



NEWSLETTER

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Code of Ethics for Civil Servants

FROM THE CHIEF EDITOR'S DESK

As all of you are aware, the whole world is presently in the grip of a severe pandemic which has already taken heavy toll of life and liberty of the population. Despite heavy odds, governments are sparing no efforts to control and eradicate this menace. Civil Services in India are heading the fight to tackle crises. They have been successful in this task because they possess leadership qualities and they are trained to serve the public in such situations. The previous issue and the present issue of this Newsletter, therefore, highlight the importance of the Civil Services (including the All India Services) in the administration of the Country.

In Corona times, civil services record in fighting the virus is a crowning moment for it

-By Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, Vice-President of India

Confidence is the chief driver of bold decisions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement on the night of March 24 asking 130 crore Indians to not move out of homes from the next day was the most audacious decision in its positive sense taken by any world leader anytime so far.

While the amazing cooperation of the people in the current battle against coronavirus is widely acknowledged, the role of administrative machinery across the country in executing PM's vision in this hour of crisis deserves special mention on the occasion of Civil Services Day today. From the cabinet secretary, the head of the civil services to the chief secretaries and directors general of police, healthcare officials, doctors and the frontline warriors on the ground deserve

appreciation for keeping virus infection under check.

About 540 deaths due to Covid-19 during roughly about 110 days in India is less than one-third to half of those dying every day in some leading countries of the world. It is no mean achievement given the size of our population including 53 urban agglomerations with over 10 lakh population each, packed living in our cities, scale of migrant work force and the status of health infrastructure.

The coronavirus crisis impacted a whole gamut of human and economic activities concerning a wide range of civil services overseeing and managing them like healthcare, education, policing, communication, travel, transport, construction, farming, banking, commerce and industry and even diplomacy. I am glad to assert that the civil services rose to the occasion with the nimbleness required. Our civil services, the steel frame of our country, whose architect was late Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, firmly stood between the virulent virus and our people. Hence, I call this their crowning moment.

India's quick and effective response to the coronavirus threat, now widely acknowledged, began with screening of those coming from other countries when we had only 28 cases of infection including 16 Italians, soon followed by lockdown 1.0 when we had only 482 cases and nine deaths. Consequently, more than half of the 700 districts in the country are without any virus cases when lockdown 2.0 came into force.

German sociologist Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy has its critics, who say that bureaucracy stifles initiative by being rigid and

centralised in decision making. Bureaucracy is generally perceived as status quoist by orientation, which may even be true on a general plane. But our civil services have a different story to tell of transforming governance in recent years with profound results.

The telecom and connectivity revolutions, massive opening of bank accounts for the unreached under PM Jan Dhan Yojana in quick time, direct benefits transfer, introduction of GST, improvements in ease of doing business, e-NAM, GEM, cloud sourcing of ideas for participatory governance, smart city planning and execution – all game changers – are ample evidence of the new face of our civil services.

The ongoing fight against coronavirus has thrown up several instances of local initiatives and empathy on the part of civil servants. The Bhilwara, Agra and Pathanamthitta (Kerala) models of containing virus are only some instances. Some healthcare officials and doctors falling prey to coronavirus while leading the fight against it are inspiring evidence of their selflessness and empathy.

This is a moment of pride for our civil services. However, like learning from every failure, we need to do so from success as well to further amplify the zone of such success. Experiences of fighting SARS CoV-2 need to be well-documented for institutional guidance while facing the next such public health challenge and that too, when bioterrorism is being talked about. Proper protocols and standard operating procedures should be evolved for quick and concerted response in future. Capacity and infrastructure development and crisis response skill training are required.

The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 is today the main legal instrument in the fight against coronavirus. This is said to be a hastily drafted short legislation to tackle bubonic plague in Bombay in 1896 and is inadequate to handle misuse of biological organisms. Let's remedy this at the earliest.

The course and duration of the fight against coronavirus is still uncertain. I am sure our experienced and able civil servants of all hues under the effective guidance of political leadership at the Centre and in the states will help the nation in winning the battle.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/in-corona-times-civil-services-record-in-fighting-the-virus-is-a-crowning-moment-for-it/>

Dated: April 21, 2020

Civil Service Values

-By B. S. Baswan IAS (Retd.), Former Secretary to the Government of India

Civil Servants are essentially paid officials appointed by Governments who have to carry out the tasks assigned, and have been called government employees, bureaucrats and, in some cases, officials of a less flattering description.

