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People skip screening at Central Rly Station

APOORVA SUDHAKAR

Despite Greater Chennai's Corporation's efforts to conduct thermal screening to detect potential coronavirus patients at railway stations and bus terminals, only a few people undergo screening. At the Chennai Central railway station, which has 17 platforms, including five suburban train platforms, only three screening counters operate.

A staff nurse at one of the counters said around 250 commuters are screened every day.

While police personnel are deployed to ensure that every passenger or accompanying person who enters the station are screened, people walk away unnoticed.

Some passengers waiting for trains at the platforms did not know where the counters were or how the procedure took place.

"Screening for what? Is it compulsory? Where is it happening," asked Valli, who was waiting for a train to Salem.

Even after the footfalls at the station have reduced, ensuring a thermal screening and other safety measures remains a challenge.

Babu, who has been operating a water vending machine for two years at the station, says the crowds have reduced because of the fear

spread among people. In a day, his counter alone earned Rs 5000 to Rs 6000. Now it has come down to Rs 3000.

"Apart from fewer people travelling, the number of people who stopped refilling water here has reduced because they think drinking water from outside could lead to them having coronavirus," he laughed.

Right outside the station, drivers at the auto rickshaw stands and bus terminals have a similar story to tell. With increased platform ticket rates and coronavirus scare, the auto rickshaw drivers suffer. Buses run half-empty.

Muhammed Hussain, who has been riding an auto rickshaw for the past 39 years, says "This is the first time I have seen such a fall in my business."

"What will I do if the spread of coronavirus catches up in Chennai? We are safe now, but for how long?"

Hussain said on a normal day, auto rickshaw drivers could save up to Rs 800-1200 a day, after setting money aside for the rent and price of gas. After regulations were issued to tackle coronavirus - including increasing platform ticket prices to Rs 50 - he can barely save Rs 250-Rs 300 per day.

While the GCC aims to screen everyone at the platforms, those outside the station remain largely vulnerable.

Elumalai, a taxi driver, said none of the drivers or those who have come to see off someone have been tested.



A deserted street in T Nagar, one of the busiest commercial areas in Chennai

T Nagar streets empty, quiet

APOORVA SUDHAKAR

An eerie silence has descended over the usually noisy Theagarayanagar, popularly known as T. Nagar, Chennai's popular and busiest shopping hub.

Apart from big franchises like Saravana Stores and Pothy's Silks, hawkers too were forced to pack up their makeshift shops under the Usman flyover.

Abdul from Kanyakumari, owner of a tailoring shop, says he does not know how to or who will compensate for his loss. "Earlier, I earned Rs 800 - Rs 100 a day. Of that, Rs 150 would be paid as rent daily."

"The electricity bill and salaries

for my five other tailors at the unit are separate; sometimes I cannot pay them if there are no customers."

Calling out to a few passersby, he says, if he does not do this, he will not earn even Rs 200 today. "In 30 years of being a tailor, I have never had to call out to pedestrians like this," he said.

Amid the shutdown of the market hub, Sundaram Stores - a shop selling steel items - remained open but did not sell anything.

The owner, who did not identify himself, said "I was just bored at home. So I am here doing nothing but just sitting! Come on March 31 and I will say how much I lost in these two weeks."

Making the most out of a doom Mohammed earned Rs 600 to Rs 700 a day selling shoes on North Usman Road. Now the Corporation has ordered a shutdown of T. Nagar. He came up with an idea.

"I called up my friend immediately and together we went to Parry's Corner to get these on wholesale," he said pointing to the carefully arranged masks which would protect one from "the virus."

His friend said "In three days, we have sold 250 masks. The cotton ones cost Rs 30 and the synthetic, Rs 20."

"This is obviously more profitable than the shoe business and it is essential for your safety," he joked.



One of the screening counters at MGR Central Railway Stations



Virus hits phone imports from China, say dealers

KANISHKA BIRAT

The mobile phone business has been hit the Coronavirus scare and the increase in the Goods and Services Tax from 12 per cent to 18 per cent has made it worse, say dealers here.

