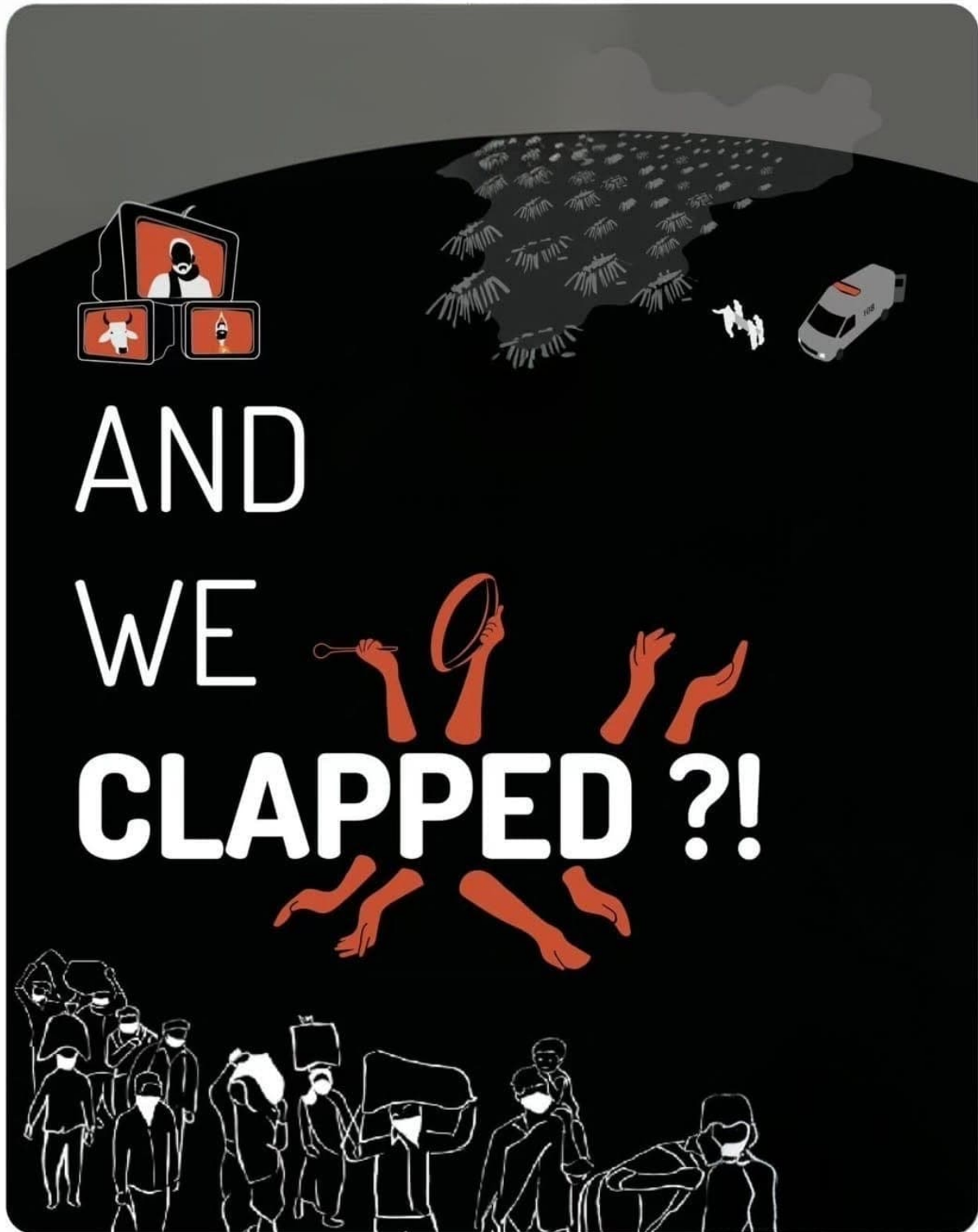




# And WE Clapped?

*News, Views, and Perspectives on Governance in Post-Pandemic India*



# And WE Clapped?

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The first issue of a newsletter always carries a burden larger than itself. It is not merely a publication. It is a declaration that memory will not be surrendered, that silence will not be normalised, and that ordinary citizens still have the right to ask dangerous questions.

Six years after the COVID-19 pandemic transformed everyday life, and four years after the formation of the People's Commission & Public Inquiry Committee (PC-PIC) initiative under the framework of Participatory Action Research Coalition of India (PARCI), we place before you this first issue of our monthly newsletter.

