

Coronavirus: The Indian children orphaned by Covid-19

Five-year-old Pratham and his 10-month-old brother Ayush lost their father to Covid-19 in April. Days later, as a different Delhi hospital, they lost their mother.

The couple had changed and they didn't even know it. They couldn't understand why their parents were taking so long to come home. Relatives told Pratham that his mom and dad had gone out for work. The Pratham kept asking, and each day became more difficult than the last.

The relatives decided to contact a Delhi-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that works with orphaned children. The NGO says it keeps someone will adopt both Pratham and his brother.

Sonia, 12, and her brother Ansh, 7, lost their father in the first wave of the pandemic in last year. Their parents' general attitude was to bring them up as if he were still alive. She is worried about their future, but doesn't even want to consider separating them for adoption.

"Who will look after these kids after me?" she said. "These children are the legacy of my son and daughter-in-law. A lot of people are coming to ask for adoption. How can I give them away?"

There are not enough orphans. Covid has devastated families across India, orphaning many children. Sonia's family, minister for women and child welfare, recently reported that both parents of 10-year-old Pratham had died from coronavirus between April and May. Experts say the number is likely a significant underestimate.

Over the weekend, India's



Adopt children whose parents have died of Covid-19. But such open sharing of phone numbers and photos of children raises fears of trafficking. Mr. Kumbh warned against social media because "Orphan-like orphans whose parents could pick them up had some access to a Facebook page that was offering children for adoption. He said, "One of my staff members called the number on the Facebook page, and they opened the price of \$7,000 (US\$1) for one child. We have reported the group to the police."

There are fears in India that children can be exploited for cheap manual labor or even sex work. Social workers at the Child Welfare based NGO Pratham, said her organization had not received any reports of child trafficking. But she said she had seen one parent had died and the other one, usually the father, Pratham's father, had died. That created a need to look out for children who had not been orphaned, but only lost one parent. For one, the staff at Pratham began visiting orphanages and very sick with Covid-19.

"Covid-19 orphans are a big issue at the moment but that's not the whole truth. The number of children who have lost one parent is huge and they also need attention," she said.

Mr. Kumbh said Pratham had received heartbreaking divorce cases during the pandemic. One said she had lost one child whose father had died in a hospital and they needed help to create him, because their mother was abandoned with Covid-19.

Many have used social media websites effectively to seek help with housing, food, oxygen and medicines. But social media has also been flooded with calls to

short term focus on foster care, rather than full adoption, was required to help alleviate the problem. "It is a myth that every child is adopted," he said. "Family members can always come forward. Foster care is a great idea but in our country, that's not taking provision in the law." 19% of families who have lost a child to Covid-19 are looking after families and in overcrowded care homes for the whole world. The number of children who have lost one parent is huge and they also need attention," she said.

Experts say it can help improve India's dismal adoption rates as more families may come forward to look after their children temporarily, which may eventually transition them to family adopt.

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Pakistan, Iraq to enhance security, defence cooperation



Rahillullah Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Iraq's Minister for Atomic Energy and Nuclear Material Al Chabrizi on Sunday agreed on the need for exchanging delegations and visits to enhance cooperation in security matters, counter-terrorism and other areas.

During a meeting, Mr. Qureshi highlighted the professional expertise and commitment of Pakistan's armed forces and the enhancement of cooperation in effectively dealing with the challenge of terrorism.

He said the two countries could benefit from cooperation in counter-terrorism, particularly in the areas of intelligence gathering and capacity building of their law enforcement agencies.

The Iraqi interior minister also held a meeting with Iraqi Minister of Defense, the two ministers agreed to enhance cooperation in bilateral defence relations, the Foreign Office spokesperson said in a press release.

Foreign Minister Qureshi resumed Pakistan's visit to Iraq to deepen and broaden bilateral cooperation in the fields of defence and defence production.

COVID-19: Bangladesh extends India border closure

India's border closure with Bangladesh has been extended for another two weeks, according to the Bangladesh government.

Bangladesh government has decided to extend the ongoing ban on public travel through land ports to India till June 14 in view of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Since the rise in COVID-19 cases in the neighborhood, Bangladesh's land border has been closed with India since April 26. May 11 was supposed to be the last day of the ban, however, the ban was extended for another two weeks.

The government has also decided to stop travel through two air-closed ports to stop the spread of the virus. The newly-closed land ports with India are Chanchal and Sonmuid of Chittagong.

