



India's Draconian Lockdown

On 24th March, at 8.00 pm Mr. Modi, Prime Minister of India ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting the movements for the entire population (1.3 billion) as a preventive measure to contain the spread of Corona virus. On this day, as per Worldometers (www.worldometers.info), 121 Corona positive cases and two deaths were reported. The air, rail and road travel suspended and the cities got shuttered on the 25th of March. Panic gripped the country as millions of people got stranded. Later, this harsh lockdown was extended until 8th of June. Unfortunately, after this long lockdown, the virus continues to infect more and

more people every day. Instead of flattening the COVID-19 curve, the government flattened the GDP curve and the economy of the country is now in peril !

The forgotten People

When Modi asked Indians to stay home, he forgot those who have no home to stay. The lack of preparation is astonishing : no consultation of state governments and medical experts.

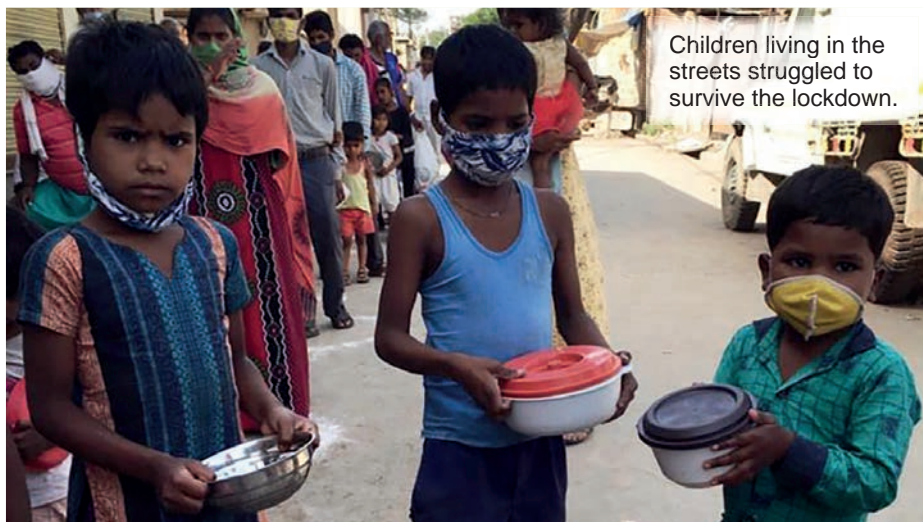
The worst affected from the lockdown are the 11 million estimated street children who live in cities. Government arranged camps for them. Help was sought from NGOs also to provide assistance and food to the needy.

Another category of people who suffered most are the over 100 million migrant workers. These informal workers are the backbone of

the big city economy. They migrated from the villages to do small jobs. With no work and no income they couldn't continue to live in the cities. The house owners put them out on the streets as they were not able to pay the rent. They got on to the roads and walked for hundreds of miles without sufficient food and water. Many did not make it to their home village. This heartbreaking plight still continues, hundreds of thousands continue to move into their joint family homes, often with ageing parents. Unfortunately, because of this, the lockdown to contain the virus had the opposite effect. More and more villages became hotspots of the epidemic.

Flattening the economic curve, not the corona

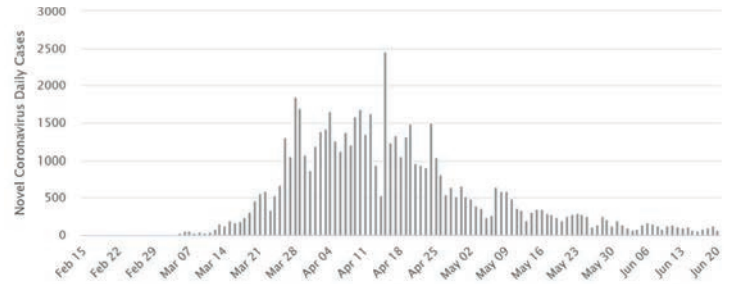
By imposing one of the world's harshest Covid-19 lockdowns before preparing it adequately, Modi has inflicted unprecedented dam-



Children living in the streets struggled to survive the lockdown.



Lockdown turned the migrants into refugees overnight. Their workplaces were shut, and most employees and contractors who paid them vanished. The fleeing migrants carried the disease with them, spreading it all over the country.



age on India's economy and on the poor, who live hand-to-mouth at the best of times.

