get together and build a beautiful world where peace and prosperity prevails post Covid19 also.



We salute those heroes and join our hands with them abiding by the law and order. I am very optimistic about the positivities and opportunities it will bring along in new business ventures in manufacturing and agriculture. We just need to have more patience at this moment.

**Mr. Yatish Kumar**  
CMD  
**Braithwaite & Co Ltd, Kolkata**

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon the world a challenge that is unprecedented in nature and scale. The selfless battle being waged against the invisible enemy by doctors and health workers, state administration, police, media and other frontline workers is exemplary and truly commendable. Support being extended by people from support services like milk, vegetable vendors, pharmacists, financial institutions like banks is worth appreciating, given the circumstances. Their brave efforts to keep the show running, drives a sense of hope in such trying times.



Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) employees too continue to work under challenging conditions on the high seas and the remotest corners of the country to achieve uninterrupted supply of Crude and Natural Gas to the nation amidst the lockdown.

Our CSR efforts have been directed towards equipping frontline workers in their relentless fight against the novel coronavirus by providing dry ration & protective items to the COVID-19 impacted families.

I take this opportunity to convey my sincere gratitude to all the frontline workers.

May the almighty give them enough strength and resilience to deliver further and win one of the worst battles human race has ever fought.

**Mr. K R Durga Prasad,**  
Executive Director-Basin Manager,  
**MBA Basin, ONGC, Kolkata**

**N**BCC and its subsidiary HSCL express their solidarity with National COVID warriors who are fighting this dreaded pandemic day in and day out in order to save the humanity. Our prayers are with them in this hour of crisis.



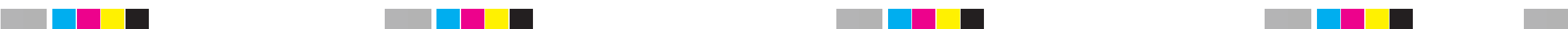
**Mr P K Gupta**  
CMD  
**NBCC & Chairman - HSCL**

**P**resently, the World is going through a dire threat from Covid-19 pandemic and the whole country is going through to Lockdown. Even in such a difficult state the Coal Miners of the company have been putting their whole sole effort by continuing uninterrupted production of coal to support the Energy Security of the country for which appropriate SOP has been prepared for all the mines as per guidelines received from DGMS and advisories received from different statutory bodies. In such a situation it is of utmost importance to keep each and every employee of the company at workplace and its neighborhood safe and healthy. ECL has taken all proactive measures of the safety of the Colliery, Co-workers and Company under a project in Mission mode named "MISSION SuDESHH-Mitwa" ( A proactive approaches a friend(Mitwa) for achieving the goals of SuDDESH, i.e Sustainable Development, Environment, Safety, Health & Hygiene).

We are heavily indebted to all the frontline WARRIORS i.e the Doctors, Nurses, Police, Para Medics, Sweepers/Cleaners, etc. and this is a tribute to them who in such a situation are fighting the battle of the dreadful pandemic. We are also indebted to all our stakeholders , the employee of our organization, the people of this country who have endured lockdown, respected Government directives and we are certainly hopeful that we will ultimately win this war against the deadly COVID-19.

Wishing all to stay blessed, safe and harmless.

**Mr. Prem Sagar Mishra**  
Chairman-cum-Managing Director  
**Eastern Coalfields Limited**



















eye



**SPOTLIGHT, PAGE 14**  
**No Means No**  
 Deconstructing the nuts and bolts of rape culture, consent and active accountability



**ARTS etc, PAGE 15**  
**The Orange Minivet Drops** by  
 Ruskin Bond on windows, and the joys of simple living in complicated times

**Surbhi Gupta**  
 with **Smita Nair, Benita Fernando, Sreenivas Janyala, Divya Goyal, Vishnu Varma and Amrita Dutta**

**I**T BEGAN with a message on a WhatsApp group. "Someone on our alumni group posted about a group of workers from Madhya Pradesh running out of food. When they had stepped out to fetch food, they were beaten back by the police," says Miriam Koshy, an artist based in Dona Paula. It was five days into the lockdown, and all of Goa was struggling. But the worst-hit were inter-state workers, spread across the state in little clusters, who had fallen off the government's radar, and been abandoned by their employers. Koshy headed out to the colony with a batch of dry rations, the little she could organise in a few hours. As word spread among workers, the calls for help became a deluge. Since then, Koshy and her team of volunteers — a mix of data scientists and researchers, architects and artists — have been raising funds, packing food and sending them out to labour colonies across north Goa. Till date, they have packed 12,687 dry ration packets for 4,000 daily-wage workers.

The lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19 has led to a staggering humanitarian crisis which the state has struggled to handle. As stranded workers and vulnerable families run out of food, cash and patience, citizen-led initiatives, running out of living rooms and college halls, mapping out the needy via WhatsApp group chats and Google spreadsheets, have stepped into this wide breach. Volunteers and NGO workers have spent hours listening to people in distress, rustling up meals for over 100 people in their tiny home kitchens, and coaxing government officials to send relief, when they have failed. In a report filed with the Supreme Court in April, the Centre submitted that NGOs across the country had served 30.11 lakh meals during the first phase of lockdown — in many states, they were ahead of the government in providing this relief.

In this upheaval, many were moved by the plight of others to step out. When he heard of construction workers from Bihar "eating raw wheat flour mixed with water and masala" in Bandra's Kherwadi area, Karthikeyan KN, 34, used social media to raise money. The head of analytics and product management at a payment solutions firm, he collected Rs 2.5 lakh to supply ration to 40,000 adults for two weeks. He also plunged into field work with Khaana Chahiye, another citizen-led initiative. Every day, he steps out at 7.30 am to pick up food packets and deliver them to Dharavi, Kurla, Chembur, Govandi and Mahul. "Once I started seeing the ground reality, I understood the meaning of privilege," he says.