It emerges not from corporate boardrooms or policy think tanks, but from relief camps, ration lines, migrant journeys, village hearings, fishing harbours, forest settlements, street corners, labour bastis, and the collective anxieties of a people who watched governance mutate before their eyes during and after the pandemic years.

When the National People's Conclave (NPC) process and the larger PC-PIC initiative began documenting what was unfolding around us, many dismissed these concerns as exaggerated. Yet today, even global institutions are forced to quietly acknowledge what citizens, activists, doctors, workers and communities were saying during the pandemic years. This issue carries the latest statement from the WHO, including its categorical clarification that: *"WHO recommended the use of masks, vaccines and physical distancing, but at no stage recommended mask mandates, vaccine mandates or lockdowns."*

That sentence alone deserves to enter the political history of our times.

Because what happened in India during the pandemic was not merely a health emergency. It became a laboratory for a new governance model. Citizens were increasingly reduced into passive beneficiaries. Rights became conditional. Dissent became anti-national. Surveillance became normal. Public suffering became statistical management. The language of democracy slowly gave way to the language of compliance.

This issue therefore revisits the last six years not merely as chronology, but as political transition. Our timeline on health policies and schemes attempts to map how welfare itself has increasingly shifted from a rights-based

constitutional framework to a selective, centralised and leader-driven beneficiary framework. The transformation is subtle but dangerous. Citizens who once demanded accountability are now expected to display gratitude for what already belongs to them by right.

That is why the workers' struggles in Panipat and Noida covered in this issue are not isolated labour disputes. They are warnings from the factory floor. They tell us that beneath the tall claims of growth, Digital India, Vishwaguru and "Amrit Kaal", lies a deeply insecure economic structure dependent on suppressing labour rights, informalising employment and disciplining dissent.

And yet, even as ordinary Indians are told to tighten belts once again, history is unfolding with astonishing irony.

The latest geopolitical crisis emerging from the expanding West Asian war has exposed the fragility of India's economic and diplomatic positioning. Inflation remains inadequately controlled. Fuel vulnerabilities have deepened. Supply chains remain unstable. The rupee continues to face pressure. The government that marketed itself as the architect of a 'New India' now finds itself issuing appeals for austerity.

Not from the poor to the rich.

But from the poor to the poorer.

In 2020, the country was told: *"From midnight tonight onwards, the entire country shall go under complete lockdown."* Around the same moment, people were asked to *"clap our hands, beat our plates, ring our bells."* What followed was not a clear survival plan for workers and the poor, but a political theatre – of disciplining, polarisation, repression and spectacle.

The same script returns today in the language of austerity: ordinary people are once again asked to carry the burden of decisions they did not make. The cruel theatrics continue unabated.

One almost expected the next announcement to ask Indians to inhale less oxygen for national development!

Why should a vegetable vendor in Noida, a fisherwoman in Kerala, a migrant worker in Panipat, or a forest community in Bastar carry the burden of a megalomaniac's misgovernance?

This issue of the newsletter therefore asks a simple question: who is India being governed for? Is there a government for the people? Is there a government?

The answer cannot emerge from television studios. It must emerge from public testimony.

That is why PC-PIC continues its work.

Over the last four years, our collective processes have helped organise and document public hearings among forest peoples, Adivasi communities, fishworkers, hawkers, ragpickers, sanitation workers, informal labourers, displaced communities and urban working classes across multiple regions of India. We documented COVID FIRs and people's testimonies not as charity archives, but as political memory. We attempted to preserve the voices that official history would otherwise erase.

Because authoritarian systems do not merely control institutions.

They attempt to erase memory itself.

In this issue you will therefore also find political cartoons by K. P. Sasi, whose sharp visual language reminds us that satire remains one of the last democratic weapons against authoritarian absurdity. You will find a short story, a book recommendation, workers' struggles, policy timelines, health histories and documentation of governance shifts. Together, they form fragments of a larger archive of resistance.

This newsletter does not claim neutrality.

Neutrality in unequal times often becomes collaboration.

We stand unapologetically with constitutional rights, democratic freedoms, workers, minorities, women, fisher peoples, Adivasis, displaced communities and all those who continue to pay the price for elite political theatre.

And we insist that India deserves citizens, not obedient beneficiaries.

