

Booming Pharmaceutical Startups and e-healthcare Amid the Pandemic

By Varuni Trivedi & Avani Pai

Assisted by Oshii Saxena & Surabhi Srivastava

The COVID-19 pandemic posed both a challenge and opportunity for India's healthcare startups. On one side it exposed the deeply rooted vulnerabilities and inherent cracks of our healthcare system while on the other hand, it brought forth an opportunity for pharmaceutical startups and small businesses to boom amid such a scenario. The lockdown as well as limited access to diagnostic labs and doctors amid the social distancing norms led more patients to embrace online consultations. Many healthcare startups emerged out as leaders as they made the most of the opportunities while dealing with the lockdown challenges. Despite several inherent challenges, these startups engaged themselves in developing solutions for COVID-19 applications in the fields of immunity-boosting, prevention, and operational efficiency. However, limited imports that led to broken supply chains, in turn, led to extremely high rates of raw materials in the domestic market. Thus, the pharmaceutical industry in India and all across the globe has been on a roller coaster ride since March 2020. While according to the World Health Organisation's stats, the Indian medical infrastructure is alarmingly low as per the appropriate standards, startups seem to be gearing up to cope with this situation.

The severe situation and almost absurd medical infrastructure called for immediate action from every stakeholder in the medical industry. Many healthcare startups have been trying to fill the gaps in India's medical infrastructure while coming up with innovative formulas. One such story is about the collaboration of 200 medical entrepreneurs, who were initially called 'Founders against Covid-19', they had set targets to come up with

innovative solutions against the wrath of this pandemic. Their initial plan of action included building a quarantine app to live track the patients that have tested positive and keep track of their location. Similarly, an automobile startup called Droom developed an antimicrobial surface protection shield for vehicles, which they called 'Corona Shield'. It was designed to prevent the growth and multiplication of the virus and other microorganisms on surfaces.

An Agra based startup called Angel Biotech has upped its game after the pandemic and has started manufacturing more immunity boosters, multivitamins, and multi-minerals that have been in heavy demand lately. Founder of the company Vineet Lathey says, "Initially as the pandemic hit in the month of March, all of the medical industry was kind of clueless and confused but we too gained pace and understood what the need of the hour was." "We have come up with an immunity booster called 'Immunaid' which consists of all the vitamins, minerals and ayurvedic extracts that one needs, as doctors have been heavily prescribing these medicines to all kinds of patients." Another start-up from Pune called Jeevtronics is now finding its defibrillator devices in high demand across India and Africa. Defibrillators are used to restore the normal heartbeats of patients and are extensively used by doctors across the world. Their manufacturing went up in the first few months of the pandemic and has been staggeringly high since then.

While for many medical startups the sales growth figures were tremendous a lot of e-healthcare platforms saw staggering growth as well. Some experts went on to say that

e-healthcare in a post-covid scenario can be a gamechanger. Medlife, a Bengaluru based platform witnessed a spike of 200-300% in terms of overall orders. Whereas masks, hand sanitizer, and other such specific categories too, witnessed a 4 to 5 times surge in orders. However, even e-healthcare startups are facing fall-backs in meeting the needs due to heightened demands and lowered supplies.

Many experienced doctors shifted to online consultations via video conferencing. Dr. Rajeev Pachauri from Agra who specializes in ENT said that some consultations can be made online however certain medical checkups cannot be done via video conference due to a lack of effectiveness and accuracy which may result from this. He further added, "Many may say that the medical industry boomed however the challenges that healthcare workers are facing during covid are immense." He concluded by saying, "e-healthcare or web consultations are convenient methods but physical tests can't be made online, even the patients don't feel satisfied until they have physically met a doctor."



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Woes of Waste Disposal

By Avani, Nishant and Varuni

Waste management system of India has reached a concerning stage. With national level focus on waste, it is only in recent years that this narrative has found its way into politics. Though one of the agenda especially for the leading political party, BJP, in India has been surrounded around waste generation and disposal since 2014, the results are nowhere to be seen. The landfills in major cities especially Mumbai and Delhi are growing large day by day. According to the estimates of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Mumbai and Delhi generate about 11,000 and 8,700 tonnes per day of solid waste respectively. A parliamentary committee report of 2016, remarked that Ghaziapur landfill in Delhi reached a height of 65 meters. A report of the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board notes that the leachates generated from the dumping ground are not collected properly and untreated leachate directly finds its way to creek/sea through drains.

Waste management is not just a big city issue anymore. Mangalore, a city in Karnataka generates 350 tonnes of waste everyday. In late 2019, waste from a landfill in the Pachchanady area flooded into the houses nearby and destroyed farmlands of about 2,000 arecanut trees, 150 coconuts trees and various other fruit-bearing trees. Being the only landfill for dumping garbage in Mangalore, this landfill reached a height of over 50m stretched across one kilometer. The affected people were compensated only in October 2020.

The situation has only worsened because of the pandemic. The flare-up of Novel Covid has not just uncovered the helpless medical care foundation and absence of readiness to fight a pandemic yet additionally provisos in the waste administration measure in the nation. As indicated by a report recorded by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in the Public Green Council in July, India creates around 101 Metric Tons for each day (MT/day) of Coronavirus related bio-clinical waste. This amount is notwithstanding the normal bio-clinical waste

age of around 609 MT for every day. The report unmistakably expresses that the accessible limit with respect to the cremation of Coronavirus biomedical waste in the nation is around 840 MT against the all-out age of around 710 MT for every day.

Swati Singh Sambyal, an independent waste management expert, expressed her opinions saying that this elaborate exercise gets compromised because of a critical issue -lack of segregation. "Municipalities develop biomedical waste from Covid houses, but it often has other household waste mixed in it. Not only does this put the waste collector in danger, it decreases the efficiency of the incinerators at waste treatment plants because it leads to greater emissions and unburnt ash. These facilities", she added, "are for anatomical waste, cotton swabs and other items that can't be autoclaved."

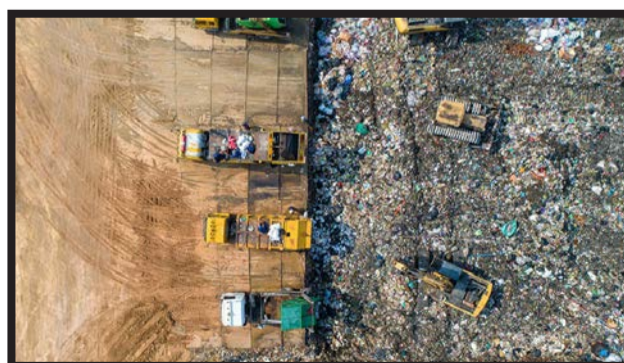


Image Credits: India Briefing

Dr B. Venkatesh, who manages biomedical waste for the East Delhi Municipal Corporation, said they are trying to do their best to properly segregate waste. "The general public is using masks and gloves, and it has been advised that they follow the guidelines, but it isn't always the case that they do," he said. "We have issued a circular to all our officers telling them they need to follow these guidelines, but we haven't for the public yet. We're We're trying our best with it," he added.