In Mumbai, an extensive network of kitchens, delivery personnel, grassroots NGOs and volunteers have been working to help the hungry. The Rotary Club of Mumbai Queen's Necklace has served over 60 lakh hot meals and food kits across Mumbai, Thane and Palghar. The project has raised Rs 11 crore till date, with funding from Rotarians as well as corporate donors. Businessman Sanjiv Mehta, who heads the project, said, "There is a maker, a funder and a distributor. Everyone is needed." Most initiatives take the support of NGOs, which often have the logistics, personnel and expertise, but not the funding. Retail entrepreneur Juveca Panda joined hands with non-profit Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) to distribute eight lakh cooked meals to frontline workers and Bhiwandi's powerloom workers. For stranded construction workers, food is prepared in a kitchen at a stadium in Nerul and then transported by Mumbai Mobile Crèches, an NGO with expertise in setting up day-care centres at construction sites. "They had the logistics in place to deliver the food," Panda says. Hospitality brands, too, leveraged their massive kitchens and manpower to provide meals. The Indian Hotel Company Limited (IHCL), which owns the Taj, Vivanta and Ginger brand of hotels, provided meals for healthcare workers as well as stranded workers in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Coimbatore and Agra.

In Delhi, where the February riots had already pushed many families into financial distress, the lockdown has been a double blow. "Many homes were burnt during the riots,

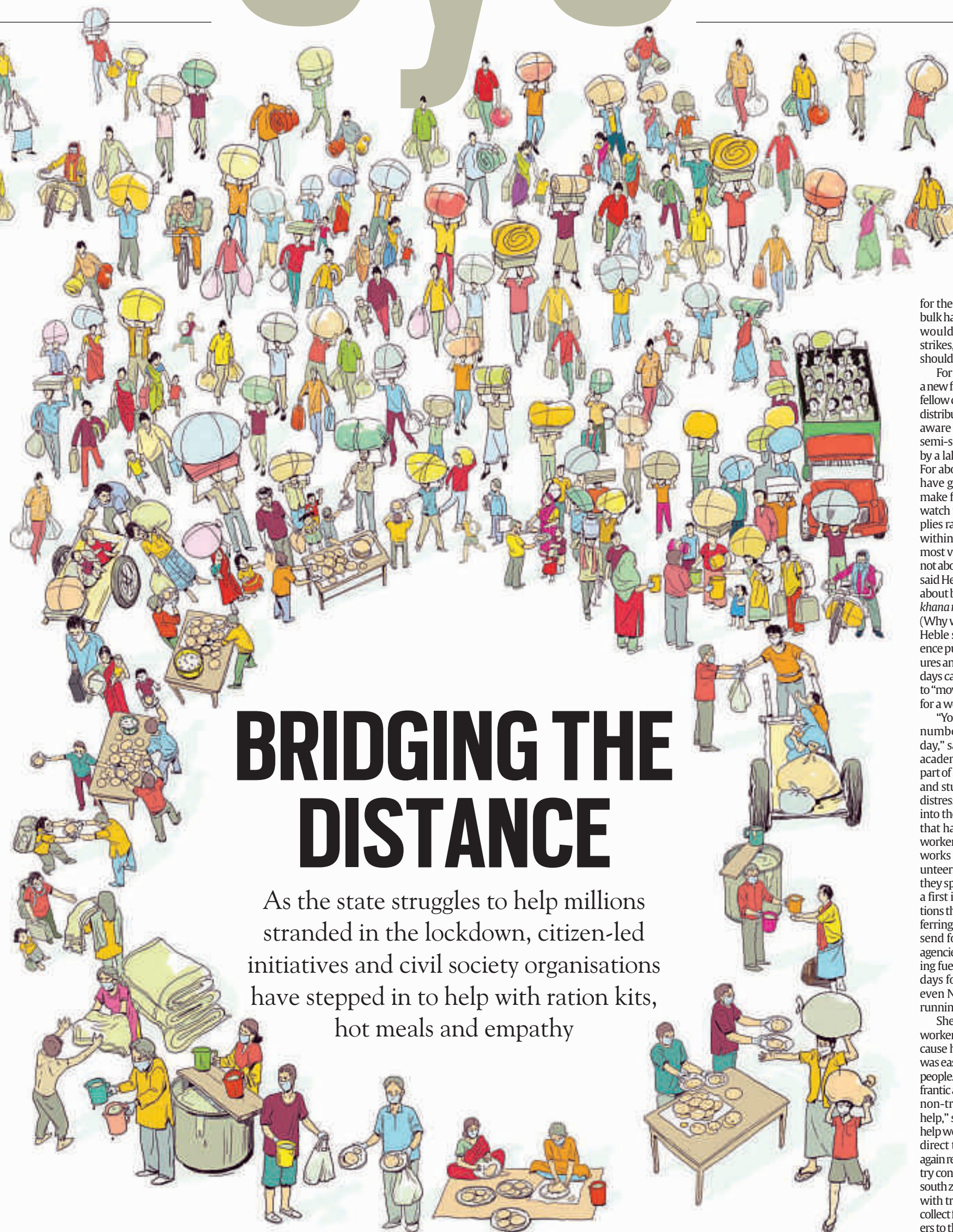


ILLUSTRATION: SUVAJIT DEO

**BRIDGING THE DISTANCE**

As the state struggles to help millions stranded in the lockdown, citizen-led initiatives and civil society organisations have stepped in to help with ration kits, hot meals and empathy

Volunteers have felt the scale of deprivation acutely. 'I had not realised how broken this system is'

Some middle-class families were reduced to zero. Had they not been affected so badly, they could have survived this lockdown," says Amir Siddiqui from Project Umeed, which runs 43 relief centres in the city. He recounts how difficult it is for the suddenly impoverished people to seek help, prompting them to tie up with withansians. "We started dropping off ration kits at the mosque. They find it more comfortable to take it from the imam than to accept charity," he says.