Venkat Ram, owner of Porito Mobile store in Adyar, says, "Since November onwards, sale of mobile phones in my store has been down by almost 60 per cent. Nobody is coming to the store since last two weeks due to the virus scare."

"Due to virus spread, we received our last shipment of cell phones from China in January. Brands like VIVO are imported from there. They have stopped launching new phones now," he said.

"The GST increase will make people postpone buying new phones," he added.

However, Vikram, manager at the Samsung store in Adyar, says "The GST increase will have no impact on sales as the manufacturers will absorb it. It will not be passed on to the customers in the form of price rise. However, whether the mobile phone prices rise or not entirely depends upon the manufacturers."

The virus scare has reduced the footfalls in his store.

Vikram said "Earlier around 30 customers a day will come to the store but since last two months it has fallen to five. Samsung has already stopped making high end products like Note Ten Lite and S Ten Lite as customers are not buying since last two months. For last three months sale in my store is down by 30 per cent."

Dev, a sales executive of Waves Mobile store in Adyar, said "Sales in our store has been down since last three months due to fall in value of rupees against the dollar. The mobile phone industry needs GST to be at five per cent."

Rafi, manager of Janami Mobiles in Adyar, said the sales had come down in the last 15 days because online aggregators were giving huge discounts on mobile phones.

Restaurants face massive loss

BHARATH THAMPI

With educational institutions closed, companies asking their employees to work from home and non-Chennaiites leaving the city, in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic, restaurants here are staring at massive revenue loss.

Initially it was just dull business due to the misinformation being spread about the virus spreading through meat and eggs, but in the last few days, there has been a steady decline in the number of customers just generally, said Perumal, owner of 'Hotel Renuka', at T. Nagar.

He figures that there is at least a 40 per cent reduction in their sales this week alone.

The situation isn't any better for the vegetarian restaurants in the city, according to Rajendraprasad, manager of 'OKadey's Vegetarian Restaurant' at Alwarpet. With the Kauvery Hospital right opposite to it, the restaurant's major share of customers was the patients and their attendants.

"There are a lot of people who come for

treatment from abroad here, like Malaysia. We have seen a huge cut in their numbers," said Rajendraprasad. He added that the numerous cultural centres being shut down in Mylapore had also affected them, causing almost a 20-percent loss.

Even small tea and snack shops across the city have been affected. The regular crowd is missing at the 'Newton Juice Shop' in Koyambedu, which specialises in shakes, juices, smoothies and ice-cream.

'Ambur Star Biryani' in Kottivakkam is one of the most sought-after biryani joints in that area, and one of the 13 outlets of the biryani franchise in the city. The security guard at the entrance greets the customers these days with a bottle of disinfectant, before letting them in.

"We have been advised to follow several such measures by the Food Safety Department, for both customers and employees," said Suffiyann, the accountant there.

That includes asking the employees to wash their hands several times in a day and

also to have immediate medical check-up in case they show any symptoms of COVID-19 infection.

Despite the chicken price falling drastically low across the city, reaching almost Rs. 60 to Rs 65 a kg, business is on a freefall as people were scared to eat non-vegetarian dishes these days, Suffiyann said.

The restaurant has lost most of their on-line customers as well. It is planning to offer a 50-percent discount on its biryani in April, as a business measure.

'Mr. Hong's Chinese', on East Coast Road, is another restaurant that is severely hit by the fear over chicken and egg leading to infection.

At the same time, the pizza joints in the city have not been affected by this at all, and can very well expect more business in the coming days.

"Since pizza is normally an eat-in food item, and mostly ordered online, we haven't had any problem at all," said the manager at 'Oyalo Pizza', Palavakkam.



There were rumours that the Koyambedu market would be shut down. However the Chennai Corporation dismissed them

Vegetable prices steady, but sales fall

BHARATH THAMPI

Vegetable prices have more or less remained steady and unaffected by the Coronavirus scare, according to vendors in the Koyambedu market here.

"Except for a Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 fluctuation that happens generally from time to time, there hasn't been any change in the rates," said Venkatesan, who sells cabbage (priced at Rs.20 a kg) and cauliflower (Rs. 40 a kg), along with other vegetables, in the market.