Values have been defined as “..the principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong, and how to act in various situations.” (Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary).

The first place to look for values is normally the religions of the world, which tell us the basics. The Ten Commandments (Old Testament) order us to honour our parents, not to kill or steal or lie in court (with good reason), to relax for one day a week and not commit adultery or covet our neighbour's wife, servants, ox and ass.

Coming to the other ‘religions of the book’, Christianity emphasised forgiveness and unconditional love and listed out the ‘Seven Deadly Sins’, namely Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, and Pride. But these can be neutralised by the Seven Virtues, listed against the Sins in the same order, namely Chastity, Temperance, Charity, Diligence, Patience, Kindness and Humility. We can list these as Civil Service values.

Building on the precepts of Judaism and Christianity, Islam focussed on pure intention, equality, not harming others and loving our fellow beings. Two countries, in fact, created Ministries “For the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice” (our version is probably The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting).

While propagating the same broad approach, Hinduism emphasised truthfulness, detachment and calmness of mind, and Buddhism compassion and mindfulness.

The German Sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), widely regarded as the father of modern bureaucracy in a democratic and market-oriented

State, studied all these religions and highlighted the Protestant Ethic, by which he meant hard work, discipline and frugality, all of which are the values we are looking for.

Weber rejected what he called the Charismatic and Traditional (patriarchal) models of authority and propagated a Legal-Rational model with a clear division of labour, a hierarchy, a chain of command, qualified personnel chosen on merit with a career pattern and governed by rules and procedures. Two additional points stand out in the Weberian model, Impersonal Authority (eliminating a conflict of interest and maintaining a low profile, as the model requires 'civil service anonymity') and Political Neutrality.

Democracy in Europe had emerged before Weber's time, and the British ('Home') and the Indian Civil Service were created in the mid-nineteenth century, under what is called the 'Westminster System of Government'. This highlighted the supremacy of Parliament, the role of the political executive and an independent and neutral civil service, on which Weber based his model. Independent India inherited and maintained this structure.

To cut a long story short, civil servants in India are meant to be independent professionals who follow the values commended by the major religions of the world - without being denominational, and the additional ones of the Weberian- Westminster model.

Values are generally transmitted from generation to generation, either through precept or, more likely, through observation. Children are smarter than we think and can detect gaps between the precepts of their parents and what they actually do.

Does this mean that children inherit the values of their parents? Only to a certain degree. An exposure to their peer group in school and college can make them arrive at certain other conclusions and consequently accept other values. Quite a few upright people have not so ethical children and vice versa, as the latter choose to ignore their parental precepts and practice. The jury is still out on genetic factors, but the home environment has a major influence on value systems through what is called inter-generational cultural transmission.

In a large and diverse country like ours, different

societies have evolved over time, and even definitions of ethical behaviour differ. Attitudes toward women have been known to vary according to agricultural practices. Rice is a largely woman-centric crop as they are capable of carrying out the operations once the field is prepared - which could possibly explain seasonal migration after the kharif crop is harvested in some regions of our country. Women in traditionally rice growing areas generally tend to enjoy a higher social status, though there are some prominent exceptions. Regional factors could have some bearing on the treatment of women, and civil servants are products of the society where they come from. Gender sensitivity is something that is expected of them.

In some other regions, there is an ambivalent approach to graft, where deviation from the straight and narrow path is construed as a sign of manliness, such individuals being described as 'bold' and 'dynamic' and able to conduct themselves as 'officers' with a lifestyle to match. A colleague in the State I worked in described corruption as "...the flow of capital from the less deserving to the more deserving." In another State, an official is described as corrupt only if, after taking the money, he doesn't deliver ("Ji, bahut kurrup aadmi hain ji")!

A social stigma against such these persons has not been as strong as it should be. Refusing to accept a gift, which could be a bribe from someone, is regarded as an insult, and many officials, in keeping with what they consider a cultural value, would not like to offend the gift bearer, the Conduct Rule in such cases being conveniently ignored.

Voices have been raised repeatedly about recruiting young persons in the Higher Civil Services who have integrity, which is easier said than done. The last Committee appointed by the Union Public Service Commission to review recruitment procedures for the higher civil services was pointedly asked to ensure that 'potentially corrupt' persons should be not be selected. Short of involving holy men with special insights on the interview board, there didn't appear to be any solution in sight.