For two-decade old organisation Goonj, disasters mean activating its deep network.

"But usually it's in a certain pocket of the country. We had never thought that all our networks will be needed at once," says founder Anshu Gupta. To adapt to many inter-state restrictions, the organisation has had to swiftly decentralise, says Gupta. "We started buying locally from grocery shops, vendors and farmers," he says. In Kolar, Karnataka, a region known for its tomato and mango production, when farmers started distress selling, Goonj decided to buy the produce over the cost price and distributed it among 5,000 families in the district. "We had not prepared cooked meals before but we decided to do so because people were going hungry. In the past month, we've fed over 2,000 people in Bengaluru, and we still get at least 100 calls a day," says Chandan Sharma, who looks after Goonj's operations in Karnataka. Through the lockdown,



REACHING OUT

Two women offer food to another in Chennai

the organisation has delivered 8 lakh kg of ration and provided 1.4 lakh meals, says Gupta. Elsewhere, too, social workers hit the ground running as the implications of the lockdown began to be clear. Around March 30, members of Ankuram, a Hyderabad-based NGO, spotted migrants from Madhya Pradesh walking on the highway. They persuaded them to return, and moved them to their shelter, where they were offered food and water and convinced to stay — instead of walking 800 km home. "We convinced hundreds more to stay at the shelters," says founder M Sumitra. "Initially, we provided

food. Later, as many decided to cook on their own, we provided dry rations and vegetables. We arranged counselling for those who showed signs of depression. Many felt guilty that they were just eating and sleeping without doing any work," says Sumitra. When they finally found a way to leave, after the easing of restrictions, some migrants from Bihar, UP and Maharashtra made Sumitra and her team members promise that they would visit them in their homes whenever possible. It is not just food alone. As several blood banks began drying up in lockdown, organisations rushed to arrange blood for emergen-

cies. "We cannot organise blood donation camps with social distancing. So, we send 10-12 donors daily to hospitals," says Taranjit Singh Nimana of the Bhai Ghanaiya Ji Mission Sewa Society, an organisation in Punjab. "We have a list of 40,000-50,000 blood donors ready in Ludhiana. But these days, even regular donors are hesitant; just a message on WhatsApp is not enough. You have to call and counsel them."

As a child, Murugan S lived on the streets of Kochi and begged for food from strangers. One day, the police shifted him to an orphanage where he was cared for by nuns for many years. Since then, he has been paying the favour forward. The 34-year-old's NGO Theruvoram, meaning street in Malayalam, has been lifting the homeless and the destitute off the streets in six districts of Kerala and taking them to safe homes in the lockdown. "Almost 90 per cent are from other states. We give them a bath, fresh clothes and then transport them to a mental health centre or a hospital," he says.

Extending a hand does not always come from a position of privilege. In the village of Kaladera, near Chomu in Jaipur district, a community of printers and dyers have started a kitchen to help 900 migrant workers stuck nearby. "The local authorities give dry ration only to native villagers. How would the workers manage?" says Krishna Kumar Dosaya, a member of the Chippa Samaj. It is a hard time

for the community, too. "Those who buy in bulk have cancelled all orders. But our elders would say that no matter what disaster strikes, everyone has to live together, no one should go hungry," says Dosaya.

For many volunteers, the crisis has meant a new familiarity with the city they share with fellow citizens. Before he began going there to distribute food, Nakul Heble was only vaguely aware of the existence of a community of semi-skilled workers from north India living by a lake near his home in north Bengaluru. For about a month now, Heble and a friend have gotten to know them better, as they make frequent trips to drop off rations, and watch their desperation as money and supplies ran out. "We depended a lot on people within the community to help identify the most vulnerable. For them, this pandemic is not about the virus, but hunger and survival," said Heble. With it, there was also an anxiety about being believed. "They would say, 'Agar khana mila hai, to hum kyun jhooth bolenge?' (Why would we lie if we had got the food?)" Heble says. Watching government indifference push the vulnerable to desperate measures and being swamped by their distress for days can take a toll. Heble and his friend had to "move away from the Google spreadsheet" for a week when it became too much.

"Your phone number becomes a helpline number. You are taking calls through the day," says Seema Mundoli. The author and academic with Azim Premji University is a part of a group of 100 academics, researchers and students, who began by responding to distress calls early into the lockdown. It grew into the Stranded Workers Action Network, that has taken calls from 16,000 distressed workers from across the country. The SWAN works as a control room of relief, with volunteers divided into zones by the language they speak. All calls for help are entered into a first information sheet, and different sections then take on the work — either of transferring cash, or getting local organisations to send food or even making payment to gas agencies when workers have run out of cooking fuel. "Sometimes, it can take quite a few days for things to move. We also find that even NGOs are getting overwhelmed and running out of resources," says Mundoli.

She has just gotten off the phone with a worker in Bellary, Karnataka, distraught because he can't return to Madhya Pradesh. "It was easier to somehow get food and ration to people. Now, after two months, people are just frantic about going home. But the process is so non-transparent that we are struggling to help," says Mundoli. The volunteers usually help workers register on a government portal, direct them to the nearest police station to again register — and then tell them to wait. "We try convince them not to start walking. In the south zone, we have had no success in helping with travel. In Maharashtra, we managed to collect funds and arrange a truck to drop workers to the Madhya Pradesh border," she says.