There were rumours that the city municipal corporation would shut down the market, said Neelakandan, who runs a stall selling beans and carrots.

However, Chennai Municipal Commissioner G. Prakash released an official statement dismissing the rumours and saying that all markets and grocery shops would remain open in the city.

Many of the vendors that their business has been affected because people avoided restaurants and a huge section of the population had left the city for their hometowns, said Arumugham, another vendor.

Vendors like Rajendran, who supplied vegetables like potato, tomato and onion to a number of res-

taurant-businesses, said he had to throw away the unsold produce multiple times this week, and fears the situation would continue in the coming days.

There is no shortage of supply which comes mainly from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, and the suppliers have not changed their rates. But if the situation keeps up, then the vendors are not sure if that wouldn't change either.

Siva, who runs his own business, is a regular customer at the market and confirmed that the prices don't seem to have changed. He lives close to the market and makes his purchases at the same frequency as before.

Jawed, who runs a fruit stall right next to the market entrance, said that the fruit business had been affected. Almost half a ton of musk melon had turned bad from his stock this week.

Jawed said one of the reasons could be that many don't consider fruits as essential as vegetables in their daily diet.

Mallika, in her 60s, who sells bananas in a tiny stall at the market, said that she was even giving them at a reduced rate these days, lest the fruit get spoilt.

Temples closed but rituals continue

V.GANESH

Major temples in Chennai have been closed to devotees till March 31 but the priests have been allowed to perform the rituals and pujas. Churches and mosques have also been told to avoid large gatherings till March 31, according to media reports.

Before the Government ordered the closure to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, some temples have been taking measures. The number of people visiting the temples has also fallen.

At the Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane, the temple's executive officer G. Jayapriya said

"We have installed 5 litre hand sanitizers at the eastern and western entrances of the temple for the devotees to wash their hands. Apart from this we are applying sanitizer on sponge and using that to clean the barricades meant to control the crowd."

"We are distributing pamphlets with information about Coronavirus and urging the devotees to create awareness and also telling the priests not to touch their faces and clean their hands often."

However, Jayapriya said that the people living in the area had



Temples in Chennai were taking preventive measures

been coming to the temple without the fear of the virus.

V. Anandan of Parthasarathy Malar Nilayam, a shop selling flowers and worship items outside the temple, said "Before the virus scare 500 people used to come, now because of the scare, only 50 people are coming to the temple. We used to earn Rs.2,000 to Rs 2,500, now we are not even earning Rs.500."

S. Srinivas, an auto rickshaw driver, said, "I used to earn Rs.400 to Rs 500 from four to eight trips in a day, now, I am not

able to earn even Rs.200 from three trips."

At the Murugan temple in Vadapalani, devotees are being checked for their temperature by masked men using hand-held temperature guns. Those who have a high temperature are turned away.

M. Ayyappan, the personal assistant (PA) to the Vadapalani Murugan Temple chairman (thakar) says, "We are cleaning the offering plates and railings every hour using Dettol. We have told the priests to maintain distance

PICTURE COURTESY THE HINDU

Stalls to screen air passengers

GOKUL G K

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala airports strengthened preventive measures as the number of confirmed COVID-19 (Novel Corona Virus) cases rose to 25, this Friday.

Special medical stalls have been installed in both the international and domestic terminals of the four airports in the state - Trivandrum, Cochin, Calicut and Kannur - to screen the passengers for symptoms.

Passengers are required to fill a form, at the airport, where they have to inform the authorities of the cities and countries, they had visited in the last one month.

They are also screened for symptoms like high temperature and cough.

According to the Department of Health and Family Welfare, passengers who arrive from the COVID-19 affected countries, should remain in home isolation for 14 days. They also requested the passengers to adhere to health advisories issued by the state government.

The stalls manned by doctors have emergency medical kits. Passengers are given a small briefing on the virus and precautions to be taken by DISHA (District Intervention System For Health Awareness) volunteers.

DISHA volunteers collect the passenger information. If one passenger tested positive for COVID-19, the volunteers would reach out

to all the passengers who travelled on the same flight.