Debarah port will be closed for one week, while Sonmuid for two weeks. However, cargo movement will continue as usual.

Although land ports have been shut with India, crowded Bangladesh air routes have been open for other land ports, namely Benapole, Karail, and Humana. Meanwhile, export import of goods will be allowed.

The decision has been taken as Bangladesh is experiencing a rise in COVID-19 related deaths. The health authorities in the country say the infection rate is showing a slightly upward trend in districts that share borders with an air close to India. Dhaka-7, has reported.

Bangladesh has registered 14 more COVID-19 deaths, taking the country's total to 12,263. The total number of infections now stands at 79,438 (ANS).

Sri Lanka launches probe after burning ship pollutes beaches

Sri Lanka launched a criminal probe on Sunday into a cargo container ship fire that has ravaged the island nation's coastline.

The Singapore-registered MV 'X-Press Pearl' had been conducting on the highway for 11 days after a blaze broke out on it when heading for Colombo from the Indian state of Gujarat.

The 25-member crew, who have already been vaccinated from the ship, will be questioned on Monday after a complaint was lodged by Sri Lanka's Marine Environment Protection Authority.

Last week, authorities said they believed the fire was caused by a toxic acid leak that the crew had been aware of since May 11.

The captain and the crew were in quarantine, but health authorities have told us that we can question them from tomorrow," Ajith Rohana, a police spokesperson, said AFP news agency.

"We have already sent samples of polluted seawater and burnt debris from the vessel for a forensic report."

Authorities said the operators of the container ship say the fire has continued to burn, though it has been brought under control.

The ship's owners, X-Press Freedom, said the vessel's hull breached, and there was damage to its fuel tank.

Most of the ship's cargo, including 23 tonnes of toxic acid, sodium hydroxide, lubricants and other chemicals, appears to have been destroyed in the fire, according to officials.

Sri Lanka's Marine Protection Authority (MPA) said the worst beach pollution in our history, and warned it could cause years of ecological damage.

Fishermen have been banned from the 80-kilometre (50-mile) stretch of coast where the polluters have washed up.

At least 4,500 fishermen were affected at the fishing and tourist resort of Negombo, officials from the Roman Catholic church in the area said Saturday as they pleaded for financial aid.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said AFP on Saturday that there were also fears of reduced demand for seafood from the rest of the world.

Nepali billionaire says the country underestimated its second Covid wave

As of May 30, Nepal has reported 571,124 coronavirus infections and 7,277 deaths, according to data from local health authorities.

Health workers wearing protective suits spray disinfectant on children during a government-sponsored nationwide lockdown in a preventive measure against the Covid-19 coronavirus, on an airport road in Kathmandu on May 3, 2020.

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Nepal underestimated its second wave of Covid-19 infections and needs to step up its efforts to address the crisis, Nepali billionaire Biju Chandrabose said on Friday.

The South Asian country's Covid cases surged in April and continued to rise through May.

As of May 30, Nepal has reported 571,124 coronavirus infections and 7,277 deaths, according to data from local health authorities.

The infection is similar to what's happening in neighboring India, which has the second highest number of cases in the world.

Chandrabose, chairman of the parliament's COVID-19 task force, said the fire was not brought under control.

"This time, it's worse," he said. "We're looking for other sources of supply." he said. "We need to step up our efforts to deal with the second wave."

World Bank data shows that in 2019, Nepal only had 17,459 physicians per 1,000 people. That's lower than 187 in India and 3.12 in the U.K. in the same year.

Incubation in Nepal have been hampered by supply, and only around 2.2% of the country's 29 million residents are fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data.

"We were counting on India's Chandrabose said.

India is a manufacturing hub for vaccines and has donated them to neighboring countries. But social media has also

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Health-care system

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India stopped exports in February to prioritize domestic demand.

Chandrabose, who is an opposition member of parliament, said he wishes that all parties would join Covid-related dialogue first.

Saidi, who is the speaker, said, "Nepal's parliament was dissolved in December. But the move was reversed after the Supreme Court deemed it unconstitutional."

On May 27, however, President Biju Devi Bhandari dissolved the parliament and called for elections in November. Hearty reported the opposition Nepali Congress party said it will launch a political and legal fight against the dissolution.

Other opposition parties find the timing unacceptable, Chandrabose said. It should be held when the country's health and economic situation is back on track, he said.



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