By pitching into the crisis, the volunteers have felt the scale of deprivation acutely. With the knowledge comes indignation. "I had not realised how broken the system is. Politicians and administrators who are trained to respond to the crisis have responded with an utter lack of care. A few good officers trying their best is not enough," said Mundoli. "By leaving the cities, the workers have questioned all of us in a big way. Governments would like to lure them to stay put, but no one wants to answer why they left," says Goonj's Gupta.

The "end" of lockdown, then, cannot mean a switch back to normal. "I know a lot more about the lives people live. Empathy has grown in me. And I don't think this work is something I can stop. A lot more people are going to need help. Jobs will be lost, people will suffer," says Heble. While they have run out of funds, the two friends are gearing up to meet municipal officers or legislators to bring some attention to the community.

In Goa, Koshy has set up a directory of workers to help match their skill sets with jobs that come up. So far, they have managed to find rain harvesting experts to train labourers in building recharge pits and are appealing to householders to hire them for day jobs. "It is about hunger and survival, and if it is not taken care of now, people will get into a life-long debt cycle. Eventually, there will be another wave of distress migration from villages," says Gupta.

Longer version on indianexpress.com

## DIGITAL NATIVE



**Nishant Shah**

Nishant Shah is a professor of new media and the co-founder of The Centre for Internet & Society, Bengaluru

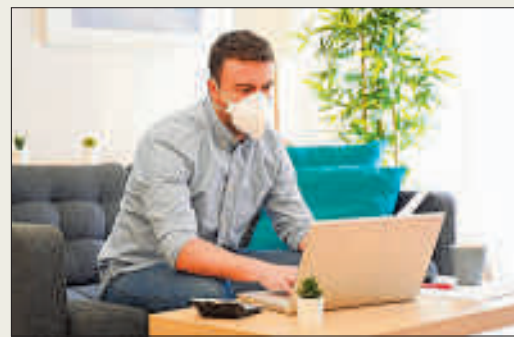
### After the Crisis

When the pandemic is behind us, the new normal will see a curb on our rights and safeties

WHEN THE world officially went online — not just used the internet but realised that we will have to live on it, amid the shut-downs and lockdowns, something strange happened. Those of us privileged enough to be able to work remotely and continue to be productively engaged, thus hanging on to a semblance of normality in an uncertain world, started to recognise the fatigue of screen space. We were already struggling with the fact that we were living with screens — they were in our hands, pockets, bags; by our pillows, and, with us, on our toilet seats. And then came the video-conferencing explosion. All work got reduced to staring at the screen — suddenly making a lot of us realise that despite the presence of ubiquitous computation, our work and life had a lot of time for in-person and physical activities.

As we shifted, taking for granted access, affordability, and affordances, into this online world, we have all been exploring what it means to work in these distributed environments. There are long editorials about “Zoom fatigue”, “platform tiredness” and “camera craziness” as we feel exhausted trying to remain productive and connected on the flattened interfaces of our screens. There is also a growing realisation that while the digital world offers many advantages, it takes an immense amount of labour. This hidden labour and its costs, otherwise performed by invisible workers or insidious algorithms, are now in our faces, clearly showing us that digital shifts are not cheap and administrators using it as an excuse to reduce costs are merely burdening their employees with additional, invisible labour.

The struggle is real. It seems trivial when compared to those who cannot work, are trapped away from home and family, or are threatened with loss of job and income as we continue extending the measures to flatten the epidemiological curve. And yet, this is in many ways the future of what is to come when the world opens up. One of the things we have to prepare for is that this pan-



GETTY IMAGES

#### LOST WORLD

Once this is over, the digital is going to be the lever for change

dem is an exercise in resource management and control. In the guise of the emergency, different administrators who were resisting the digital shift because of lack of knowledge or fear of loss of control are suddenly accelerating the shift, being facilitated almost entirely by for-profit corporate services instead of community-driven open-source environments that have been developing over the years. It is also a practice run for normalising digital labour as a part of our work, even as we continue to shoulder the full share of responsibilities that we always did.

When we get back, there is going to be a huge thrust to convince us that things are back to normal. The impulse for normalisation is not going to go back to the old baseline. The work that we put in, taking enormous responsibility for caregiving towards family and colleagues, working beyond the call of duty to make up for the lack of institutional and governmental resources, is going to become the new normal. The digital is going to become a lever by which people are going to be laid off, their jobs replaced by automation. It is going to come with the promise of efficiency and transformation — code for restructuring organisations for profit and transforming the nature of work and distribution of resources.

The digital shift is long in the making, but the sudden shift has given many leaders the opportunity to experiment with their employees in real-time, seeing how much more work can be piled on people, extorting them to perform more and sacrifice their free time and health to the betterment of an economy where they are going to be asked to work more for less even as the few people who control it will be the only ones that profit from it. In the past, technological shifts fueled by other crises — the rise of computation after the end of World War II, the increase in digital security after the Y2K scare, the naturalisation of surveillance technologies after 9/11, the introduction of no-privacy governance databases after charges of terrorism, all come to mind — have led to dramatic re-ordering of life and society.

This pandemic is not an exception. As all that we know is suspended, there is a startling shift into a universe without safeties and entitlements. The new normal is not going to be an older one — which, even as it was problematic, at least had the bounds of rights and safeties. It is going to be one where the crisis is going to be normalised and we are all going to be forced, in our digital environments, to be stuck, experiencing this crisis, in how we work and live, long after the crisis is over.