"I felt safe once I reached Trivandrum airport. It is clear that they are handling the issue seriously,

Passengers are required to inform authorities of the countries, they had visited in the last one month.

"says Durga Rajeev, a college student from Chennai.

Passengers are made to sanitize their hands while entering and leaving the airport.

"The government is taking such proactive measures," said J Vignesh, a student from IIFT Kolkata.

Vignesh, who took a flight from Kolkata to Trivandrum with transit at Chennai, said that both the Kolkata and Chennai airports had no screening or any other preventive procedures. Both these cities reported positive COVID-19 cases this week.

"Most passengers were wearing masks but there was no screening, even hand sanitizers were not available at either of these airports," he

said.

The passengers arriving at any of the airports in Kerala are also given a brochure issued by the State Government which has safety instructions and helpline numbers. Temporary washbasins, equipped with soap and disinfectant, have also been set up outside the airport as a part of the state government's 'Break the Chain' programme - a mass handwashing campaign aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19.

As of March 19, Kerala has 25 confirmed coronavirus cases.

"The total number of people under surveillance is 12,450, of whom 270 are in hospitals and the rest under home quarantine," said Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at a press conference today.

Many Keralites are working in the Middle-East are finding it hard to come home, as most international passengers are required to go in for a compulsory 14-day quarantine.

The Thiruvananthapuram district administration, on Tuesday, shifted all passengers, who arrived at Thiruvananthapuram International Airport from Oman's capital Muscat, to the care home which was opened on Wednesday on a temporary basis.

After immigration formalities, the health department briefed the passengers about the arrangement and sought their cooperation as the state is battling the pandemic of the novel coronavirus or Covid-19.



Passengers being screened at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport

Prisoners make masks in Kerala

GOKUL G K

Thiruvananthapuram: Inmates of prisons in Kerala are making surgical masks to ease the shortage as the number of COVID-19 positive cases rose to 37 in the State on Saturday.

Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala, has run out of masks and gloves.

"I went to more than 10 medical stores in search of an N-95 mask, even regular surgical masks are unavailable at some of these stores," said Gopakumar V R (63), a retired government employee.

However, medical stores complain that they are not receiving enough masks. The N-95 mask, which was suggested by the WHO (World Health Organisation), is usually used only by medical practitioners.

"We are not getting enough N-95 masks. At least 30 people call daily asking for the mask," said V. Arun, a medical store employee from Statue.

Last week, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan enlisted the help of prison inmates at Thiruvananthapuram, Vayyur and Kannur central prisons to ease the shortage of masks. The first batch of 1,000 masks produced by inmates was handed over to the state government on Saturday. Vijayan said in a tweet that more masks would be made available by this week.

"In light of the shortage, directions were given to engage the prisoners in the State in manufacturing masks. It has com-

menced on a war footing basis.

Today, the Prison officials of Thiruvananthapuram Jail have handed over the first batch," the tweet titled 'Solving the mask problem' read.

Kudumbashree's tailoring units have also started making cotton masks to help the public fight back coronavirus. Kudumbashree has many small and medium tailoring units functioning across the 14 districts in Kerala. Out of these units, 268 tailoring units have started making cotton masks.

Masks are being prepared as per the orders received from the health department and stitching has started. The total production capacity of all the units put together is approximately 130,000 masks a day.

Medical stores are also facing a shortage of gloves and hand sanitizers. "We are trying to source more hand sanitizers and gloves from other states but these are in high demand all over India," said Arun.

Overpricing of masks and gloves by pharmacies has also been an issue in the state. The Department of Legal Metrology has filed several cases against pharmacies for overcharging for these essential materials.

Four cases were identified during the inspections. It was noticed that masks priced at Rs15 were being sold for Rs 50, and masks that cost Rs 95 were priced at Rs200.

The prices for N-95 masks have also gone up on online platforms like Amazon. The mask that usually costs around Rs 300 is now sold at Rs 599."

Police enforce lockdown in Bidar

CHARUDUTT PRABHU

Humnabad: Bidar district is under precautionary lockdown due to the Coronavirus outbreak. One of its major taluks, Humnabad wears a deserted look.