Various cities have started taking initiatives in the form of waste segregation in order to tackle the menace. Mangalore Municipal Corporation has implemented new rules that impose fine on households that do not segregate waste. The fine ranges from Rs 1,500 for not segregating household waste to Rs 25,000 for dumping construction debris in open spaces. "We have proposed an idea of installing CCTV cameras at different locations all around Mangalore to avoid dumping in open spaces" Said Madhu Manohar, environmental engineer at MCC, "Households, hotels, educational institutions, businesses who convert wet waste into compost will get a rebate of 50% in solid waste management cess they pay as part of property tax."

The Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) has now categorised the solid waste into 16 different categories an upgrade from its five categories segregation and has asked all residents to undertake the segregation of solid waste. "It is important to take such strict steps in order to get better results," said CCP commissioner Sanjit Rodrigues, "All residential complexes, hotels and other waste generating bodies will have to comply to the new rules or face penalty."

Some organisations, such as the NGO 'I Am Gurgaon', are tackling this problem head-on by taking initiatives that create awareness by exemplifying aesthetic upcycling and offering citizens resources for waste segregation at its Gurgaon-based Samadhan Hub Park.

Some cities have made an inspiring example by taking small efficient steps. Alappuzha, a coastal city in Kerala, introduced a system of decentralized waste management around six years ago. Instead of collecting the garbage produced and dumping it in a single spot, the municipality started waste management processes, in which the waste is treated at the source of production itself. Bio bins and pipe compost are offered by the municipality at subsidized rates. In February this year, this city bid farewell and closed down its only landfill all due to combined efforts of citizens and municipality.

The alarming rate at which landfills are becoming huge issues, waste management models are needed of the hour. As different cities line up to adapt various models of waste management, the vision of a cleaner country seems achievable.

Are E-Bikes and Bike taxis replacing autos and buses?

By Shreya Kachroo and Upasana Singh

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to changes in several spheres of society. Whilst people have become more conscious about increasing their immunity, adapting a healthy lifestyle, maintaining hygiene, and so on, they have also shifted to alternative transport services due to the fear of using public transport. Given the restrictions put in place by governments worldwide and the risk of contracting the novel coronavirus, changes in the way energy is used across economies is becoming more and more apparent.

One of the biggest changes in transportation patterns include reduction in passenger transport demand. Although transport companies such as Uber and Ola in India have introduced new safety measures during the pandemic, people are still hesitant to use

these modes of mass transport. Amit, a 26 year old Uber cab driver in Delhi said, "Earlier, I used to get around 20-30 customers per day and now, I can hardly get 10 on a weekend. I sanitise my vehicle every time a customer leaves but people are still scared of using cabs."

Public transport services in the national capital have been operating ever since the lockdown was lifted.



Image credits: New Indian Express

According to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, in certain sections of the metro network, occupancy is reaching the 100% mark during the morning and evening peak hours. However, transport services such as e-rickshaws that passengers often used to reach their destinations after the metro ride have witnessed a significant decline. The story in Mumbai is quite similar. Although the local trains have resumed operations, the fear of contracting the virus has stopped several people from availing the service.

Moreover, people living far from the stations who earlier used to opt for buses or share rickshaws are in a terrible fix now. This fear of public transport has led to a surge in two-wheeler mobility in various states.

The general public is fast adapting to the idea of e-bikes and bike taxis in several metropolitan cities. Yulu, an electric bike provider that started operations in 2017, running a fleet of 10,000 bikes across Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru has even announced an increase in their operational electric bike numbers to 1,00,000 by 2021 to facilitate the growing demand. The launch bike taxi service Rapido in Mumbai too has fast gained popularity amidst

the pandemic. Frequent Rapido user Umang Verma says, "Rapido is less hectic than travelling in a local train and significantly less cheaper than an Uber or Ola. I don't think I will ever go back to any other mode of transportation."

Sanitary measures taken by these service providers such as the inclusion of a "last sanitized" timestamp on the Yulu app and back shields for Rapido bike captains as well as Rapido's no ride without a mask policy and mandatory sanitisation of all customer accessible areas after every bike ride play a major role in people being attracted towards these services. If e-bike and bike taxi providers continue to maintain their popularity even after the pandemic ends, it could potentially lead to a decrease in the pressure on public transport in several jam packed cities.



Image Credits: Time8 Now

Rising price of food commodities striking the Indian market with fear

By Shraddha Tiwari & Nabodita Ganguly
Assisted by Ashish Chandra

The agriculture sector of India has been plagued with a recent surge in price of food commodities ranging from vegetable and edible oil to dairy products and cereal grain. While the situation is termed as 'food inflation', a severe impact is on farmers and traders since the imposition of nationwide lockdown earlier in March is blatantly coming through. Bappa, a vegetable vendor from Baranagar, West Bengal, spoke to INK about the rise in prices of food commodities and conveyed the harsh repercussions of the lockdown on his local business. "During lockdown, the prices of vegetables increased because buses and trains were not functional and these commodities couldn't be bought from other places. So with limited stock, vegetables had to be sold at more high prices than usual," he sighed. Expressing great agony, he stated how the lockdown period cost almost 50 per cent of his earnings. Bappa added, "Small businessmen like myself cannot change the prices of agricultural commodities. I have to buy from the wholesaler and I have to go ahead with whatever prices available."

The steep rise in prices of commodities at a time when the nation had been facing a severe crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic led to several hardships to people across all states. Sumit Pawar, a Maharashtra based trader operating with hundred farmers in supplying the produce to cities such as Pune, Mumbai, Ahmedabad etc. projected the price to rise in case of commodities such as onion. He said, "Such price fluctuations have not happened before. Due to the lockdown and untimely rains the situation for onion prices resulted in being volatile. However, the major contributor to the high rise in onion

prices has been the export ban by the government this year. When the prices were already high due to supply-demand mismatch in lockdown, the export ban did not help at all."

Coupled with the sudden export ban over commodities such as onion, the government also amended the Essential Commodities Act which gives power to the government to regulate certain food items in catastrophic situations such as famine, war, or natural calamities in September. The change removed commodities such as onions, potatoes, edible oil from the legislation's list rendering no control option to the government. With the government not regulating the stock of these commodities anymore, it is believed that it can lead to poverty.

Expressing concern about the huge rise in prices of potatoes in the market, Bappa mentioned that it is becoming hard to sell them as during the lockdown there has been an increase in unemployment resulting in excess surplus.

The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, on November 9 sought the intervention by the central government to control the inflating prices. While the central government did intervene earlier in October to ban the export of onions in order to control the prices in the domestic agricultural market, Pawar highlighted that the ban led to sudden stoppage of trucks domestic agricultural market, Pawar highlighted that the ban led to sudden stoppage of trucks loaded with food commodities near the borders due to no prior notice to farmers and traders. He further added, "Since the commodities couldn't be sold off, our stockpile rose. Farmers were in urgent need of money so we had to sell it all off before the festive period in November gets

over domestically. Now that we have done so, there is hardly anything left to sell which will increase the prices more in coming months."

As of mid-September the price of onions fluctuated to Rs.3000 per quintal in Lasalgaon, Maharashtra which hasn't lowered since then till November 23 as per our analysis from the regular data provided by the National Horticulture & Development Foundation, New Delhi. The trends further suggest a consistent rise in the commodities' prices since March after the imposition of lockdown. With the ongoing price rise of food commodities, ten central trade unions have also called for a general strike on November 26 all over India to protest against various changes brought in by the government in the farming sector including the recent amendment of the Essential Commodities Act.