In these Services, among others, a two year probationary period has been prescribed for the young officer trainees, formerly known as 'probationers'. Very few probationers have been discharged from service as this period is mainly spent in training. In one particular case, around the early 1990s, the Chairman of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (now known as the CBIC)

and the Government of India, took steps to discharge a probationer who was accused of an action of moral turpitude.

Absolute honesty is an abstract concept, like a perfect market or perfect love and can lead to ridiculous outcomes and highlight equally peculiar rules. Two examples come readily to mind:

A Collector & District Magistrate was required to park his official car at his residence. At that time, the officers were meant to use their own transport to reach the office. He drove his private car to the office, while his driver followed him in the official car each day.

The Commissioner of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, many years ago, attended a banquet hosted by the Association of Industries in the city, which was presided over by the Chief Minister. When the guests were served by the waiters, the Commissioner pulled out his sandwich box and did not partake of the banquet food.

‘Behaviour unbecoming of an officer’ is an omnibus term and can include actions far too many to list: abdicating responsibility, blaming subordinates, servile behaviour towards politicians and superiors, tailoring one’s opinions to what the boss wants, favour trading, nepotism, sectarianism, turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, self- promotion through the press and public forums, telling subordinates what to write on the note sheet, running down colleagues and predecessors (an indication of one’s own sense of inadequacy), just to name a few.

A large number of probationers from the higher civil services undergo their induction training at what is now known as ‘The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration’ (LBSNAA) in Mussoorie. As I headed that for a while, I was repeatedly asked what we were doing to inculcate the ‘right’ values in the young men and women who were under training. My response was “...I have learned to keep my mouth shut and try to set a good example”, or words to that effect.

This issue had been looked into by my predecessors since 1959, when the Academy was set up, and good and bad ‘examples’ were cited in the classroom. In the early 1970’s a far sighted Director gave one of his deputies (the late Mr B N Yugandhar) a free hand in reviewing the induction programmes. Apart from organising treks in the Himalayas, the probationers were sent to camp in

the villages, learn about the problem of rural poverty at first hand and conduct a socio-economic survey which would be discussed in plenary sessions at the LBSNAA when they returned. The probationers would come back frustrated and angry at the exploitation they saw by the more powerful rural elements, often in connivance with the local officials and politicians. They were then told that little could be done at this stage of their career, but the purpose of sensitising them to a field situation was largely achieved. This initiative was tweaked over the years to include an attachment with selected NGOs, who were better placed to bring about attitudinal change in the villages.

In the mid 1970’s there was a well-intentioned initiative to emphasise the country’s cultural diversity, but a large number of ‘Holy Men’ were called to the Academy as guest speakers. Many of the probationers voted with their feet, and sneaked out of the classroom because, for value training, preaching is a self- defeating strategy, given the wide gap between preaching and practice which prevails in traditional societies. The Experiential method mentioned in the last paragraph is far more effective in imparting values, and this practice is globally recognised.

But once the probationers are “let loose on the people of India” after their training, what happens to the knowledge, skills and values taught to them in their Foundational Course and Professional Courses in their Departmental Training Institutions where they learn about their specific services and the role they play in the country, depends only on them.

Apart from the value systems they bring with them when they enter the civil service, the influence of the work environment, which varies from one organisation to another and the attitudes of their peer group can impact their behaviour.

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of the new entrants have a strong sense of idealism and a desire to do something for the country. The learning process is enriched by their being given responsibilities during the training period. Most people learn a lot from their own mistakes, and ‘hands on learning’ is far more effective than sitting in a classroom or someone else’s office.

‘Straying from the straight and narrow path’ can happen if the work environment reeks of corruption, it can happen after marriage when the spouse’s value system is a factor to be reckoned with, it can happen

if a person cannot stand up to pressure, it can happen when promotions are not forthcoming, or a major family problem requires money urgently.

As civil servants we need to remember that we only pass one difficult examination, while politicians pass a more difficult examination every five years. They have their feet placed more firmly on the ground than we do, and are often less petty. Wise politicians know how to deal with the civil servants under them, and make use of their qualities, whether in the area of rent seeking, or the need to administer in a firm and honest way - or to get a difficult job done, regardless of all considerations. They generally respect the honest ones though they may side-line them from time to time and make use of the more flexible officials, while the Brahmastra of the vigilance agencies is kept for those in the latter category who don't cooperate.

Ours is still in some ways a feudal society, and a civil servant who helps his family, his village and his community is widely respected and liked, even if questionable means are used in providing this help. There is little social disapproval of such persons who have amassed wealth, regardless of their profession: they are seen as padrones, and pillars of society.