The district administration, this week, imposed Section 133 and 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code till March 31. The sub-inspector of the Humnabad Police Station Ravikumar Subhash Chandra (37), said, "Except gas stores, petrol bunks, medical shops, hospitals and wine shops, everything is closed. You won't even find a cup of tea."

"We are making sure people do not congregate, especially at religious places. We have also asked people to scale down the pre-planned functions," he added.

The Gram Panchayats have employed people to spread awareness in the rural areas, while the police have used the public announcement system in the urban areas.

"Our department has put up banners everywhere to educate people about the virus outbreak," he said.

Humnabad taluk comprises 27 villages including the hamlets. "So far, a total of eight residents of this taluka have come from abroad. The three men, who arrived today from the UAE (United Arab Emirates) has been sent for a medical check-up," said Chandra.

The police go around to ensure that the shops are closed. A vegetable seller Yaqub Ali (58) said, "I close my shop when they [police] come when they go, I keep it open, otherwise, the vegetables will rot."

Another vegetable seller Sunil Haroor (25) had a different opinion. "I don't think the market is weak. In times like these, people come in large numbers to buy. For they are scared the shops will be closed."

Venkat (51), a Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation worker, said "To my luck, I found a handful of shops open and bought things necessary for daily need."

Like any other medical shop, the Apollo Pharmacy here faces the same problem. "The demand is high for masks, hand wash and sanitizer. We don't have these items now in our store today," said Shiva (30) who works in the pharmacy.

While the medical shops were open, a handful of grocery shops were half-opened. "The entire bazaar is shut and the business is badly hit," lamented Sharnu (25), owner of a grocery shop.

Grocery stores run out of supplies in Kolkotta

ARKATAPA BASU

Kolkata: As Kolkata prepared for the Janata curfew announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, loudspeakers blared warnings against hoarding and increased prices and listed preventive measures against COVID 19 at Behala Chowrasta bazaar.

The usually bustling evening bazaar of Behala Chowrasta saw considerably less crowd since the PM's announcement on March 19.

Even though there are few customers, grocery shops ran out of basic food items like bread and eggs by late evening.

Amal Dey, (35) a grocery shopkeeper, had to turn away about seven customers within a span of 20 minutes.

"I picked up few items today because the shop will be closed tomorrow. A lot of people want bread and eggs but the items got over very quickly," he said.

In addition to this, items like rice, wheat and potato have been in high demand.

Dey added, "People have bought twice the amount of rice, pulses and flour than usual. Somebody bought 10 kg of flour instead of their usual 5 kg."

Manju Naskar, (48) a caretaker for the elderly, said that the price of rice had increased by almost Rs 200.

"We have bought extra 10 kg of rice and 20 kg of potato. Till yesterday one sack of rice was Rs 700 but today it is Rs 900," she said.

As precautionary measure her family has bought extra pulses, oil and spices as well.

However, potato seller Rajdeep Bannerjee (35) said his sale had not been seriously affected. "People are buying as per their need. Nobody has demanded extra till now," he said.

According to him, wholesale markets had increased their prices

Supplies rationed in Lucknow

ASHREYA PATIAL

Lucknow Small scale business continues here despite the number of those infected by the Coronavirus rising to nine.

Anand Pal, a flower seller, who hails from West Bengal travelled to Lucknow last week and he could not see any screening for virus at the railway station. He wants to return home.

Pal witnessed a decline in his business from the past one month. "People do not come to buy flowers, they seem skeptical. They tell me to come after the situation gets better."

Pal said "What is this virus that I cannot see? Our battle is with hunger which we feel."

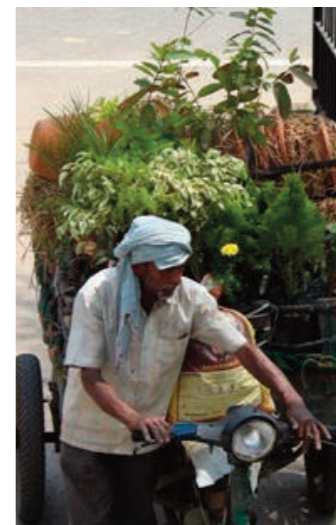
Shifali Gupta, a private tuition teacher, said wages were important and that she needed to go for work regularly.