Image Credits: IANS

A realtor's journey of creating an opportunity in adversity

By Kashish Arora and Vanisha Jagwani

“One of the biggest lessons the pandemic has taught me is the law of impermanence. Every single thing from the global weather pattern to our individual cellular structure is constantly changing, and understanding and accepting this reality gives us the ability to look past any negativity.”

Real estate Developer Ashok Doshi, who is known for some effective arrangements in his vocation got compelled to make a gigantic business move as the pandemic hit the real estate sector, radically. From running a smooth business in Dubai, the real estate professional turned businessman diverted most of his money from the land industry to the agribusiness area. This led to the emergence of Farm Fresh, a new line of organic items produced using fresh fruits and vegetables, now accessible within easy reach at every leading supermarket in the UAE. Farm fresh is an inspiring project with sentimental roots started with a stroke of luck to stork a life purpose that involves serving self and others.

Enchanted by the success of his business idea, he says

that the pandemic was quite a journey for him. Thinking about the distinction between the initial months and the rest often sets him off on a memory trip whereupon recollection of various vignettes of life, he finds himself making decisions to begin something more concrete and satisfying. This business idea originated from a change in his life perspective where his intention has not only been of building a new business but also venturing into such an arrangement that could all the while satisfy his life purpose of serving others, as well.

He acquired a farm of around 180,000 square feet in the year 2015 in Ras Al Khaimah as a spot to spend some quality time with his family and friends during weekends. The elements of divinity and nature had always sent him on a relentless pursuit of soul-fulfilling. Determined to keep adding something to the equivalent, he had always made use of this land to do some small-time farming for his home produce. However, little did he know that his steady experimentation with an assortment of agricultural techniques would lead him to discover hydroponic farming which

would additionally be utilised as a staunch business idea.

On being asked about his lesson and how he put it to practice to bring this conversion, he said, “Survival had become extremely difficult so I had to keep doing something. It was the right time to move beyond what I was already doing. My new line is a product of my philosophy which builds its edifice on the foundation of an adamant belief that one must go after their calling, something that holds the potential to fill them with satisfaction. This business aims at leaving a positive impact on the environment as well as the people”

On another piece of land in the same area of about 690,000 square feet, he began farming on a large scale in the month of April when the entire UAE went on a sterilization drive. Today, in less than five months, he has managed to create a good amount of employment opportunities for thousands of jobseekers, who would not only help him in the robust supply of a variety of herbs but also provide help with transportation, packing, putting technology to best use and expansion of his sales.

Walking Towards a Greener Earth with Nemital

By Rhea Binoy and Bornika Das
Assisted by Navamya Acharya and Sneha Mothey

When Pooja Apte was pursuing her Post Graduation in Renewable Energy from The Energy and Resources Institute in Delhi, she learnt about recycling and upcycling of fabric, tyres and plastic. “The issue is very serious right now, there are approximately 15 million tonnes of scrap that are generated worldwide and no one is doing anything about it. The recycling process goes through the process of pyrolysis in which the tyres are burnt at high temperatures which releases steel gauze, carbon and oil. If the tyres are kept in the landfill, they will cause more harm to the environment than the process of pyrolysis”, Pooja explains.

She then thought about upcycling the tyres, and came up with the startup Blink Green, and started manufacturing footwear with a range called Nemital. “Since the product should have minimal contact to the hands and face, I decided to go for footwear.”, she adds.

Nemital – ‘Nemi’ meaning tyres and ‘tal’ meaning ‘shoes in Sanskrit was launched in the summer of 2019 with the product being in Research and Development for quite a while. “Initially we came out with two prototypes, one was made out of airplane tyres and the other one was made with car tyres, it was made with the assistance of local shoe makers”.

With these prototypes, Pooja went on to participate in the Startup India Yatra and ended up winning the award for the Upcoming Woman Entrepreneur. “I received a Rs 50,000 cash prize which went for more Research and Development of the product.”, she says.

The Nemital consists of nine people, with her friend designing the shoes, some people for office and six cobblers who help in making the shoes, on a contract basis. “The funding now happens through MUDRA loans, and the material is locally outsourced if they cannot provide us with the material, we are touch in with scrap companies who help us in with the material.” To this date, Nemital has upcycled a total of 500 kgs of tyres. Pooja says, “We haven’t used leather, fabric to make it more sustainable” explaining more benefits of using upcycled tyres she says, “The soles of the shoes are made from virgin rubber and plastic, but at Nemital we make it from tyres”.

Till last year, the product was being sold through exhibitions and taking customized orders, but since the pandemic, the business was affected. Since then, they launched a website. “In March, the sales were zero, that is when we decided to launch a website in August and go pan India. Since then, the business has been steady and has been picking up”, says Pooja.

Nemital makes customized shoes and also sells products which are now available on their website. “We make designer sandals, bellies and wedges, and also specialize in Kolhapuri sandals while even making shoes for men and with a few designs for kids as well, all in the price range of Rs 600 to Rs 1000”, she concludes.



Image Credits: Nemital (Instagram)

Muted, drowned and censored: How journalists are deprived of their freedom in India

By Snigdha, Nikita, Rujuta
Assisted by Ashish Chandra and Suramya Kaushik

Media is the fourth pillar of a democracy where it not only reports and informs people about the day-to-day happenings but also acts as a watchdog, keeping a check on the excesses of the legislature and the executive. However, the ideal situation for the Press needs to be its freedom from all sorts of threats and violence, and retribution for their action. This is not the case for India which fell 2 ranks below to 142 out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index according to the 2020 Reporters Without Borders annual index. Since 1992, 51 journalists have been killed in India for doing their job. November 2nd marks the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. India stands at the 12th position on the Global Impunity Index 2020 by CPJ just behind Bangladesh and Russia.

At a time when the entire world is grappling with the coronavirus pandemic, the Press Freedom Report by Rights and Risk Analysis Group, an independent think-tank, showed that as many as 55 journalists were targeted in the pandemic between the months of March and May. During the nation-wide lockdown, the government openly violated human rights law and targeted dissenters reporting against them.

November 2020 saw cases of violence and intimidation against journalists:

- Journalist Milan Mahanta was tied to a pole and beaten mercilessly in Kamrup district of Assam over his report on local gambling and land mafia. (Nov 18)
- Journalist Parag Bhuyan, a senior journalist was killed by a speeding vehicle under suspicious circumstances. He had exposed various illegal activities taking place in Kakopathar, Assam. (Nov 11)
- 6000 copies of Tripura newspaper were snatched and destroyed from passenger buses in Udaipur by goons over the reporting of an alleged 150 crore Agriculture scam in the state. (Nov 7)

Talking about the violence against journalists, Khushboo Kumar, a reporter at the Free Press Journal said, "Today anyone who is raising voice against the injustices happening in India is facing oppression and journalists tops the list here. This practice of pushing down us, journalists, is not new but now it's been noticed because even we are being heard. However, that brings more challenges, we're being heard by those who we speak against. They want to throw us out of their way! Violence is how they choose to do it now. It has increased and is being ignored by the officials who should help us. Women journalists are facing special trouble related to their safety, this was expected when I entered the profession but now I know it can only affect you when you don't have any support."