The 'mature' Anglo-Saxon democracies started out in a similar milieu but, over the years, public opinion was built up against rent seeking which, in our country, is still a work in progress.

Successive governments in India have taken measures to promote integrity in the civil services and punish wrongdoing, though at times these agencies have themselves been compromised. The progress has been incremental but, in an age of information, nothing can be really hidden from the public for long. Multimedia and the spread of the internet have created a great deal of awareness, which was missing in the early years of our democracy.

Structural Reforms, like abolishing the 'Licence-Permit Raj' and opening up sectors of Industry to private entrepreneurs has done much to reduce official graft and though the private sector has its fair share of highly compromised individuals, competition, public awareness and the impartial judgement of the market has helped to keep them honest. The scandals in the banking sector would not have been possible without the connivance of many at the top levels of Government and the

banks, but steps are being taken to close the stable door and officials who acquiesce in wrong doing have been rightly hauled up; only a few have suffered collateral damage.

Procedural Reforms, like the Right to Information Act and the steady rise of e-governance alternatives have brought about a much needed boost to transparency and automaticity, and it's widely accepted that information technology can impact the behaviour of civil servants at all levels, enhance their professional skills, reduce routine work and provide a greater sense of self respect for junior officials.

In today's day and age, the public have a clearer idea about the qualities a civil service officer should have: integrity, equanimity, attentiveness, empathy, domain knowledge, innate intelligence, self-confidence, humility, sound common sense, humour and an ability to get things done. Generations of our tribe have, at times, decried their successors, but I see a lot of these traits in today's civil service officers. They are far more accountable than we ever were and their challenges are more formidable. I see a gradual rise in public and peer group pressure against those who don't adhere to the values listed in this short article and remain optimistic.

We tend, at times, to be opinionated and judgemental about others, and, since none of us is perfect, we'd do well to remember the Biblical dictum, "Judge not – lest ye be judged."

How India's young IAS officers ensured a smooth lockdown in every corner of the country

-By Sanya Dhingra

When the Narendra Modi government announced a 21-day lockdown across India to contain the spread of Covid-19, it said that "incident commanders" will be deployed in each district to implement the mammoth exercise in every nook and corner of the country.

The Centre's guidelines said that the district magistrate will "deploy Executive Magistrates as Incident Commanders in the respective local jurisdictions" in order to implement these containment measures.

"The Incident Commander will be responsible for the overall implementation of these measures in their respective jurisdictions. All other line

department officials in the specified area will work under the directions of such incident commander,” it further elaborated.

These incident commanders are young IAS officers, still in their late 20s or early 30s, who are posted in sub-divisions across India’s 700 districts. With an average of 1-2 years of experience, they were given the responsibility of locking down an entire country block by block.

They immediately sprang to action, ensuring that people did not come out of their homes, those with travel histories or symptoms were home-quarantined, the supply of essential goods was maintained, and hoarding and black marketing was checked. They also worked on aggressive contact-tracing of positive cases and sealing borders of districts and sub-districts.

While some aspects of the lockdown were planned at the top or senior levels, day-to-day challenges and unanticipated situations meant these officers were taking on-the-spot decisions to keep a country in lockdown running as smoothly as possible.

ThePrint spoke to several of these incident commanders to understand how the mammoth task was achieved.

Planned crisis management

When PM Modi announced that the country would be going into lockdown in his televised speech for the nation on 24 March, people had just a few hours before they were restricted to their homes.

However, within the administration, processes had been working for days to prepare for it.

“Within the administration, we knew that an extreme step like a lockdown was in the offing since Holi,” said Pankaj Ashiya, who is posted as an SDM in Nashik, Maharashtra. “By the 8th or 9th of March, we had already made teams at the block-level of Block Development Officers (BDO), Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), school teachers, etc. who were told to plan for the lockdown in advance.

“Basic planning of how to enforce a lockdown was done ... Then on 24 March, when the lockdown was announced, and officers were made ‘incident commanders’, it was just a matter of getting started,” he added.

Getting started meant work days lasting more than 18 hours a day, and staying alert 24×7.

In districts like Bhilwara — which had earlier emerged as a hotspot of the disease — measures like “ruthless containment” meant a war-like clinical management of the situation.

“At every level, tasks were divided,” said Athar Aamir Khan, who is posted as a sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) in the Badnor sub-division of Bhilwara.

“At the district level, there was a war room consisting of the DM (District Magistrate), SP (Superintendent of Police), Additional Collector, Principal Medical Officer, and a few others — the whole district-level planning was done at this level,” Khan said.

