

Observation

The Mayhem of May

by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

I'll call this the mayhem of May. I have been getting news about people I knew in India dying of COVID. One of our friend's brother and his wife's brother both died of COVID on the same day in different parts of India. It is heart-wrenching.

Medical facilities in India are already limited and inadequate and now it's overwhelmed with people suffering from COVID-19. One of my friends who just returned from India stayed there with a family where both the husband and the wife are medical doctors. According to my friend, the couple return home every day late in the night enervated after attending to dying patients. Then they receive phone calls from their relatives and friends all night begging and crying for hospital beds and oxygen cylinders. Scenes like this and far worse - are playing out hundreds of thousands of times every day across India.

"We are in a helpless state," the couple told my friend. Then they broke into tears. My friend left India and came home on the next available flight. That was the least he could do for the couple.

This is what it's like to be in India at this time. A couple of factors are responsible for the second wave that India is facing now. A lax attitude toward mask-wearing and social distancing is a major reason for the surge. A misplaced sense of triumph over COVID-19 encouraged gatherings at weddings, political rallies, and religious ceremonies. All those became super-spreader events.

Secondly, the major cities of India are overpopulated and their amenities are busting at their seams. As an example, in Mumbai - home to more than 20 million people, more than 40 percent of them live in



overcrowded slums where disease can spread like a wildfire.

As a consolation, the countryside in India is much better off than the cities. I regularly talk to a couple of folks in my ancestral village. Not a single case of COVID has been traced there. The states in India need to create

employment opportunities for the natives. For example, the laborers from the state of Bihar emigrate to major metropolitan cities of India such as Kolkata, Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai in search of per diem wages to avoid starvation at home.

There are always lessons to be learned from any kind of disaster. It is essential now, more than ever before, that public health plans be improved in India. There is no sense going to the moon or Mars; building the tallest statues and largest stadia or making comparisons with other countries to look better than them statistically. Taking care of its own citizens should be more important than anything else.

The good news is that an array of mathematical models predict that India's surge will peak sometime towards the end of May. Hopefully, the governments in India will learn the lesson from the Mayhem of May and will work towards a better health care system and regional employment opportunities for their citizens.