A threat to life and violence has always existed for a journalist, but with more and more women entering the profession, the cases of sexual assaults and rape threats is on the rise. Another new form of attack that has originated in the age of social media is online trolling to bring disrepute to a journalist's reporting, often with the politicians themselves encouraging these online trolls by calling any news that doesn't support their views as 'fake news'.

Laws protecting journalists-

Article 19 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech and expression to all its citizens. But everything comes with a rider, the rider here is Article 19(2). It states that free speech should not harm the sovereignty and integrity of the country, be indecent or immoral, hamper its security or relations with other foreign states, be a contempt of court, or incite an offence. India lacks a cumulative law for journalists. While the laws do not mention the press, these laws are often used as a blanket law to fortify the scribes or to shush them down.

Maharashtra is the only state to have some law to guard the journalists. In April 2017, the Maharashtra Assembly passed the first-ever law to protect journalists on a state level. The Maharashtra Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss to Property) Act, 2017 provides for a jail term and a fine of up to Rs 50,000 for any one convicted of physical violence against a media person or a media institution. The offence is non-bailable. The act

has clearly defined what constitutes violence, media person, and a media institution. While physical assaults can draw charges on an attempt to murder, in most cases, a proper case is not even registered.

Great investigative stories come from the tip-offs of a whistleblower. The need for a Whistleblower protection mechanism arose in 2003 after Satyendra Dubey, a project engineer with the National Highway Authority of India, exposed corruption in the Golden Quadrilateral Project in Bihar. While he was shot dead in 2003 in Gaya, the persons accused were given a life term in 2010. The country has a Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 as an act of the Parliament which has not been implemented so far. An amendment to the same was introduced in 2015 but the Bill was not passed by the Rajya Sabha and as a result of which it lapsed. In today's time, however, this act is only applicable to public servants who expose alleged wrongdoings. For listed companies, the Companies Act 2013 makes it mandatory for all entities to have an audit committee to investigate whistleblower complaints. There is no specific law on whistleblowing applicable to private employers in India. Some progressive companies (especially subsidiaries of MNCs) have incorporated a whistleblower policy as part of extending their global policies but they constitute only a minor percentage.

RTI activists, too, have been facing the brunt. While several remedies have been suggested, there are ample loopholes. RTI requests are generally passed around the relevant departments and the chances of personal information becoming public are high. In the absence of specific privacy law or a data protection act, RTI activists are exposed to a lot of risks. A report by Christophe Jaffrolete and Basim U. Nissa in 2017 points out that 69 RTI activists have been killed since the act was passed in 2005.

Often ignored in this ambit are the freelance reporters and citizen journalists. These two are defenceless because they do not have a specific union as such to back them and neither the monetary backing. Speaking to Tarun Kumar, a citizen reporter from Jamshedpur, it was found out "that since (we) are not backed by organizations, it is hard for us. We do not have a professional network nor a professional ID. People think we are implicating them by taking out the news. You need a lot of goodwill."

Laws used against the journalist:

Between 2014-2020, several journalists have been shushed for speaking the truth. For being 'the world's largest democracy', the political parties have less tolerance for un-fabricated news and only prefer painting a hunky-dory picture. Time and again, the Indian government has continued to exploit several laws to subdue the voice of dissent. One of them being the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 2019 – its stringent anti-terrorism legislation to suppress journalists and people who do not conform to the government's ideas. Numerous cases of journalists being thrashed, arrested, or even being forced to resign have come to limelight for trying to report news about the government or any argumentative issue.

According to the UAPA 2019, the government can designate a person or a group as a terrorist if they:

- Carry out or participate in acts of terrorism
- Layout a plan of terrorism
- Encourage terrorism; or
- Get involved in a plan of terrorism

India's position in the World Press Freedom Index degraded over the last five years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. The Reporters sans Frontiers (Reporters without borders) informed that in India, freedom of the press has been violated persistently, and several cases of police violence against journalists, attacks by political activists, and vengeance prompted by the mafia and criminal groups or officials have come up.

Journalists have also been booked under Indian Penal Code Section 124A for the offence of sedition and even under Section 500 for defaming a person, labelling a journalist as a criminal prosecutor.



To mention a few from the recent times:

- In 2018, scholar Anand Teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha, a journalist, were charged under the UAPA for allegedly provoking caste-based violence in the Bhima Koregaon riots. The duo was also accused of having connections with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) and conspiring the assassination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- In April 2020, Peerzada Ashiq, a journalist, was interrogated by the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) police for alleged dissemination of 'fake news'. The very next day, Masrat Zahra, a photojournalist from Kashmir was booked under the UAPA for "uploading anti-national posts with criminal intentions to induce the youth." Zahra's photographs were picked up by outlets like Al Jazeera and Washington Post.
- In May 2020, Dhaval Patel, editor and owner of Face of Nation, a Gujarati News Portal was charged with sedition under Section 124A and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, for spreading false panic. Patel was booked for publishing a report proposing "suggesting the possibility of a leadership change in Gujarat due to criticism over rising coronavirus cases."
- In as recent as the Hathras gang rape and death case, Journalist Siddique Kappan and three others, were arrested by the Uttar Pradesh police and were charged with Section 17 of the UAPA (raising funds for a terrorist act) and sedition. The police claimed that they got a tip-off about some 'suspicious people' and seized their laptops, mobiles and some books that they carried.

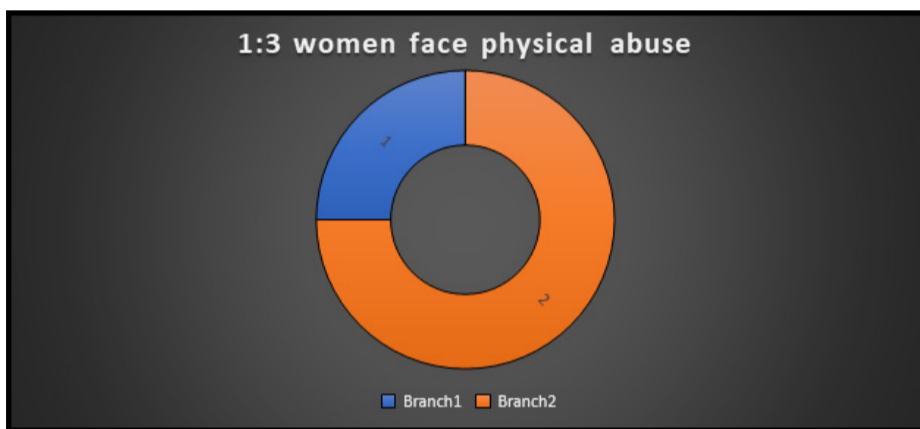
These are just a few of many stories where journalists have been pulled down for their jobs faithfully. This era has brought in online violence along with physical violence in the field and sexual harassment at the workplace. All these combine to make journalism an unsafe work environment for women as well as men. Journalists should be recognised for their bravery and honest work instead of being subjected to violence and hatred. After all, it's important to keep in mind that in the absence of a support mechanism, they might just get reduced to a spokesperson rather than a watchdog.

