Dr. (Maj.) Amar Lanka describes the successful efforts of the Kerala administration in handling COVID-19.

Within two weeks of our school reopening this term, India had its first three cases of COVID-19, all from Kerala. By February 3, Kerala had issued the first phase of ‘state calamity warning’ and the state machinery had been set into motion long before the Indian government took notice of the calamity in the making.

Soon, a team of twenty four experts from various fields like epidemiology, community medicine, infectious diseases, paediatrics, drug control and food safety got together to draw a plan to deal with COVID-19. This team had the Health Minister Mrs. Shailaja, also known as Shailaja Teacher, at its helm. A science teacher in a high school before joining politics, she had successfully contained the deadly Nipah virus outbreak in 2018. It was made into a superbhit medical thriller film called ‘Virus’ (viewing suitable for all). The WHO had called Kerala’s handling of the Nipah outbreak a “success story”.

By January 30, the date when ‘patient zero’ was confirmed, the team under Shailaja Teacher had begun setting up isolation wards in all medical colleges, general and district hospitals. Doctors and nursing staff were deployed across the state after training. The government also set up twelve testing labs to enable early identification of COVID-19 patients. While the rest of India, along with countries such as the UK and the US, wouldn’t take stringent steps to limit movement for another two months, Shailaja Teacher had ordered Kerala’s four international airports to start screening passengers in January itself. All those with symptoms were taken to a government facility, where they were tested and isolated; their samples were flown to the National Institute of Virology 700 miles away. Kerala promoted social distancing and the use of masks by the public from January 30 itself, the first state in the country to do so. Schools and colleges were closed on March 10.

So, how did this high school teacher do it? What is there for us to learn to be a true leader and not just a manager?

The key lies in the way Shailaja Teacher handled her responsibilities. She was watchful of what was happening in Wuhan, gather information and be smart enough to predict what was coming. At the same time, she constituted her professionally qualified team and empowered them to think and make coordinated decisions. Her team would analyse data and come up with solutions with a scientific temperament. Her team included public-health experts, doctors, data-entry operators, epidemiologists, and technical assistants. Medical students had been roped in to handle distress calls to helplines.

Another vital element of Shailaja Teacher’s method of action was to empower the people.

The state set up a 250,000-strong volunteer force in just two days on March 26 via an online portal. The volunteers’ work included getting standby ambulance drivers, nurses, and paramedical staff to assist the 3,000-strong health workforce. Others were deployed to deliver food packets to the poor or keep surveillance on those under home quarantine. On the ground, the team looked at practical methods for efficient deployment of the medical teams. A three-tier system was put in place, which divided doctors and their teams into three groups, two active and one on standby. No group would work for more than one week and none would come back to work for two weeks after that. The health department provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to all caregivers and paramedical staff and issued guidelines for sample (Continued on the next page)
The team, with its ‘Teacher’-in-Charge, has shown brilliant results as the flattening of the curve has already begun.

Kerala has set up 1,255 community kitchens from where 280,000 food packets are distributed daily. Free ration kits of 35 kilos of rice and Rs 1,000 worth of essential commodities have gone out to 3.69 million families. This is a fabulous example of the good work that can be done with the cooperation of civil society, the vigilant state police force, and community volunteers.

Apart from this, by mid-March, the state announced a revival package of Rs 20,000 crore, the first by any state in the country, meant for health packages, free food-grains, subsidised meals, loan assistance, welfare pensions, tax relief, and arrear clearances. The state has even put in place 250 teams who have been conducting psychological counselling for the quarantined people over phone calls. The state, as well as voluntary organizations, have arranged call centres in at least five languages commonly spoken by migrants.

What has worked for Kerala is its extensive testing of symptomatic cases, followed by a painstaking contact-tracing process and then publishing of the route map of an infected person, so that everyone with the chance of being infected could be put in self-isolation. Today, anyone who enters the state has to undergo mandatory isolation. The period is fourteen days if the traveller is coming from another state, and 28 days if he or she is coming from outside the country. The government is also leveraging technology and releasing essential information on a real-time basis, and has launched a mobile app to check the spread of fake information. In Kerala, the people have realized the seriousness of the situation, and are doing their bit with a sense of responsibility.

The team, with its ‘Teacher’-in-Charge, as she is fondly addressed by her people, has shown brilliant results as the flattening of the curve has already begun. The reason why Kerala has successfully been able to flatten the curve is because of excellent inter-department coordination at all levels (state, district and village panchayats). Moreover, either Shailaja Teacher or the Chief Minister addresses the citizens every evening for an hour, which establishes people’s faith in the system.