“Then at the SDM-level, there is another 24×7 control room which keeps a check on everything from ration supply, surveying of people, contact tracing, quarantining and general grievances,” he added.

In addition to the SDM, control rooms at the block level consist of the DSP, BDO, Station House Officer (SHO), and tehsildar, Khan added. The members of this team are called “Corona captains”.

While these officers supervise activities, there are other members who work in three shifts through the day to keep the control room functioning 24×7.

Under the Corona captains are more grassroot-level workers who actually execute the decisions made — the “Corona fighters” — panchayat education officer, revenue officers, patwaris (the local official who maintains ownership records and collects taxes), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Anganwadi workers and government school teachers.

The Corona fighters are responsible for all the heavy-lifting when it comes to actually executing functions like round-the-clock monitoring of those home-quarantined, surveying people with symptoms, and providing ration packs consisting of basic food items like dal, masalas, sugar, wheat, etc. to daily wagers.

“The entire government machinery at the lowest levels is being used to manage everything,” Khan said. “There have been tasks that people don’t even know ... Like we have flying squads, which are teams

of people who have to immediately rush to a spot if more than four people are seen anywhere ... the whole exercise has needed micro-managing at the lowest level of the government,” he said.

Crises within the crisis

Communication and directions from the Central and state governments have been very clear, said the young officers. However, the incident officers have still had to make decisions on their own time and again.

“We had to use both coercion and appeal to enforce the lockdown,” said Richie Pandey, a 2016 batch IAS officer appointed as the deputy development commissioner in Patna. “There has been a high degree of decentralisation at play ... While the big decisions were being taken at the top, the DM’s and “We had to use both coercion and appeal to enforce the lockdown,” said Richie Pandey, a 2016 batch IAS officer appointed as the deputy development commissioner in Patna. “There has been a high degree of decentralisation at play ... While the big decisions were being taken at the top, the DM’s and subsequently the SDM’s office has really been at the centre of management,” said Pandey.

“Not everything can be streamlined during a crisis,” said a young officer in a district from Maharashtra who did not want to be named. “You cannot wait for orders and approvals for everything,” he added. “For example, the government will tell you that vegetable markets will remain open ... But at the top level, they cannot factor in exactly how crowded or congested a market is,” the officer said. “So I, at the sub-division level, decided that bus stops will be turned into vegetable markets where vendors can sit at a distance from one another since they are open spaces and no buses are plying.”

Several other officers who spoke to ThePrint also mentioned using the same technique to ensure social distancing at vegetable markets, indicating that there has been a constant exchange of ideas, mostly through WhatsApp groups, among officers — all of the same age and experience who find themselves in the same boat.

“We have stayed in touch through out WhatsApp groups — sharing idea, experiences informally,” the Maharashtra IAS officer said.

Despite the government’s meticulous planning, the crisis threw up unanticipated problems that could

simply not have been planned for at the top.

“The medical staff was in a state of panic at the time of the lockdown. They thought that the government will force them to work no matter what ... We had to repeatedly assure them that their lives would not be put in a jeopardy ... And frankly, that was hard because we didn’t know anything for sure either,” said the officer from Maharashtra.

Ashiya, the SDM in a subdivision in Nashik, threw light on how the outbreak taught them to make use of “informal channels”.

For example, when shops selling essentials had shut down due to panic or authorities were having trouble convincing people to stay quarantined at home, local politicians had to be requested to convince people.

Another young IAS officer from Tamil Nadu said not just local politicians, but even local religious leaders needed to be roped in to connect with the people.

“You only learn crisis management on the job, it is not something that can be taught ... In deeply religious societies, the best way to convince people for such a big lifestyle change is to get their religious leaders to tell them that — no book or no teacher can teach you that, only a crisis,” said the IAS officer.

IAS officers’ training focuses largely on fight against Covid-19

From watching Virus, a Malayalam film on the 2018 Nipah virus outbreak, to understanding the Epidemic Diseases Act, the next batch of IAS officers graduating from the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration is gearing up to fight the coronavirus disease (Covid-19).

The 182 officers currently at the academy are expected to join as trainee assistant collectors in districts across the country next month, provided the government lifts the lockdown, said an official at the academy.

The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers will complete their course on May 8. The Centre for Disaster Management recalibrated its course to instruct these officers about ways to tackle the outbreak.