Atrocities against women at its highest amidst lockdown

By Mallika Chugh, Pallavi Mehra and Shweta Jamsandekar
Assisted by Asmita Pant and Surabhi Srivastava

“Crime against women takes place at four levels-societal, community, individual and gender. Matters related to women are mostly hush-hush situations. The norms and traditions tend to bind women as submissive, snatching away their personal identity,” - Aditi Mehra, psychology practitioner.

their perpetrators with no support mechanism available owing to the pandemic. India’s National Commission for Women (NCW) registered 587 domestic violence complaints between March 23rd and April 16th – a significant surge from 396 complaints received in the previous 25 days between February 27th and March 22nd.



Crime against women have drastically increased in recent times and have become one of the major issues disrupting the stability in society. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, 1 in 3 women face physical abuse by their sexual partners, let alone someone else. To top that, almost one-third of every Indian woman faces domestic violence on an annual average. The 2018 National Crime Records Bureau’s (NCRB) report stated that the crime against women have risen to 7.3% with the average rape cases recorded per day have gone up to 87 rapes in 2019. With 118 women per lakh population, Assam registered the highest number of cases regarding crime against women in 2019.

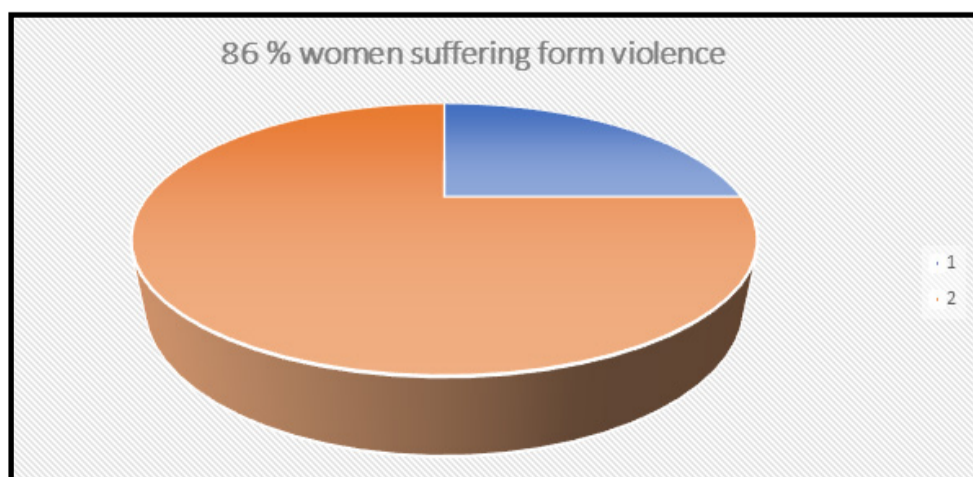
Around 86% of women who suffered any kind of violence did not seek help and 77% of women did not even mention being tortured in any sort. Most of the ones who reached out for help contacted their immediate family members instead of a doctor or lawyer or a psychologist.

“Factors accelerating violence during lockdown are poverty, frustration and unemployment in general,” said Shanu Pant, a practicing lawyer. Head constable Pushpa Lokhande stated, “Crimes due to substance abuse mostly happened in slums wherein the unemployment rate was higher.”

Amendments in the law and change drives in forms of gender equality campaigns, large amounts of alimony and working women concept have been initiated throughout years but less have been transformed in the structure of the society. Such comments and figures reflect an alarming situation which needs immediate attention along with adequate and satisfactory combating as well as remedial strategy.

“Such crimes keep on happening mainly because these acts are justified and men believe they can get away with it due to poor legal construct. Another biggest reason is to satisfy the male ego and maintain dominance,” said Aditi Mehra, a psychology practitioner.

Since the government still fails in providing timely and satisfactory justice to the survivors, the atrocities seem to have increased immensely during lockdown wherein women were always exposed to



Is Biden’s Win Beneficial For Indian Stock Market in the Long Run?

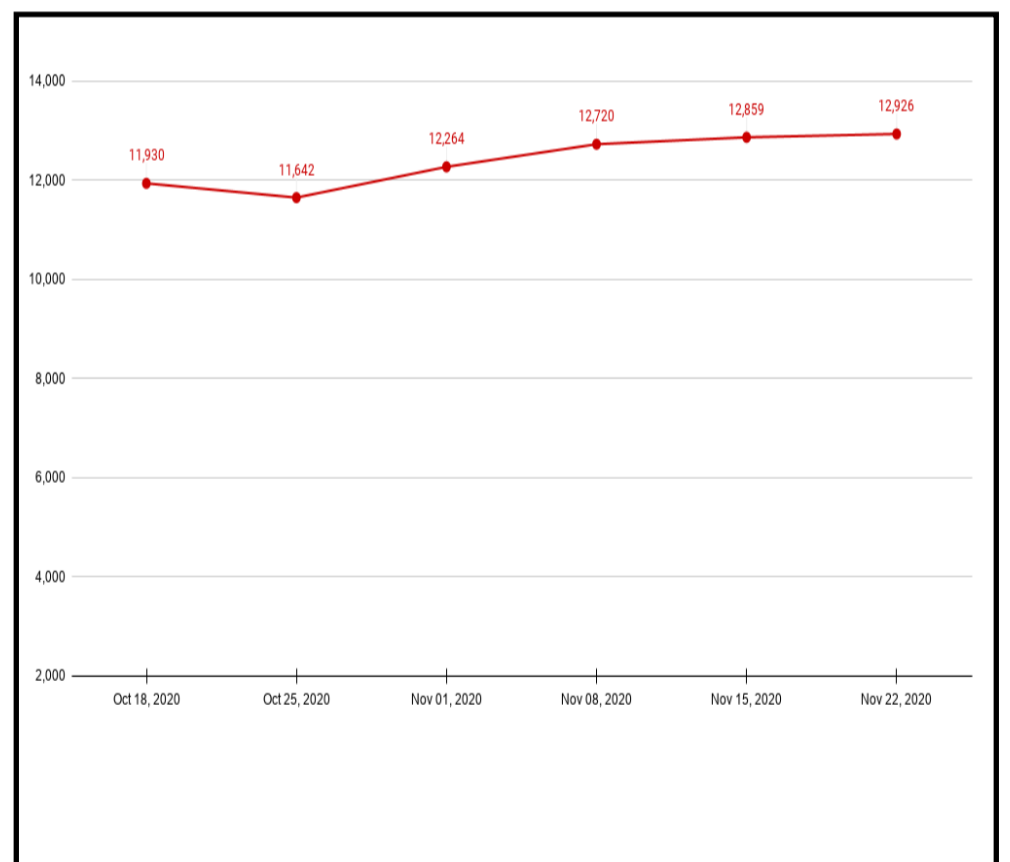
By Rhea Binoy

As the US elections moved towards a nail biting event, with Joe Biden winning the Presidential elections in the US, with Kamala Harris. The investors all over the world put trillions of dollars on the line, with India also in the race as it is seen as one of the emerging markets. Kartik Pingale, a stock market expert said, “The Indian Stock Market has reacted very positively to the outcome of the US elections. The reaction was positive since the Nifty 50 index recorded an all time high last week”.

more favorable trade policies with Biden coming to power, providing a boost to the Indian investors. “Joe Biden’s policies will have a positive impact on the Indian markets in the long term as well. Investors hate uncertainty, and unlike Trump, Biden will bring stability to the White House”, Pingale said. He also adds that Biden’s stands on the immigration and environmental issues will create a flow of jobs.