"I teach at four different houses some keep sanitizers at their homes and some do not," she said. But she makes sure that she keeps a sanitizer with her as she needs to travel all day.

"Sanitizers have become scarce in the market. We fear that soon we will run out of them," she said.

Sapna Jaiswal, a household worker who used to work for 7 houses has been told not to work in 3 of those houses now.

"Last week, I was told by everyone that I should stay at home," she added.



Anand Pal the flower seller, pushing his cart

Sapna has four school-going kids. They all live in a one-room house. "If we have to live in quarantine, we already know what that would be like because we do not have enough space available."

After a complete lockdown was imposed in Lucknow, food supplies for the army personnel have been restricted as all canteens inside the cantonment have been shut.

Pawan Kumar, a soldier here said that he and other soldiers who had been assigned quarters away from the army mess were not allowed to access the mess.

"Soldiers like us deployed for household work are expected to

store food. However, we do not have a place to cook in the quarters. We were informed about the lockdown without prior information and we do not know when will it end," he said.

Sanjana Rawat, a housewife said, all shops including the army canteens had now been shut. The price of regular vegetables has been gone up by 50 per cent. "What used to cost us Rs. 40 now costs us Rs.60," she said.

However in the cantonment area, the military police constantly patrolled the roads, she said. The parks had been sealed and the walking area had been closed.

"Nobody expected the army canteens to be shut down with only a medical dispensary left opened," she added.

Rawat said the army would supply rations from now in controlled quantities. Trucks would bring in milk, vegetables and even water once a day. The supply would be given only once a day.

Rawat said "I have full faith that the army will ensure that everyone gets a fair share in this time of crisis."

Oinam Meiti, a soldier, said that before the lockdown started the army was screening every individual who crossed the gates.

Oinam's daughter was born last week and he was planning to go home. "We have been strictly told to stay indoors and I understand the seriousness of this.."



A long line outside a shop in Koramangala

People stocking up in Bangalore

ARCHITA RAGHU

Bangalore: Bangalore's stores are running out of sanitisers and handwash even as 20 people tested positive for coronavirus in Karnataka.

Stores like Reliance Fresh are allowing only 20 people inside the store at a time and are screening their customers with a thermal infrared thermometer. At the Koramangala branch, a line of people donning masks extends outside the store and spills onto the 18th main road.

"Handwash came in this morning and was sold out by the afternoon and sanitisers are currently unavailable and will be out of stock for the next three weeks," said Foutima Usha, an employee at Reliance Fresh.

Citizens are stocking up on non-perishable items such as maggi and chips packets from supermarkets and small stores.

Gouri RB, a resident of Koramangala, says that she comes out of the house only when she needs to stock up on goods. "It's better if we are prepared and keep items at home because it looks like this virus is not going to blow over or reduce anytime soon," she says.

Gouri adds that she does not feel like Bangalore is equipped to deal

with the outbreak of coronavirus or a future where there might be a lack of food, soap, and other items.

Nilgiris — the other large grocery store in the area — has only fresh fruits and packed items. Several aisles are empty and there are scattered boxes. There is only one cashier with a calculator and very few customers now.

"You will have better luck somewhere else for masks and sanitizers," said N. Babitha. A regular customer at Nilgiris.

Grocers Basket is one of the very few stores in the area that has a stock of sanitisers. The cashier here, K. Rajan says that they had just ordered three boxes of sanitizers and already more than 30 sanitizers have been sold. "We have placed an order for 150 more and hopefully they come on Monday," he said.

Shilpa N, a domestic worker in 2nd Block Koramangala, says "It's good that people are stocking up items but some of us can't afford to. The sanitizers are expensive and we can't stock up on vegetables and things like that as we don't have a fridge."

The first COVID-18 case in Karnataka was in Bangalore where an IT professional who had traveled to Dubai tested positive for the virus on February 24.



A vegetable market in Kolkotta