“The online course in the academy is focusing on the legal ecosystem around Covid-19, such as extant

rules [for] national disasters with a special focus on procedure,” said academy director Sanjeev Chopra. A two-hour introductory session for this was held on the academy’s e-learning platform, GYAAN, on Thursday.

“The session was mostly about the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA),” a trainee officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre said. “It was conducted by our faculty members, some of whom have experience on the ground of having handled disasters in Tamil Nadu and other states.”

The trainee officer said Covid-19 is a nascent case study, though mitigation of the disease can be similar to other natural disasters. “We are still discovering things about Covid-19 but many steps taken for mitigation of disasters like floods can help here as well,” the trainee officer added.

A second trainee officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre said information about laws will help with their work in the districts.

“The DM [Disaster Management] Act, for instance, tells us about the exact responsibilities of a district magistrate and sub-divisional magistrate,” he said. “We learnt we could requisition helicopters for delivering rations and ask private companies to provide equipment and human resources, if needed.”

The second trainee officer added that Covid-19 has no precedent and officers will have to “improvise” when they start work. “The provisions apply in general to disasters, we will have to see how to use them to fight Covid-19,” he said.

“We learnt how to set up relief camps, ensure sanitation and ensure no discrimination happens. We can extend these to tackle the present migrant worker crisis.”

A second academy official said: “There are certain disasters that need an immediate response, such as floods. Others, like the pandemic, require a standardised response. These are the best practices needed to help reduce infections.”

As a run-up to Thursday’s introductory session, the batch was asked to watch documentaries and films such as *Virus* and *93 Days*, a Nigerian movie on Ebola.

“The idea is to make them familiar with how

countries across the world have dealt with epidemics,” the second academy official said. “Sub-divisional magistrates and sub-divisional officers are generally involved in disaster management in normal times as well. The district magistrate is the disaster management authority at the district level.”

The batch was provided access to documents and modules on how districts and state governments and the Central government are tackling the pandemic.

“Whether it’s understanding the concept of an incident response team or making sure different departments coordinate seamlessly, they will be in a better position to administer [after] this module,” said the second academy official.

Inter-departmental coordination is being stressed. “Coronavirus has been declared a disaster by the government, so it automatically falls under the ambit of the course,” the official added. “We are also explaining coordination, such as working with police, the railway department, or others to ensure vulnerable groups and migrants don’t suffer.”

A third official said disaster management was always an integral part of the course, but extra attention is being paid to it this year. “We have increased our focus on the National Disaster Management Act, State Disaster Management Act, epidemic Act and State Disaster Response Fund to help prepare the officers for their forthcoming assignment,” a third official said. “We are trying to help them understand and solve supply chain problems and ease the migrant crisis.”

This official added that along with three classes a day, the trainees were asked to do book reviews on various subjects to help broaden their horizons. “Those who haven’t studied Hindi as a first language have to review a book in Hindi, others who are literature graduates have to review books on economy. The academy wants to help them expand their oeuvre.”

The third official added an online concurrent assessment is being conducted on the material provided on Covid-19.

The second trainee officer said while constant online assessment is being conducted, the trainees are also likely to be tested on Covid-19 once the module is completed this week.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/4-000-covid-19-cases-linked-to-jamaat-says-govt-but-india-isn-t-the-only-one/story-CGsIbXftyMbfl2AKPoh8PM.html>

Dated: April 19, 2020

Spiritual Defense Against Global Covid-19 Infection

-By Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha Mathadhipati, Guidance & Inspiration, FRNV

Harih Om Tat Sat.

Alarming, bewildering and enlightening information is pouring in from various parts of the world regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Situation in United States of America is quite disheartening.

Our devotees in India and elsewhere, especially in the US, have reported that they are deriving remarkable inner strength by chanting Mrityunjaya mantra in online groups. Yes, the mantra has such effect.

Do not, however, relax the physical safety measures.

Kerala is a small State in India. With enchanting greenery, backwaters and mountains; it is described as God's Own Country. Over time, people of the State have evolved unique inner methods to deal with physical problems, even calamities.

I find it timely to narrate a relevant episode here:

A very rich man fell ill. His symptoms grew worse and looked fatal. His family got unnerved and decided, as tradition prescribed, to hold an astrological session. Learned astrologers, experts in dealing with planetary effects on human life, were called. The role of the astrologers, in such circumstances, is to identify and alleviate the suffering to the best. So they probed into celestial configurations and examined their respective aspects and impacts.