In 2016, the investors were in for a surprise when Donald Trump won, however due to refined polling methodology, the experts held Joe Biden favorable. “I still remember the panic in Indian markets after Trump won in 2016. The opinion polls were much more reliable this time as the pollsters refined their methodology. Global markets were very much in favour of Biden because of better policies and his past experience in handling the 2008 financial crisis”, Pingale said.

Various sectors in India are projected to flourish since Biden has been elected to power, especially the ones of whom the majority chunk of the revenue comes from the United States. Pingale believes that the IT sector is projected to be the winner because of the policy certainty and the relaxed immigration norms and if the trade tensions with China are eased, the chemical, pharmaceuticals and the metal sectors are likely to do well.



While reports already suggest that President-elect Joe Biden has already spoken to the Asia Pacific allies, and assured them of the United States commitment. The debt in the Asia Pacific market is already rising as investors expect better returns from the emerging markets. This is reportedly due to the extremely low interest rates in the US, the foreign institutional investors have already poured in Rs 16,945 crores in October 2020, and Rs 37,972 crores in November 2020.

The United States of America being the biggest economy in the world does affect the global economy. Investors remain cautiously optimistic regarding the situation now. “Biden is largely considered to be a one term President due to his age, and political partisanship may lead to a reversal of policies in the future”, Pingale added.

Analysts at UBS Global Research concluded that India will be in benefit from the

As they inform that the macroeconomic data is expected to be positive in the future as economic activity restarts with the positive news on the vaccine front, India has to look at the domestic problems to solve, with growing NPA’s being the biggest hurdle.

Youth's journey to spread awareness regarding Kondapochamma Reservoir Dispute

By Manaswini Tripathy

As a part of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme, the Telangana Government constructed the 15.8 kilometer-long Kondapochamma Sagar Reservoir, in order to make the Godavari a perennial river. This new tourist spot, set to attract masses in Hyderabad, was inaugurated on May 25, 2020, by K Chandrashekhara Rao and a few local ministers. With water spreading up to 17.07 square kilometers, the Kondapochamma reservoir is a project which cost the state government up to Rs. 1,668.66 crore. Other than being an eye-catching tourist spot, this reservoir which collects water from the Markook surge pool will provide irrigation to over two lakh acres of ayacuts through 13 canals. The water is said to be first released from Akkaram pumphouse to Markook, and then it is released into the reservoir.

Geographically, the Kondapochamma Sagar Reservoir expands up to 6,000 acres of land which covers six villages from the Gajwel constituency, and 90,000 acres in Awarnagal, Mulugu, and Gajwel Mandals.

However, the reservoir completely submerges three villages, Mamidala, Birampur, and Tanedarpally; leaving the villagers homeless who also lost their lands due to this project. According to media reports, the TS Government had promised the villagers to pay them compensation money and provide



Image Credits: Telangana Today

them with new homes in the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) colony. Although, a viral video by a student from Hyderabad explains how the authorities dragged the locals out from Mamidala, Birampur, and Tanedarpally and were forcefully shifted to Rehabilitation and Resettlement colony, on April 30 2020.

Sai Aditya, a student from Hyderabad found information on V6 Telugu News that the farmers and locals were asked to evacuate the villages at midnight. "After watching the news on YouTube, I wanted to confirm if the facts were right, so I decided to drive down to R&R colony. The situation was grave. Several villagers and locals were affected by this project, and suffered a great financial loss," said Aditya. He further added, "The villagers suffered so much only because they filed a case against the Government, as they weren't receiving the right compensation. Farmers lost their lands, and now they are jobless, none of the locals from Mamidala, Birampur, and Tanedarpally were compensated for their loss by the Government."

According to the video shared by Aditya on YouTube, most families received dysfunctional apartments which are small for joint families, and during the rainy season, they suffer a lot. "Most of us don't know the harsh reality behind the Kondapochamma Sagar Reservoir project, and I wanted to spread awareness about the plight of these villagers and wanted the officials to take appropriate steps in favour of them," said Aditya.

Through the video, several residents in Hyderabad got to know the truth about the suffering of the villagers, and the issue got great momentum. After a month and a half of releasing the video, Aditya with the help of a few other people raised some funds for the villagers and provided essential kits and food to 200-230 families. However, after speaking to Aditya, it was understood that to date there is no change in the situation, and the people from Mamidala, Birampur, and Tanedarpally villages are still waiting and hoping for the Government to take actions at the earliest, and compensate them for their losses.

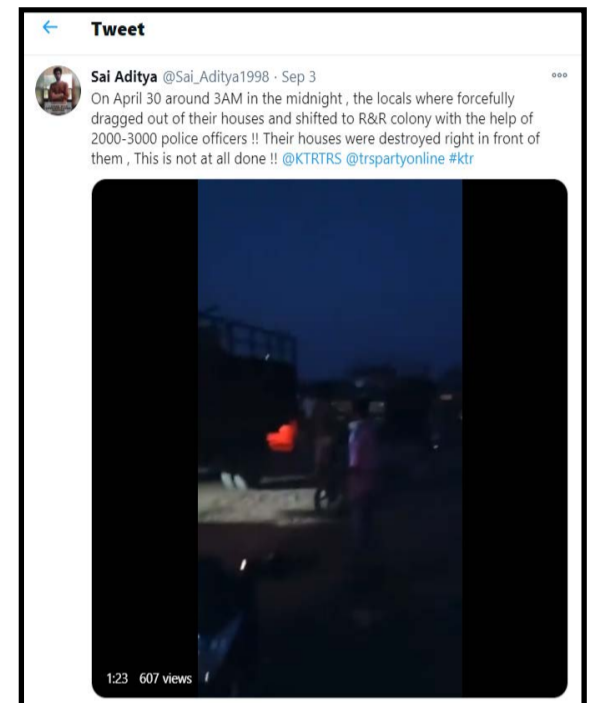


Image Credits: Twitter (Sai Aditya)

Sky High Cut-Offs declared by Delhi University's Non-Collegiate Board, Students Raise Concern Over Declining Accessibility of Education

By Manya Saini

Assisted by Damini Solanki and Sangam

"The goals with which it was founded, and where it has ended up today are in a sharp and deeply painful contrast," laments Bhavya Banerjee, an activist and former print editor of DU Beat, a student-run news publication when asked about the Non-Collegiate Women's Education Board (NCWEB) cut-offs for the academic year 2020-21. NCWEB, now a well-established institution came to life in 1943, with an amendment to the Delhi University Act, 1922.