As on May 21, out of the 666 positive cases in Kerala, there have been only four deaths, a mortality rate of 0.6%, which is one fifth of the all-India death rate of 3%. A 93 year old has been cured, and is now among the oldest in the world to have survived the COVID-19 infection. In Kerala, 75% of the patients have recovered while the corresponding figures for India are 40%. Kerala has proven to have done an exceptional job that other countries can learn from. However, Kerala is not yet resting, as it is expecting another influx of people stuck in the Gulf as the airports open up.

It was more than just the world-class healthcare system that delivered the amazing results. What helped the state of 34 million people was a team led by a teacher that geared itself up to tackle a pandemic with contingency plans and then relentlessly followed it up with various strategies. The Kerala Model is a story the rest of the world can well take lessons from: all because of a Teacher!
35 Hours

Yuvan Kamdar recounts his road-trip from Mumbai to Dehradun during the lockdown.

On May 15, my parents and I decided to go to Dehradun from Mumbai by car after receiving permission from the authorities. I was very excited as we would get to experience all the cultural diversity of India, but my parents were slightly sceptical of the trip, as a lot of things could go wrong in the trip during these times. We also would have a great chance of catching COVID-19 if we did this trip. Nevertheless, we still decided to go as Dehradun is much safer than Mumbai at this point in time.

We left at 4:15 PM on Friday. The car was packed with food, pillows, blankets, and some of our belongings. We took all we would need to stay in the car for three days, as we didn’t want to get out in cities that might be infected. As I started the journey, I was astonished to see the number of migrant workers going back to their villages. They were all cramped (almost 20 in one tempo!) in the 40° heat. The state of these people was extremely saddening. At around 8 o’clock we decided to stop for dinner, but we had to wait till we found a light source on that dark highway so that we could at least see our food. We finally waited near an old fruit seller who had a single light bulb over his hut and ate our cold theplas.

For me to reach in time for classes on Monday, we had to reach Indore that day itself. Indore is around 600 km away from Mumbai, and we had to drive till 2:45 AM to reach there. Once we reached, my dad and I set up our mosquito net tent near the highway, but even then the persistent mega-size mosquitoes managed to bite us. By 4 o’clock, we realized that no one was getting any sleep, so we decided to cover some more ground and started driving again. Gwalior was our next stop, and at more than 800 km away, it seemed impossible. By 6 am, both my dad and me were sleepy, so we went to sleep while my mom continued driving. Later, we switched again. By 1 o’clock, we were hungry for lunch, so we stopped near a temple and ate some sandwiches. It was extremely hot and dry with sudden clouds of dust that brushed against our faces. By 4 PM, we were three dusty people who hadn’t had a bath for two days.

Since we couldn’t sleep and kept driving, we reached Agra much before we expected. Now we were faced with a question: Should we push ourselves for that one day and reach by Saturday night or should we try to sleep and continue the next day? We decided to push ourselves and reached Dehradun by 2:30 at night – and that’s how we reached Dehradun from Mumbai in two days over 35 hours.

Overall, I really enjoyed the journey. I have come to a safer place, and also got to travel across India in the process. I enjoyed experiencing the different kinds of places people live in – all of which were so different from my house in Mumbai. A lot of these places were also where a lot of my friends live, and I enjoyed seeing the different kinds of environments, cultures and areas my friends lived in. I encourage people to visit these places in India after the lockdown gets over. Our country has a lot to offer, and I believe we should experience and learn more about the myriad cultures of India.

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Paper Boat

Udathveer Pasricha

Life is like a small paper boat let out into the ocean, And is constantly in motion.

Your friends will be the mosquitoes and the leaves And you can wave to your acquaintances the trees.

The ocean will love you like your parents do And you will have many adventures to scream Woo-Hoo!

There will be many obstacles in your way But you have to carve the path as you go away.

When you reach your final destination, I hope it is that to your satisfaction.
A Letter to 2020

Sai Arjun

Dear 2020,

My mother told me that I won’t be stepping out of the house for the next month and a half. Also, I am not able to listen to songs by my used-to-be-favourite artist. Mum hasn’t watched a movie and isn’t allowing me to watch one as well, saying that two of her gods had passed away, and left me wondering how did her gods die? Every time I call my aunt in a certain far away land and ask her what she is doing, all she says is that a certain man has gone bonkers and is ruining every citizen’s life there. She also says that more people, followers of that mad individual, have an extreme desire to catch “the Virus” and are crowding up on streets.

I also lost my second uncle to this beast called Covid that you have spun, and my mom and dad are just sad. I had no idea who to write to. It seems like you are my last option, so I thought, “Why not?”