### IMAGINE

BY SHELJA SEN

DEAR BOYS,

I AM WRITING this letter to you without any agenda to blame and shame. If you have been following the social media stories and news recently on “rape culture”, then you know what I am talking about. To begin with, I do not agree with the term “rape culture” that is being loosely thrown around as it assigns a single identity to all of us. People are multistoried, as is our culture. A single story of “rape culture” removes possibilities of boys and men being compassionate beings, who can stand up for gender equality, respect and uphold consent. The other issue I have with it is that it ends up othering the problem as if it is out there and we do not have anything to do with it. There is no “us” and “them” here. Misogyny seeps in our lives, homes and workplaces without us even realising it.

Let me say it loud and clear — consent matters, whether you are married, in a long-term relationship, or just there for casual sex or a “hook up”. It matters across gender, age, sexual orientation, class, caste, religion, everything. It does not matter if she has said “yes” earlier, if you have done it before, or you have heard from somebody else that she is “easy.” And no, you cannot blame it on your raging hormones, your manliness, the fact that you were too intoxicated or that you misread the signals. There are no greys in affirmative consent — it is black and white. Consent could range from checking if she is okay about getting messages from you to holding her hand, kissing her or having sex. It might be awkward and might break the flow but do it. Do not keep pushing as you might have heard, “girls like to be chased.” No means no. Don’t make assumptions that suit you. There are four elements to transgressions — consent, power, age appropriateness and context. Suppose a Class X boy posts a picture of a Class VI girl in his private WhatsApp group, it is a transgression on four counts — no consent, no equality of power (he is a lot older and is a male), not age-appropriate, and, in the wrong context. That is why it is ridiculous to equate the girl’s Snapchat to the #boislockerroom on Instagram.

If, by chance, you are a bystander (online or otherwise), then rather than staying passive, take an active role. If you are a child, talk to an adult you trust who will be ready to take action. Reach out to the person who is being targeted in whatever way you can and show solidarity. It could be as simple as saying, “This is not okay, what can I do to help?” If possible, gather like-minded people and address the

# No Means No

Deconstructing the nuts and bolts of ‘rape culture’, consent and active accountability



REUTERS

#### IT TAKES TWO TO AGREE

Activists hold a protest rally in New York in opposition to US Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and in support of Christine Blasey Ford, the university professor who has accused Kavanaugh of sexual assault

issue with the perpetrator. Every little step you take counts. If you stay passive, you continue supporting patriarchy.

We also need to go beyond all the mudslinging and talk about active accountability and what it means.

**AWARENESS:** There is no learning in public humiliation, expulsions and social-media shaming. It just leads to people not taking responsibility — “I am not sure if I even did anything wrong”, “Guess I will just have to be more cautious” — to gaslighting the victim with “it’s all in your head”. Altogether, no learning, justice or healing and maximum damage. We need to have conversations with our boys at home and in schools on sex, especially in terms of gender politics, consent, respect, empathy, transgressions. We need schools to step up and start a dedicated weekly classes on these and on diversity — on issues of gender, sexuality, neurodiversity, disability, body types, race, class, caste, justice, power, religion — not once in their school life but every week from Nursery to Class XII. That might be the most important lesson they will take with them as they step into the world.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** The seeds of gender criminality has its roots in our language. Language is the thread that weaves the dominant beliefs regarding gender, where gender is seen in binaries — boys as smarter, tougher, braver, girls as weaker, prettier, nicer and any

other gender as abnormal (I will leave the injustice of that for another column). No wonder when they grow up, men take charge and women are taken charge of. Their identities get restricted, where women need protection from men who are “tough” and “strong.” The “boy code” or “manning up” does not leave much scope for sensitivity and gentleness. Such are the warped and restricted dichotomies we set up for our children from a young age. But then there is another dangerous dichotomy — good girls and bad girls. Bad girls do not need protection, they are “free for all”. These are the girls who fall prey to the male gaze, who earn the label of “slut” in school, where all genders are united in saying, “she asked for it.” Media has to acknowledge the way it feeds into the dangerous discourse around gender and consent (Watch any Bollywood song to see how it plays out).

**ACTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY:** In a way, it was

There are four elements to transgressions — consent, power, age appropriateness and context

SHELJA

Dr Shelja Sen is therapist, writer and co-founder of Children First, a child & adolescent mental health institute. Write to shelja.sen@childrenfirstindia.com

## Healing Touch

The importance of art in the age of the coronavirus

Nachiket Chanchani

AS THE government of India looks to gradually reopen the economy, creative and cultural industries, a sector that has already been impacted by the ongoing pandemic, may be among the last to recover from the economic downturn. As the arts nurture public health and as cultural diversity is an essential aspect of the nation’s fabric, it is critical to keep this sector afloat.

For several reasons, creative and cultural industries are poised to suffer enormous losses. Many of India’s performing arts, museums and heritage sites have come to be tied to tourism, another sector poised to recover slowly as travel and social distancing restrictions will continue for some time. The perception that the arts and humanities are not essential to our society is entrenched. Since many artists, arts organisations and cultural workers have been the recipient of meagre grants from the government and philanthropic trusts even before the pandemic, their resources will diminish first. To counteract this, the development of a forward-looking cultural policy is the need of the hour. Recent symbolic gestures by the Union Ministry of Culture — such as inducting regional weaving traditions into national lists of intangible cultural heritage and illuminating the forecourt of the Red Fort with oil lamps — will neither preserve these practitioners nor the sites.

A recognition that the arts positively affect our bodies and minds is an elementary first step in formulating a new policy. Art fosters awareness, enhances social skills, increases self-esteem and slows cognitive decline. Many studies have shown that activities such as viewing a painting, listening to music or watching a performance strengthen learning,



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

reduce anxiety and heal trauma. Therefore, the arts are promoters of healthier communities in the intermediate and long term.