As per the designated merit-based policy of admission, the University recently declared its cut-offs to various courses taking aspirants by surprise. Two of the most reputed and sought after colleges, Hansraj and Miranda House opened general category counselling at 88 percent for B.A. Programme while it was 87 percent for B.Com Programme. In a stark departure from earlier years, the average for all affiliated colleges for undergraduate courses was at an all-time high of 82 percent. Dr. Shivali Agarwal, Admission In-charge, Department of Political Science, Daulat Ram College commented on the trend stating, "NCWEB is not an exception, the cutoffs are staggeringly high this time across the board. Unfortunately, many aspirants will not make the cut, however, the university declares it by the seats available and applications received."

The Board allows women residing in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi to study under a unique system that allows them to attend classes only on weekends and work simultaneously. It was founded on the principle of making a safe space for women to be free from gender discrimination, social pressures, and continue their education after a long break. "It is so important that everyone realises education is not a free-for-all, some have problems others don't. I worked as a tailor and supported my family while getting a degree from Miranda House.

Today I have a corporate job as a content specialist which would have been impossible without NCWEB," says Priya

Sharma, a former postgraduate student of NCWEB at Miranda House.

The declining accessibility of non-collegiate education has raised concerns and several demands have been made to rectify the situation. Many student activist groups such as the All India Students Association (AISA) have asked that the University create a policy of reservations to protect the marginalised and economically disadvantaged aspirants. An online signature campaign launched by the students union with these demands recently received support from over 25,000 people. There has been so far no official response from the university about the contention that NCWEB's resources are not fulfilling the goal with which it was established. According to the data published on the Board's website, currently, it only accommodates 20% of its total applicants

Despite the issue being raised over and over again since the declaration of the cut-offs, it has received little to no media coverage. Roshni Mohan, a social worker in the field of higher education said, "What is to be done when no one is willing to acknowledge

that there is a problem waiting to be solved in the first place?" The sentiment is echoed by aspirants of lower-income groups who have found themselves neglected and abandoned amid a pandemic. The desperate need for full-time jobs for their families has led to severe neglect of their education. Mohan on the need for change and awareness adds that "I have seen it over the years that public education though for the most part affordable, remains largely out of the reach of students who need it the most."



Image Credits: First Post

Kerala Aims to Track Garbage Digitally with its Smart Garbage Monitoring System

By Saikeerthi

Assisted by Meenakshi Maidas and Vishal U

The Kerala Local Self-Government Department is all set to implement a digital alternative to tracking garbage disposal in the state. In a project approved recently, the Smart Garbage Monitoring System being developed by the Kerala State Electronics Development Corporation Limited (KELTRON) is to be released next year, according to sources. This project will be implemented through the Haritha Keralam Mission and will take over the current system of allotting Haritha Karma Senas to panchayats and municipalities to manually keep track of information regarding garbage disposals.

An official from the Local Self Government (Department C) in charge of the sewage disposal and solid waste management confirmed that the project is currently being developed and will seek to ensure that local bodies and residents will be able to track and understand the disposal routes. This will ensure greater transparency and efficient planning as opposed to the current system. It will also, reportedly, allow residents to lodge complaints directly to the concerned authorities regarding inefficient garbage collection or disposal in their respective locality through its Complaint Redressal System. KELTRON officials stated that “the project seeks to positively influence the current disposal system in the state. If implemented, it would prove to be an innovative step in the right direction and towards a cleaner Kerala.”

However, they refused to disclose any design features for the reason that it's an ongoing project and statements will be made only upon its completion. P. Ajaykumar, the Technical

Officer (Waste Disposal Management) at Haritha Keralam Mission commented that the whole idea behind the app is to track everything related to waste management. This includes information about where it has come from, where it will be disposed of and even the type of waste disposal processing done by each house. “It (the system) also seeks to track the movements of the waste collected from the house to Material Collection Facilities (MCFs) in Panchayats and mini MCFs in different wards, where the collected waste is stored. The app also has provisions to collect information such as quantity and monetary details of non-biodegradable waste which is sold on sorting.”

On how the introduction of the app can help Haritha Karma Senas, he said that “The app can monitor the nature/type of waste as well as the quantity of waste collection along with information on the residents of the house. The system bridges the gap between the HKS workers and the residents by notifying both the parties about garbage pick-up timings.

The app also tracks whether the fixed fees for the HKS workers has been received from each house.”

According to reports from the Haritha Keralam Mission, the project idea has been influenced by the Smart Trivandrum mobile application. This app locates the nearest waste management or recycling facility and even provides garbage pick-up updates. A similar template is being used for the Smart Garbage Monitoring System, however, on a much larger and inclusive scale.



Image Credits: The Better India

The instant popularity of Among Us

By Netra V. and Sanjukta Mandal

Assisted by Disha Palkhiwala and Yagnoseni Das

2020 has proven to be spectacular for video game enthusiasts in India. Ever since lockdown had been imposed in the country in March, different online/video games have received a plunge of surge. Even after the commencement of unlock, the surge continues. One such game which saw a huge rise in usership interface was ‘Among Us.’ Released in 2018 by American game studio InnerSloth, Among Us saw an upsurge on Twitch during the lockdown alongside PubG, Ludo King, PES, etc. Among Us is available on Windows, Android and iOS, and is set in a fun, space-themed environment where a group of players take on the roles of either a Crewmate or an Impostor. Among Us became the most suitable game for the people who wanted to kill time during lockdown. “I would play the game almost every day for over an hour with my friends over discord,” said Anuradha Banik, a 22-year-old MBA student when asked about how often she played the game.

Among Us, a multiplayer game for four to ten players creates excitement among the players with a format quite fascinating. For each round, one to three players are anonymously selected to be the imposter(s). One game can be placed on one of three maps: a spaceship called “The Skeld”, a headquarters building called “Mira HQ”, or a planet base called “Polus”. Tasks are allotted on every level and crewmates win by completing these tasks. Crewmates can also win by identifying and eliminating all imposters. For imposters, they need to equal their number to the crewmates for winning. There is even an option for chatting (mostly strategy discussion) among the crewmates. “The most exciting part of the game is being the imposter and killing the crewmates and not getting suspected,” added Anuradha.

During the period of lockdown, India saw an upward surge in

the usage of online platforms and online gaming. According to the reports presented by Maple Capital advisors, online gaming companies found 24% spurt in traffic during lockdown. It was observed that students as well as working professionals turned to online games for recreation. The report presented by ‘Gaming - India Story’ forecasted a compounded annual growth rate of 32% for online gaming in India to \$3.7 billion by 2024 seeing the rise in digital infrastructure. Presently, the sector values to \$930 million from \$360 million in 2015.



Among Us has become the most downloaded mobile gaming app worldwide for two months now. It was downloaded for 74.8 million times in October. 15% of the Indians have downloaded Among Us. It became majorly popular as famous YouTube stars, Tik Tok influencers and streamers like PewDiePie, James Charles and Dr Lupo streamed it on their channel. Today, Among Us Discord servers have almost

98,000 players in a single server. When asked about why she thinks the game suddenly became so popular, Snehasmita Das, a 24-year-old Mass Media student said, “The game is strategic in nature and is relatively easier for a non gamer.” Both Snehasmita and Anuradha agreed on the fact that being an imposter and killing the crewmates is the exciting part of the game.

The game's continuous success propelled even further with the increase of the Among Us related content on the internet.