They came, spread their cowrie shells after drawing the astrological chart. Uttering the invocatory hymns, they heaped the shells on the floor and under the right palm began to roll them piously for a while. Taking then a handful from the heap and dividing it in groups to arrive at the lagna, the astrological locus for the intended predictions, they started their rational deliberations. They confirmed that the illness of the family head was life threatening.

Turning to the family, they said, "You are resourceful. Will you do what we ask you to? Dig a big public tank for humans to bathe in, and for animals and birds to quench their thirst from. Do the task on a war footing." With this prescription, they closed the session and departed.

The family, sensing the imminence of danger, also the emergent nature of the relief needed, acted instantly. They started the work the very next day, and in seven days the tank was ready for birds and animals. And in 12 days, for humans. Countless animals and birds began to drink from the tank every day. Men and women started bathing in the tank. Through this, the ailing man and his family accrued punya, holiness, abundantly.

The astrologers were called in again. They cast their shells. Heaving a sigh of relief, they said, "The victim is now safe. As each day passes the punya to bless him will grow in leaps and bounds. He will be fully cured of his illness soon."

Selfless work is the greatest selfish gain. Sometimes severe drought sets in. And people and animals are threatened to die en masse. But rains shed torrentially. In one go, the area has abundant water for a year! Well, this is the result of unexpected meteorological phenomena!

The invisible spirituo-holy outcome is even sharper and more effective. The instance of 'drought and rain', is visible, while the instance of 'gaining punya and its reward', invisible! The subtle presence and power behind both are the same. Do not fail to discern it! Harness your inner potential benevolently!

Punya, holiness, is like the mind, invisible. But its effects are more tangible than even the mind. Discern this and be guided by it. Let the spell of COVID-19 be a life lesson for you.

Dear souls, this is how the mind works. Making of the tank was a physical task accomplished by others. Chanting a mantra is an inner austerity each has to do. The more inner the resources you employ, the greater the effect that follows. Generate more and more of inner defense against the pandemic.

In the service of all Beings
With Fond Benedictions
Antaraatma



Kerala and Covid-19

1. Situation in Kerala could have been worst but with aggressive testing, intense contact tracing, instituting a longer quarantine, providing shelters for migrant workers and distributing cooked meals to those in need, Kerala has been able to contain the Covid-19 situation and maintain a very low mortality rate. The mortality rate in the world is 5.75, it is 2.8-3 in India, & 0.58 in Kerala.
2. Highest number of Covid Testing in India based on population density. So far the state has tested 19756 samples, out of which 19074 came negative. 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 potential to being infected could be put in self-isolation.
3. Kerala became first in India to develop its own inexpensive kiosks for mass collection of samples from people with symptoms for Covid-19. A healthcare staff sitting behind a glass wall collects the sample with fewer personal protective equipment.
4. When Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has invited Letter of Intent (LoI) for participation in studies to validate Therapeutic Plasma Exchange (TPE), an experimental procedure to treat critically ill coronavirus patients, Kerala was the first state to initiate the protocol for plasma therapy. Kerala had initiated research and protocols for the plasma therapy even before the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved it on April 3.
 - <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/coronavir-us-cure-india-to-start-plasma-therapy-kerala-first-off-the-block/story/401108.html>Plasma therapy uses antibodies found in the blood of people who have recovered from an infection (or convalesced), to treat patients who are infected.
5. Kerala has a long list of achievements when it comes to fighting COVID-19. In Kerala, every district has at least two Special hospitals for COVID-19.
6. Kerala government had also issued the Kerala Epidemic Diseases, COVID-19 Regulations, 2020 on 21 March. However, the state government has now promulgated this ordinance, which defines an 'epidemic disease' as "any disease declared as epidemic diseases by a notification" published by the Kerala

government.

The ordinance also prescribes a two-year imprisonment penalty, with or without fine up to Rs 10,000. This is as against the penalty under the 1897 law, which prescribed imprisonment up to 6 months.