If the past is any guide, then by turning to it we might learn of other benefits of investing in the arts in times of crisis. As a famine extended its grip in Bengal in the 1940s, artists such as Zainul Abedin and Chittaprosad made sketches of the unfolding human tragedy. Some exhibited their work, others arranged for their speedy and inexpensive publication. Even as these ventures drew the colonial government’s ire, they inspired fellow Indians to contribute resources to ease the suffering of those most impacted by the catastrophe.

Two decades later, a severe drought hit Bihar. Pupul Jayakar, the then head of the handicrafts board, encouraged the women of the Mithila region to transfer compositions they had hitherto reserved for their nuptial chambers to paper. With Indira Gandhi’s support, Jayakar marketed these rustic paintings to urban audiences by emblazoning their images on trains, hanging them in hotel lobbies, selling them in emporia and showcasing them at international festivals. Since then, a dedi-

#### A THING OF JOY AND BEAUTY

A Madhubani painting by Padma Shri winner Sita Devi, one of the early Mithila artists

cated group of anthropologists, designers, museum professionals and government officers has revived many other ritual art traditions, including some on the verge of extinction. As a result, their makers have enjoyed fame, their rural communities have prospered and new forms of cultural expression and regional identity have flourished.

Alongside arts practitioners, now is the time to support arts scholars. Given the closure of Archaeological Survey of India-protected monuments, budgets allocated for repaving walkways, growing exotic flowers on lawns and installing dynamic lighting systems should be transferred to fellowship schemes for students and scholars of archaeology. Funds apportioned for the construction of grandiose experiential museums in the recently-concluded budget session should be transferred to charitable trusts devoted to advancing the history, conservation and enjoyment of art. These trusts should be allowed to help existing museums pay the salaries of positions critical to their missions and cover other essential expenses. The Ministry of Culture should publicise its pension and med-

ical aid scheme for artistes facing hardships, simplify the application process and expedite fund disbursement.

Over the past decade, The National Missions on Manuscripts and Libraries have scanned thousands of manuscripts. These digital resources should immediately be made freely available online. Scholars must be given grants to begin translating these texts from the ancient languages into contemporary tongues. Subventions should be given to presses to publish these works. The Ministry should give stipends to humanities researchers to write accessible essays and podcasts for a broad audience, including school children. Finally, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations should work with embassies worldwide to encourage private collectors and connoisseurs of South Asian art to donate funds to artistic organisations in India.

As cultural historian Lakshmi Subramanian recently reflected, music is one of the few transmissions in the human chain that can be safely amplified now. Governments might remunerate practitioners of musical and performing arts if they consent to teach students basic singing techniques through teleconferencing facilities. Following the lead of global pop stars, India’s agencies should initiate schemes that will disburse funds to local musicians who livestream melodies from their homes.

Today, India’s eyes are on China, where the pandemic began and which is now carefully reopening its economy. If we also take into account China’s modernising initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s that aspired to pull millions of its citizens out of grinding poverty, then we will see that they led to a paradigm shift in China’s cultural landscape. Many practitioners of long-cherished traditions found themselves tilling fields or working in assembly lines on factory floors, hundreds of kilometres from their hometowns. As these erstwhile practitioners aged and their unique skill-sets became rusty, an array of artistic practices that helped to shape China were endangered. Some artistic traditions even disappeared. Our creative and cultural industries are essential — they nurture public health and preserve cultural diversity, and so, these are among the nation’s most valuable assets in the age of coronavirus and in the years to come.

Nachiket Chanchani is an associate professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, US



RAVIKANUJIA

Devyani Onial

## The Orange Minivet Drops By

Ruskin Bond on the joys of simple living in complicated times, looking inward and gazing out

LONG BEFORE the world discovered the virtues of windows in this season of social distancing and staying home, Ruskin Bond let the world in through his. With the mountains on one side, the valley below and the road ahead, the view from Ivy Cottage in Landour, a corner of the hills that was once the headquarters of the American missionary community in India, is varied. "A long and ne'er-say-die search for the perfect window. This would be one way to sum up my life," writes Bond, one of India's most loved and prolific writers, in *A Book of Simple Living* (2015, Speaking Tiger). "Windows are all important, and not just for writers. I get the sunrise on my bed first thing in the morning. It wakes me up," he says. At his previous home, Maplewood Lodge, he found the solitude he sought, living next to the forest and writing from his window seat. Many of his best-known short stories, that make up classics such as *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988), *Time Stops at Shamli* (1989) and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991), emerged from that workstation.

It wasn't lonely though. A small plump squirrel would climb on to his window-sill, "a little out of breath with the effort" and eat groundnuts out of his hand, and, at night, the moths would beat softly against the window panes. "Mussoorie hasn't been this quiet since I came here in 1963. There were only two taxis then. I think, we have about 600 now. But the streets are near-empty," says the author, who was born in Kasauli, grew up in Jamnagar, journeyed through Dehradun, England and Delhi, before putting down roots in Mussoorie.

From his room now, he can see the road but the hum of everyday life is missing. The birds seem to have decided to compensate for the missing footfalls by increasing their number of flights. "In the early morning, I see far more birds than I used to and a greater variety, even some that hadn't been coming before. Yesterday, there was an orange minivet. It's more of a forest bird, it did not venture here earlier. Usually you will see parrots in the plains but they have been coming up for a holiday now that the tourists aren't," says Bond.

The hill station that sees traffic jams stretching to hours in the summer is now almost entirely made up of its local residents. "Mussoorie, of course, will miss the tourists because it's a town that thrives on tourism. All the business people are suffering," he says. The days are quieter and the trickle of tourists, book lovers and even honeymooners up the stairs to Bond's room, whose visits asking for

### THE CRICKET STILL SINGS

Ruskin Bond at his home in Landour, Mussoorie

blessings have always perplexed the author who has remained single lifelong, has dried up. Will the ease with which strangers turn up at writers' doors, join and leave conversations and the intimacy of touch that is such a big part of what India is, change in a world scarred by COVID-19? "In many ways, India is an informal sort of a country. In some other countries, you would be looked on with suspicion, whereas here it's perfectly natural to talk to a stranger about the journey, or to grumble or make a complaint and everyone joins in," he says. The fear of the virus may make people wary of each other but Bond says, "I think people will go back to doing what they were before. We go back to old habits. In India, it's hard to break with custom."