Several Twitter accounts that publish memes about the game have hundreds and thousands of followers, while Tik Tok views including hashtags related to Among Us have reached more than 13 billion views. Amongst this frenzy, the U.S presidential election 2020 saw something that was unexpected, when US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez live-streamed the online game along with fellow Congresswoman Ilhan Omar and YouTube personalities like Pokimane, Hasanabi and Jake Septic to encourage young Americans to vote before the US Elections on October 21, 2020. When asked about her thoughts on the use of the game for political campaigns in the US elections, Anuradha said, “I think it's pretty smart on their part considering how popular the game has become,” while Snehasmita told, “It's a good idea. People who might not be into politics may come across the memes of the game and the US elections.”

Recently, it had to go through a massive spam attack as its app was hacked. The games have had massive spam messages that are threatening and mysterious. Reportedly some messages threatened to hack devices. The players have asked the developer to resolve this issue. The games should be kept after resolving the issues like hacking, this is what the gamers are looking forward to.

Indian Super League 2020: Ushering Towards the New Era of Indian Football

Aayush Kataria and Ritaban Misra

India's glamorous football league or what we all know as the Indian Super League has returned for its seventh season, starting off from 20th November, 2020. While the league continues to prosper and help Indian football take a leap towards becoming a force to reckon with, the 2020 season comes with a host of chances. Even though the novel Coronavirus made sure that no events would occur the way it has been, for all these years, ISL has promised to make the return of the sport rightly described as 'passion' in India amidst the tyranny caused by the pandemic. All matches will be played across three stadiums in Goa with no fans howling chants at the top of their voices on the stands.

In a historic move, two of India's greatest and oldest entities, Mohun Bagan A.C. and SC East Bengal which were previously only known for Club Football and are famous for their age-old heated rivalry in the state of Bengal will become a part of the league for the first time ever. While the

ball group. The Abu Dhabi Royal Family who own this group are also the parent company of English football club Manchester City and have stakes in nine different clubs across the globe. Adarsh Kumar, an ardent Mumbai City fan from the club's origin claims "investments like this will help Indian football not just quality players but also more opportunities for Indian players through player exchanges within the city group." Kumar also expects the club's popularity within the city to rise. He states, "Cities like Mumbai and Navi Mumbai have a heavy influence of European clubs. There is a possibility that the fans who support clubs like Manchester City or even Chelsea and Manchester United can get attracted to Mumbai City FC, due to a big brand like City group."

Team INK spoke to Noel Adrian Corera, junior associate at Sportz Interactive, who claimed that the inclusion of the famous Kolkata clubs will lead to ISL's fanbase



Image Credits: ISL (Facebook)

fans of the two clubs have so far shown animosity to this new decision, this season is set to change all views and raise all expectations, as both fanbases enthusiastically await their teams to take lead on the field.

Shoubhanik Saha, a passionate Mohun Bagan A.C. supporter claims that this season, "Indian Super League will be better than ever, because the passionate Green and Maroon supporters have joined the ISL bandwagon."

Meanwhile, East Bengal fanatic Ratnadeep Mukherjee infers that, "it is impossible to organize any successful event without these two clubs and their inclusion in the Indian Super League was just a matter of time."

This season is set to set a mark because it will be the first full season for Mumbai City FC since taking over the City Foot

ball group. The Abu Dhabi Royal Family who own this group are also the parent company of English football club Manchester City and have stakes in nine different clubs across the globe. Adarsh Kumar, an ardent Mumbai City fan from the club's origin claims "investments like this will help Indian football not just quality players but also more opportunities for Indian players through player exchanges within the city group." Kumar also expects the club's popularity within the city to rise. He states, "Cities like Mumbai and Navi Mumbai have a heavy influence of European clubs. There is a possibility that the fans who support clubs like Manchester City or even Chelsea and Manchester United can get attracted to Mumbai City FC, due to a big brand like City group."

Corera added, "The competitiveness of the league is going to increase a lot with 11 teams this time which will also bring more game-time for Indian players to showcase their talent." While talking about City Football group's investment, Corera said, "It is too early to say what impact they will have but their recruitment of players and coach with Mumbai has been very impressive. If they can continue to attract top quality foreign talent, it will raise quality of the football in the league especially young Indian players."

Finally he paints a positive picture for the Indian Super League which is still finding his feet saying "The only for the league is up." The fate of the Indian Super League, football in the country, and Indian sport in the COVID era will depend on how the next five months pan out. But for now, fans can appreciate having some high-quality sport back on Indian soil amid the pandemic.

Hills of Munnar Waking from a Sleeping Spell

By Ashitha S. Prasad

COVID-19 quite didn't leave the stage even when most of us wished for it. After months of being curled up on beds while facing screens clad in our pyjamas, people have started to feel the desperate need for a break. A weekend trip to the nearest tourist spot is the ideal way for taking that much-needed break from all the stress 2020 has gifted.

The hills of Munnar carpeted with tea plantations, patterns of cardamom farms, cascading waterfalls, Nilgiri Tahrs (mountain goats) and wild elephants within the pockets and decorate with tree houses is one of the most popular holiday destinations in Kerala.

Jilo Jose has been the manager at Shamrock Holiday Home, Pothamedu, Munnar for over a decade. Years of working and living on these hills have made him a better source than a google search on Munnar. He narrates how the pandemic episode has been for this well-loved scenic place.

"6 months following the nationwide lockdown was the loneliest this place has ever been. Most of the staffs was sent home. However, I couldn't because staying back was a safer option," says Mr Jose. He explains how he was the single soul within the walls of the resort and over the months and how all his meals were also a way to finish the stocked food ingredients customers. When questioned about other residents of Munnar who depend on tourism for their income, he stated that the famous local stores selling freshly produced tea were forced to shut and homemade chocolate sellers were forced to be vegetable vendors to earn a living.

In the month of October when the Kerala government opened various tourist locations, Munnar finally woke up from its silent spell. Mr Jose happily sighs as he talks about the first booking he received after months of staying alone in the resort. "Finally, in October we started getting calls and emails regarding reservations. It felt like resuming to duty after a long break and nothing else had made me this

happy in a long while." He further adds, "There has been a shift in the tourist pattern. I have observed tourists for years and Munnar always attracts travellers from abroad and Indian from Non-South Indian states. Currently, almost all of the tourists are from Kerala or the surrounding states."

Despite being extremely happy about receiving bookings, Mr Jose says that it can only be said that conditions are better but not okay. "Prior to the pandemic, this resort has mostly been fully booked throughout the year. Post pandemic, the resort is more than half booked during weekends and long leaves but once the weekdays begin there are barely 2 rooms filled or none. This has forced us to appoint only a few staff and made it impossible to provide employment for the others who were sent home."

He understands why there is a dip in tourism, but he reassures that it is quite safe to travel to Munnar. "All the people in this area (Pothamedu) were tested a week ago and no one tested positive. We also follow all the safety guidelines set and make sure that the stay is perfectly safe for our guests. We don't want to put ourselves or anyone in risk. After all, a vacation shouldn't add to more stress."

The Hills of Munnar is an ideal place to be if you wish to sip some good tea, watch hills blanketed with clouds, spot some rare wildlife, go for treks and to relax alongside a waterfall but don't you dare forget your mask and sanitizer.



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