Since you seem approachable, I have a couple questions regarding this year. Have you got more surprises up your sleeve? When is ‘the Virus’ going to leave us in peace? When is that bonkers man going to realise that he is playing with the lives of people? When can I go out to play with my friends? My football seems to have lost all air in trying to keep itself healthy! Lastly, when will you stop taking away my favourite celebrities and allow me to watch a movie? These are only a few of my bank of questions. I am obviously not the only one who is writing to you. I told my friends to do so as well! I wonder how these 366 days are going to pass, but looking at the bright side (like my mom always tells me to), there is surely one good thing that happened at my house: my sister stays in her room all day every day, for she has a lot of friends that somehow don’t get tired of talking. So there is less screaming and complaining about how school should be *bleeped* and how I act so dumb and stupid sometimes. I can’t go to the driveway and post this letter (because mom tells me that the mailman touches the post box every day), so I am going to leave it next to a bigger one when I go to the supermarket. I hope it wasn’t much of a trouble reading this letter, and I didn’t waste your time, but I would much appreciate it if you answered my queries, or at least made the world normal again.

A Whirlwind Experience

Aradhya Jain describes his experience of the cyclone Amphan that recently struck West Bengal.

It was on Monday when my mother told me about Cyclone Amphan (pronounced um-pun). It was a devastating cyclone that was to strike Kolkata this Wednesday, and strike it did, with all its might. The cyclone had an intensity fluctuating between four and five and being present while it struck was a truly horrifying, yet exciting experience for me.

The cyclone was so powerful that it exerted its influence even before it had achieved its landfall. A tree near the gate of my house was snapped into half even before the cyclone arrived. The wind made ghastly sounds that were truly terrifying. A lot of voltage fluctuation meant that there was heavy lightning in the skies. As time passed by, at seven o’clock in the evening, the sky turned pitch black, and the whistling of the wind could be heard. The power stations were planning to shut down. Nothing could be heard besides the roaring of the sky, while it rained like cats and dogs. It felt as if the houses themselves would be flooded. My uncle had accidentally left the outer windows of his room open, and they nearly shattered under the force of the severe gale, which occurred when the full force of the cyclone was about to attack our city. When the cyclone finally hit our area, it was raining very heavily, and the wind was raging everywhere. The windows were banging open and close again and again. Six trees near my house were uprooted.

Thankfully, since the lockdown was in place, no one was outside when it struck. I was horrified at the damage that the storm had caused. When the storm finally abated, the streets were completely waterlogged, with knee-deep water, but we took solace in the fact that we had made it through the cyclone. There were still after-effects, such as bursts of wind. I was really astonished that I got to experience such a violent cyclonic storm and survived it as well. Its memories shall be etched in my mind forever.
जीवन का उद्देश्य

जीवन का उद्देश्य क्या है? यह प्रश्न आजू काल के समय में बहुत प्रश्नात्मक है। शायद कोई एक ज्ञान के आधार पर इसे हां कह सकता है। परंतु यह कहा जा सकता है कि यह हर व्यक्ति के मन में कहीं न कहीं मिलता है।

मुझे इस प्रश्न का भी अपने अनुभव से दृष्टिकोण से लेकर उत्तर देना होता है। हां, हम सब लोग जीवन की अस्तिरता के साथ वस्तुनिष्ठ रूप से जीता है। उन्होंने अपनी तरीके के में हमेशा कहीं न कहीं विश्वस्त है।

डेक्रा जाए तो खेल की तरह जीवन में भी कई योजनाओं की जरूरत पड़ती है।

कोरोना के पश्चात् दुनिया

देवक अवस्था

कोरोना हमारे दिन और दिनमान की गाहकों में जाकर बैठ गया है। आपने अपने दिन कठिन से कठिनाई दिखाई देते हैं। इस महामारी से चुटकारा पाने के लिए लोग अपनी जान की बाजी में बैठे हैं। हर आदमी के मिठाई में सबक हो सकता है – कहाँ होंगे? कहाँ बरस लोंग होंगे? देश की आर्थिकवादी का क्या होगा? यह दुनिया का रूप बदल देता नहीं है? यह वास्तव की कोई राहता है? जीवन का बहार में कई लोग पर कसौटी लगा रहे हैं?