Writing for a living from the 1950s, when he was a young man of 21 to now, when he turns 86 on Tuesday, Bond has taken us through the natural world, past mofussil

towns and to the deep well of solitude. This, he feels, could be a moment to review and reorient our relationship with nature. "There is a feeling among people that this, to some extent, is the outcome of human interference with the natural world. I think it was Thomas Hardy who said God created a beautiful world and left it to us to look after it, which we didn't do too well. Hopefully, we will take better care of this wonderful inheritance," he says.

It may also be a time to connect to ourselves. "Maybe people will also get a chance to discover themselves in this enforced solitude, to become more thoughtful because we can't rush around as we used to, and we must try and make life as simple as possible to be reasonably happy and avoid complications. To live within one's means and not be over-ambitious, that's the road to contentment, if not happiness. Of course, it may be tougher to make a living now for sometime," says Bond.

As someone who always worked from home, his day hasn't changed much, maybe got busier, writing, and reading out stories for All India Radio, dipping into his rich repertoire, narrating a ghost story, a humorous anecdote and the tall tales of Jim Corbett's *khangama*. The writer promises a new offering soon.

"I have written some 10,000 words during the lockdown. They are partly philosophical, thoughts and observations. So far the title is, 'Where have all the people gone?' But that sounds rather pessimistic. I will perhaps change it to *Have a Wonderful Life*," he ruminates. That's a dose of optimism we can all do with in these uncertain times. We could also turn to the last lines of his autobiography, *Lone Fox Dancing* (2017), "I'm afraid science and politics have let us down. But the cricket still sings on the window-sill."

## Light Filters In

Jericho Brown on winning the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and being a poet in the time of the pandemic

Nawaid Anjum

"IT'S FUNNY winning the Pulitzer Prize in the middle of the pandemic. You can't go out to party and shake a bunch of hands," says Jericho Brown, winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize for poetry. But even as he stays at home in Atlanta in the United States, Brown, 44, has suddenly found the world reaching out to him. Since the announcement of the award, he has been giving back-to-back interviews. "I have never talked to so many people from across the world in such a short period of time before," Brown says, over the telephone.

Brown's win — just like that of fellow Black playwright Michael R. Jackson for his off-Broadway musical *A Strange Loop* — seems to symbolise the triumph of a community. The first Black queer poet to win the honour for his third poetry collection, *The Tradition* (2019, Copper Canyon Press), Brown is also the director of the creative writing programme at Emory University. Before the news of his win broke, he had been busy working on some essays about growing up in Louisiana and his work life. "There is a notion that in the United States you can get what you want if you work hard enough. In the essays, I wonder how true that is in a country where people work very hard but barely get by," he says. If things were normal, he would have headed out for a drag show, a karaoke session or to a strip club to celebrate his Pulitzer win. But, in the new normal, Brown did the next best thing: introspect and meditate. "I did it with the same intensity that I would have partied with," he says, bursting into a guffaw.

The interplay between the other and the self has been the hallmark of Brown's poetry. Part of what he reflected on after the win was the significance of being a poet in this particular moment of history. "Poetry is about re-

silience. It holds out hope because it changes our minds. That can lead to a change of action," he says. His win comes 70 years after the African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks became the first Black poet to win the Pulitzer for *Annie Allen* (1949). "Brooks's works made way for the books that I am able to bring in this world," says Brown, who dedicates one of his poems to her. Between them, six Black poets, including Rita Dove (1987) and Yusef Komunyakaa (1994), have won the award. Like Dove, Brown is interested in exploring "the most intimate moments, the smaller, crystallised details we all hinge our lives on."

Born as Nelson Demery III in Shreveport, Louisiana, Brown's landscaper parents did yard work. His childhood memories are of going to the Baptist church with his deeply religious parents and his father beating up his mother. Having discovered his sexual orientation early, Brown kept thinking of committing suicide. All of that is in the past. He has changed his name and learnt to live with his many identities — a Southerner, a queer and a Black man, blending them all into a single, cohesive identity: a poet.

In his poems, Brown dwells on the contentious relationship with his father, the quiet submission of his mother, and the vulnerabilities of being a Black man in America. In *As a human being*, he writes about how he fought "your father and won, married him/He'll have a scar he can see all/ Because of you/ And your mother/ The only woman you ever cried for..."

In his writing, he adheres to the tradition of American poets like Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson in the same measure as he follows in the footsteps of Brooks or Dove. His poems in *The Tradition* — on a wide range of subjects like Blackness, queerness, fatherhood, legacy, worship and trauma — capture the quests of survival and beauty amid cruelty and violence. There is also a deep undercurrent of



STEPHANIE MITCHELL

### A POET OF WITNESS

Jericho Brown, winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in poetry

politics that runs through them. "When I write, I am not trying to make political statements. But I do know that a political statement will be made because that's the history of poetry all over the world," he says. An ardent admirer of former US President Barack Obama, Brown is, however, quick to point out that there had been other Black people in the US who were "capable and smart enough" for the job. "He was the first Black President, but he was not the only one we could've had," he says.

And so, Brown grapples with racial injustice, normalisation of terror and naturalisation of inequality in his work. The increasing number of hate crimes against Black men in the US often come up in his poems. "I am a they in most of America," he writes in *Stake*. "Sometimes you is everybody," he writes in another poem.