- <https://theprint.in/india/governance/kerala-promulgates-covid-19-ordinance-to-restrict-duration-of-essential-services/390629/>
7. Kerala has become the first State in India to start Tele-Medicine. The Kerala chapter of Indian Medical Association (IMA) have made doctors' consultations available online through telemedicine tools during lockdown. The app, called blue Telemed, is available on Google Play Store. Through the app, people can consult doctors via video calls.
 - <https://theprint.in/india/governance/kerala-promulgates-covid-19-ordinance-to-restrict-duration-of-essential-services/390629/>
 8. First State in India to provide Tele-Medicine, Expert consultation for Indian diaspora. The lockdown announced by the government has minimised the chances of people with other health issues getting medical attention as the health sector is more or less focused on Covid-19 cases only. It's in this context that a group of doctors led by Dr Aneez K Arakkal decided to launch a telemedicine facility, where the patients who cannot seek medical aid anywhere else can contact doctors over Facebook messenger and can get the issue resolved, without paying a Single penny.
 9. In this critical time of COVID-19, Kerala started 'No one without Food' campaign and opened 1,400 community kitchens across the state becoming the first Indian state to do so. In addition, the state also houses over 5,500 Migrant Labour Camps which is highest in the entire country.
 - <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/mar/28/telemedicine-offers-help-to-patients-stuck-at-homes-2122481.html>
 - <https://egov.eletsonline.com/2020/04/dr-vishwas-mehta-leading-from-front-in-keralas-fight-against-covid19/>
 10. Across the country, the state governments are running 22,567 camps and relief shelters, out of which Kerala government is running 15,541 camps.
 11. Kerala is the first state in India to appoint 300+ Doctors and 400+ Health Inspectors on war footing within 24 Hrs time.
 12. First State in India to declare stimulus package of 20000 Cr Financial Aid. Kerala is the first state of India to announce a mega financial

package of Rs20,000 crore to mitigate the impact of the deadly coronavirus and counter its economic fallout.

13. First state in India to provide One Month Food without any consideration of APL/BPL.
14. “Break the Chain” Campaign – Kerala in its efforts to spread awareness among people regarding the significance of hygiene in fighting COVID-19, started ‘Break the Chain’ campaign for handwashing, sanitizing and social distancing.
15. Ever since the first case of coronavirus was reported in Kerala early this year, the state has been at the forefront in tackling the novel virus. Prioritizing the well-being of its citizens, the State government went the extra mile to home-deliver mid-day meals to the Anganwadi children and became the first State in India to provide Mid Day Meal at home for Kindergartens (Anganawadi’s).
16. First State in India to expand Internet bandwidth and connectivity for Lockdown situation. The state’s cabinet has asked technology firms to augment broadband internet strength as several people will be working from their homes.
17. CM Pinarayi Vijayan’s response time, his strategic thinking, communication, coordination, and delegation of work have been astoundingly better and faster than any CEO.
18. Well known journalist Rajdeep Sardesai of India Today commended the work of Kerala in fight against COVID - 19 and commented “What Kerala thinks today, India must think tomorrow ! Good to see more and more Indians acknowledge this! “
19. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has been the standout performer and a seasoned administrator, who also handled the Nipah virus outbreak and the unprecedented floods in the state in 2018.
20. Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and three-term New York state governor Andrew Cuomo have emerged as stars in this uncharted Age of Coronavirus. Cuomo’s daily press briefings in which he mixes stories about his family with detailed explanations of his Covid-19 fighting efforts are broadcast live on major cable networks and reach an audience far beyond the boundaries of New York state. Vijayan, too, ends his day facing the press, offering in Malayalam a detailed presentation of the heroic ground-level struggle with Covid-19.

Of the two, Cuomo, who’s the son of late New

York governor Mario Cuomo, is the more colourful performer, combining that with a total grip on the minute details of the anti-Covid-19 fight. On the other hand, Vijayan, born into a toddy-tappers’ family, is the diametric opposite, more matter of fact. He nevertheless picks up prime time audiences on most Malayalam channels rattling off facts without the slightest touch of drama, often looking more at his notes than at the cameras.

Cuomo is very frank, very honest – upfront and preparing the people, presenting facts so that the public is not caught off guard, and they know what to expect. Similarly, for Vijayan too, the aim has been to keep up public morale and prevent panic by offering up all the facts.

21. Kerala has emerged as the best state in the country in terms of healthcare performance, reveals a latest Health Index report, jointly prepared by the World Bank and Niti Aayog.
22. First state in India to conduct Daily situation analysis headed by Chief Minister. He choose prime time audiences on most Malayalam channels and share with them the facts about COVID-19 without the slightest touch of drama, often looking more at his notes than at the cameras.
23. Kerala has done much better than other states in the fight against coronavirus and in mitigating the hardships caused by the measures to contain it. This was achieved through a relatively high.

There has been no more revolutionary contribution than the one which the Hindus (Indians) made when they invented ZERO.

**— Lancelot Hogben
(English Mathematician)**

Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.

Chief Editor: Shri Gopal Ganesh