According to some estimates, more than 120 million people lost their jobs immediately with the lockdown. And about half of the country's population of 1.38 billion is likely to have been impoverished, with many approaching starvation levels. 140 million have registered for job application.

Opposition parties have been asking the government to support the people with financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 (125 €) but it has not happened. The central government transferred Rs. 500 (6 € !) to the women account holders. At this hour of need, the state governments have not seen the helping hand of the centre either.

In St. Anthony's School

On 16th March, the government declared two weeks of holiday for schools. The ongoing Central Board exams for classes 10 and 12 were postponed till April 3rd. The families of our south teachers started to get anxious

about getting them back home (2000 km from *St. Anthony's School*). There was a lot of uncertainty at that time, and we decided to linger for few more days before taking the decision to arrange their departure. Each passing day, it became clearer that the re-opening of the schools on 3rd April would not be possible. Also there was a big risk that they would remain stuck in our campus for a very long time in case a full lockdown was decided. On 22nd March, the Delhi government imposed curfew and we foresaw the probability of Delhi borders and the airport being closed without delay. There was no time to wait, we immediately booked the available flight tickets for the next day and the teachers from south (*Kerala and Tamil Nadu*) left from school early morning on 24th to catch the last flight in the afternoon. Meanwhile the borders of Delhi were closed and our vehicles couldn't enter the city ! We dropped the teachers at the border from where, with much difficulty, they managed to find local taxis. As they boarded the last flight, we had a sigh of relief !





Online classes

Many schools started online classes using tools like Whatsapp, Zoom, Google classroom, etc. However, these classes were accessible to only the students whose families are equipped with a computer or a smartphone and internet connection needs also to be available. For our students of classes 12 and 10, who have to prepare for board exams next year, the teachers started having classes via whatsapp and zoom, but only 40 percent of the students could profit from it. Later, we started using a more structured system, Microsoft Teams, by which the teachers and students could work at their own convenient time. It had its own limitations as well. Eventually we extended the system to other classes too. *Rahrai* teachers kept in touch with the students via whatsapp, but only a very few turned out, the children are still very small. Following the government order, the ITI staff too started online classes for the students.

The staff's salary

Private schools like *St. Anthony's School* receive no financial support from the gov-

ernment. They pay their staff's salary from the fee collected from the students. While private schools with rich students managed to continue collecting fees, the schools in the remote and poor localities couldn't. Teacher's community is badly affected by this Covid-19 epidemic.

With the support of *Anthony's Bread*, we paid all the staff of our projects till the end of May. What will happen in the next few months is uncertain, the reopening of the schools in July will not be possible and nobody knows when it could happen. Schools cannot afford social distancing with more than 45 students per class. The school buses are full when they bring children from the villages. The return of the staff is also uncertain until the situation gets back to normal.

The director of the project, principals of our two *St. Anthony's* schools, ITI and other responsible people for the village work, stayed back in our campus. They are attending to the



The local government requested our SHGs to stitch the mask at the rate of Rs.2 (0.02 €) . Tissue was provided.



needs of the project and collaborating with the government in fighting this virus. *Anthony's Bread* provided food for the families and old people in the villages. We collaborated with the local hospitals and police stations and other public places to provide sanitisers and masks. Awareness program in the villages are held. Our women from SHG stitched masks on demand of the government. The school building if need arises will be used for quarantine.

Covid-19 in our project areas

The government took drastic measure to implement strict lockdown in the villages as well as in the cities. Those who are found on the road unnecessarily were even beaten up.

We distributed grocery kits to the elderly and to the poor families in the project area.



People who returned from foreign countries were kept in quarantine for 14 days. The return of migrant labours from the metropolitan cities like *Mumbai*, *Delhi*, started bringing in the disease and currently the number of infected people is going up. There is still no community spread in the villages around our projects, but the situation is of great concern.

We are in touch with our staff from the leprosy colonies. Positive cases were reported from that area early in March and since then they were completely isolated. With no income coming in, they survive with the food supplied by the government. The inhabitants of the colony have common toilets, they also collect water from common place which add to the risk of contamination. Our students who have been out of the station are back at their homes now.

The lockdown in India was relaxed on June 8th, at a time when the infection rate kept growing. No police control as before, people are now free to move. The migrant workers are still coming back, infected. New cases are emerging from the villages. Will it be possible to control the spread without putting back people into lockdown? The government seems to have lost its control.



Police staff of Asmoli ran out of sanitisers and masks...