Brown's previous collections include *Please* (2008), which explored the intersection of love and violence, and *The New Testament* (2014), which meditated on race, sexuality and faith. "There is an amount of tenderness in all my poems. No matter how much steeped in violence the poem might be, it restores tenderness because that, too, is a part of the human condition. If I am a poet of witness, then I can't only witness a tragedy, I am a poet who can also see joy," he says.

In *The Tradition*, Brown invents a new poetic form called duplex, which weaves together elements of the sonnet, blues and ghazal. Brown, who listens to a lot of ghazals, besides songs by Michael Jackson, Diana Ross and Stevie Wonder, says it was born of his interest in linking forms that could encompass different kinds of identities. "A poem is a gesture toward home," reads one such poem. Does his poetry take him home? "What a poem really should do is lend access to all our experiences. It should be honest about all the forms walking around in you," says Brown, who has been living with HIV since 2012. In one of his poems, he refers to his body as "a temple in disrepair", in another, he writes of being "consumed by a single diagnosis of health".

His illness has long made him aware of the uncertainty of life but the pandemic has been an eye-opener. The US response to it, he says, has been "embarrassing and humiliating". President Donald Trump has recently asserted that COVID-19 will "go away at some point without a vaccine" but Brown knows how far from truth that is. In the poem *Virus* he writes, "I want you/ To heed that I am still here/ Just beneath your skin and in/ Each organ/ The way anger dwells in a man/ Who studies the history of his nation... If I can't leave you/ Dead, I'll have/ You vexed."

## DOWN IN JUNGLELAND



Ranjit Lal

Ranjit Lal is an author, environmentalist and bird watcher

## The Eyes Have It

Lockdown blues? There's a kaleidoscopic new world waiting to be discovered

NATURE LOVERS these days must be tormented to be stuck indoors, watching TV documentaries on natural history. And yet, as I discovered decades ago, there are enough astonishments lying around, in the house, garden, or even a flowerpot, for you to discover, enjoy, and photograph. Decades ago, I became fascinated by what things looked like in magnum close-up and got myself a small microscope whose lens was basically a glass bead. But you could see the features of an ant's head with it, or details of a bee's wing. Of course, I had to photograph these, so I snapped open my father's ancient "fold out" Zeiss Ikon, aligned the lens as close to the microscope's eyepiece as possible and clicked. The pictures resembled primitive X-ray images but were exciting for me. You could see the hooks at the edges of the bee's wing with which the hind and front spans attach so they work as a single wing.

Then I graduated to my first single-lens reflex — a heavyweight Russian Zenit-E that fired like a rifle and had an excellent 58 mm normal lens. I got myself a bellows unit, which, when attached between the body and the lens, enabled you to obtain up to a four-times the magnification on a sliding scale. An entire new world opened up.

Peer into a water drop and see the whole world suspended inside it. Or, the photographer's favourite — spiders' webs strung like strings of pearls on the foliage on dewy mornings. Even better, a bejeweled dragonfly's wings you could photograph at leisure because the insect was still too chill to fire up its engines! Most enthralling of all, on a cool, moist morning in Mumbai's Borivali National Park, was discovering what's called leaf "guttation" — the exudation of sap from a leaf as spherical droplets, arranged like a tiara on the edges of a leaf. Dewdrops on rose petals is another old photographic cliché, which you can fake with a sprayer. Another wonder was the details of a skeleton leaf — the intricate filigree of its veins is truly amazing. You could see the barbs and barbules that made up the edges of feather vanes, en-



RANJIT LAL

### WHO IS THAT ALIEN?

A robber fly

abling it to keep its shape after a bird had run its beak through it.

Other "everyday" things, too, when seen real close-up could take your breath away. The translucent flakes of an orange, backlit by the sun (or even a lamp) against a velvet black background was like a work of art. And then, I discovered ice cubes. When just formed, they had the most astonishing internal structures, and by using coloured transparent paper you could compose the most magnificent works of modern art. Another source of magical and ghost-like abstract imaging was the swirls and curls of smoke rising from a resting cigarette, in a pitch-black room with just one spotlight (I used my slide projector) to light them up. Lately, I discovered you can photograph rainbows on the playing side of a CD, useful for explaining the basic physics of light to children and why a duck's head shimmers purple and emerald. I've framed some of these images and conned many by passing them off as the Northern Lights!

Get up close to insects and other creepy crawlies, the fearsome details of an ant's mandibles will reveal themselves. You'll also understand from where Hollywood directors got their "inspiration" to create the look of the Martians! Look deeply into the beady eyes of a cockroach or those bright, obsidian eyes of a jumping spider on the wall. Always focus on the eyes. A robber fly once flew into the room and I went really close to make out the thousands of lenses that made up its giant compound eye!

To capture flying insects was a completely different ball game. Back in the mid-1970s, I discovered the work of Stephen Dalton, who had made it his passion to do just that, with strobe lights and infra-red triggers and whatnot in his very life-like dioramas. He used the peerless transparency film, Kodachrome, and the results were outstanding — bees and wasps and butterflies in take-off, or mid-flight, pin-sharp from head to toe! This sort of thing galvanises you even though there's no way you could develop the sort of equipment required. So, you do the next best thing: wait for wasps to hover close to their nests, when they move the least (but still far too much) or you go after those wonderful flying machines: hoverflies. These guys can suspend themselves stock still in mid-air and if you're quick on the draw you can nail them. Even so, I used up a criminal amount of expensive film on them (this was before digital), with just a couple of acceptable results to show. But it is worth it, every time (the equipment is so much more advanced today!). You may just find a kaleidoscopic new world ready to be discovered.





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