इस तरह होता है कि अपनी जान के लिए हम अपनी जान की बाजी में बैठ गए हैं। अर्थ प्रदायक अपनी आपूर्ति उद्यम लाने में भी बेचे थे जो बहुत धीरे-धीरे हो गए। कमी की हर रात में सालों चालू करता रहता है। कोरोना के कारण आपूर्ति हंगाम बैलैंड, वैश्विक की बजाय विदेशी होती है।

कंपनियों को बाहर से आपूर्ति मंगाना कुछ समय के लिए वंद करना पड़ता। कंपनियों के इस कौशल की बजाय से विदेशी प्रदायकों को फायदा होगा।

अगर प्रदायक अपनी आपूर्ति उद्यम तय नहीं करता तो उन्होंने भी अपनी कंपनी नहीं हिस्ट्रियाहीरी और इससे माल खरीदें।

ऑनलाइन व्यापार के कारण ऐसे लोगों को जो नागरिक में लेन-देन परमंतर करते हैं, बहुत तेजीस्वी हो रही है। इस वक्त कोई भी बाजार में जाने का जोखिम नहीं उठाना चाहता। अपनी कोई घर वैड उपयोग का सामान लाना चाहिए। यह लिखित इलेक्ट्रॉनिक अवस्था नहीं है। इंटरनेट भुगतान का साधन होता है। अवधारणाओं के मुताबिक, विदेश अवधारणा में अधिक निषेध नहीं करते। विदेश बाजारों पर पाबंदी के कारण विदेश में निवेश करने वालों को जोखिम नहीं उठाना चाहते। इसके लिए अब ऑनलाइन ही कमणें। जो लोग दूसरे जगहों में रहते हैं उन्हें लिए वहीं से ही कमर करना बहुत फायदेमंद साबित होगा।

कोरोना के कारण स्वास्थ्य देखभाल पर ज्यादा ध्यान दिया जायेगा। अनेक देशों का स्वास्थ्य-बंटवारा अपने स्वास्थ्य-बंटवारा की अपनी अधिक उद्योग के साथ बनेगा। स्वास्थ्य के क्षेत्र में निवेश की भारत बढ़ेगी। बीमा कंपनियों के लिए अधिक दिन आएं।

अंत में, निवेश का जो नक्साल है उसका अक्षर कहीं नहीं कर सकता। इस निवेश का वाष्प आता नहीं है और रिटायर समय पहले? निवेश के समय बांट लोग अपनी परिवार के साथ कहीं छुटियों पर जाएं। निवेश की तरह हम इस दौरान हो जाएगा जब देश अपने दावेदारों परंपराओं के लिए खेल देने। इन सवालों के जवाब का अंत में बहुत दूर हो।
Problem of the Week

The third Monday of January is the holiday commemorating the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. The first time Martin Luther King Jr. Day was celebrated was in 1986. Try to solve these problems without using a calendar!

1. How many times has Martin Luther King Jr. Day been celebrated?
2. How many times since 1986 has Martin Luther King Jr. Day actually been celebrated on his birthday, January 15th?
3. What is the probability Martin Luther King Jr.’s actual birth date falls on the third Monday in January?
4. Does a decade exist in which Martin Luther King Jr. Day will not be celebrated at least once on his birthday, January 15th? On which days could Martin Luther King Jr. Day be celebrated throughout this decade?

Source: Mathcounts

What Have You Been Reading During the Lockdown?

The Forest of Enchantments
Author: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
This book revolves around the Ramayana, but unlike the typical one, which is narrated from the perspective of Rama and through him, a male-driven society, it is narrated by Sita. So, unlike the rest of the versions, it includes what her feelings and thoughts may have been while the various events occurred in the epic. Thus, this book offers an escape from the polarisation that other versions of the Ramayana offer, taking Rama purely as a dutiful husband and king, and helps understand the role of perspectives in narration, which is extremely relevant to the current time.

- Aditya Saraff

What Have You Been Watching During the Lockdown?

House M.D. (Age Rating: 16+) (TV Show)
Cast: Hugh Laurie, Jesse Spencer, Lisa Edelstein, Robert Sean Leonard
Gregory House is a misanthropic medical genius who treats the most peculiar of illnesses in the most unconventional and outrageous of ways. House M.D. traverses the stormy waters of all kinds of emotions and states: misery, love, pain, happiness, trust, and isolation. Incredibly funny, poignant, and ingenious, this show draws in people regardless of their interest in medicine with explorations of universal themes and the spectacular performances by the actors, especially Hugh Laurie as House. You will never see a hospital or a doctor in the same way after you watch House M.D.!

- Varen Talwar

If we wait until we’re ready, we’ll be waiting for the rest of our lives.

— Lemony Snicket

Around the World in 80 Words

The US Senate passed a bill that removes Chinese companies from American Stock Exchanges. Indian Health Minister Harsh Vardhan replaced Dr. Hiroki Nakatani of Japan as the Chairman of the WHO. Global count for COVID-19 crossed five million, while the Indian tally crossed the one lakh mark. Domestic flights will commence from May 25. Football teams returned to training post-precautionary quarantine. South African Cricket Director, Graeme Smith recommended BCCI head, Sourav Ganguly for the post of International Cricket Council Chief.