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Cartoon: **KP Sasi** · Design: Achu Sheela · COVID Response Watch

#### LOCKDOWN AS GOVERNANCE

## Lockdown as Governance — What did WHO say?

*"On March 11 the World Health Organization declared that Covid-19 was a pandemic. Two days later, on March 13, the health ministry said that coronavirus "is not a health emergency." Finally, on March 19, the prime minister addressed the nation. He hadn't done much homework. He borrowed the playbook from France and Italy. He told us of the need for "social distancing" (easy to understand for a society so steeped in the practice of caste) and called for a day of "people's curfew" on March 22. He said nothing about what his government was going to do in the crisis, but he asked people to come out on their balconies and ring bells and bang their pots and pans to salute health workers. He didn't mention that, until that very moment, India had been exporting protective gear and respiratory equipment, instead of keeping it for Indian health workers and hospitals"*

(2020, Roy)

On 24th March, PM Modi announced a complete lockdown of the entire country. He stated that social distancing is the only way to mitigate it. Along with stating "Covid 19 does not see race, religion, colour, caste, creed, language or border before striking", calling for "unity and brotherhood" in India's response (All India Radio, 2020). Starting from the sudden lockdown to the migrant crisis,

where thousands of migrants were stranded with no employment, food security or homes to the unaccounted deaths, with dozens of bodies washing up on the banks of the Ganges, to the "Pradhan Mantri" policies that came after, which made it clear that the virus was not the only thing that the state was managing, but the people. Also the vocabulary of "physical distancing" that was adopted by the state during the pandemic was mapped onto India's existing structures of exclusion, built on the logic of purity, pollution and untouchability which further exacerbated and enforced centuries of systemic injustices.

In January 2026, when the United States formally completed its withdrawal from the World Health Organization, WHO issued a response that deserved far more public attention than it received.

The WHO is a specialised agency of the United Nations with a decades-long record of helping countries detect, control, and eliminate major diseases. Its contributions span the eradication of smallpox, the containment of multiple epidemics, and the development of evidence-based health policies for member states, all grounded in rigorous scientific research and international coordination.

When the US cited "WHO failures during the COVID-19 pandemic" as a reason for its withdrawal – specifically accusing the organisation of promoting lockdowns, WHO pushed back clearly and on the record. In its January 24, 2026 statement, WHO wrote:

*"WHO recommended the use of masks, vaccines and physical distancing, but at no stage recommended mask mandates, vaccine mandates or lockdowns. We supported sovereign governments to make decisions they believed were in the best interests of their people, but the decisions were theirs."*

There was backlash from officials from the US institutions including the acting leadership of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health. Maria Van Kerkhove, an infectious disease epidemiologist and WHO's technical lead for COVID-19 – responded directly:

**"All untrue. We don't ignore science and WHO never recommended lockdowns."**

This position was not new or reactive. WHO had stated it publicly as far back as December 2020, in a question-and-answer post titled *Coronavirus disease: herd immunity, lockdowns and COVID-19*. There, WHO acknowledged that large-scale physical distancing measures and movement restrictions — commonly referred to as lockdowns — can slow COVID-19 transmission by limiting contact between people. However, it warned explicitly that

"these measures can have a profound negative impact on individuals, communities, and societies by bringing social and economic life to a near stop. Such measures disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups, including people in poverty, migrants, internally displaced people and refugees, who most often live in overcrowded and under-resourced settings, and depend on daily labour for subsistence."

Even earlier, in April 2020, a WHO strategy document stated the urgent need to transition away from lockdown measures, while cautioning that premature lifting of restrictions without careful planning was likely to lead to an uncontrolled surge in cases. The organisation's position throughout was consistent: lockdowns could serve a narrow, time-limited purpose, buying governments the weeks needed to build preparedness capacity, but could not and should not function as the primary or default mechanism for disease control. As WHO later stated directly: "We respected that choice, as it was their sovereign right, but we said that lockdowns should not be used as the primary or default strategy for controlling COVID-19, and highlighted their serious social and economic consequences."

The way many governments, including India's, actually implemented lockdowns went far beyond this — abrupt, prolonged, and with little of the surveillance infrastructure WHO had recommended built alongside them, leading to outcomes that were, by any measure, catastrophic.

Six years have passed, and the government chose to ignore WHO's directions on how to deal with this crisis. **Why did the government, as a member and a founder state, choose to ignore WHO guidelines? On what scientific basis was the lockdown announced, given that there is no scientific evidence that lockdowns keep a pandemic in control? And most importantly, whose interests did it serve, and who was made to pay the price?**

The consequences were borne by the people, the working class and the marginalised.

According to Ayodhya Prasad, a sanitation worker based in Ghaziabad, Delhi, when workers left their homes to work during the pandemic, they were beaten by the police and blocked from collecting garbage. When MCD officials eventually granted them permission to resume work, police harassed them again in the name of lockdown restrictions and physical distancing norms. When they filed complaints, they were lathi-charged, beaten, and jailed.

In Gujarat, the Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network documented and investigated the increase in Dalit atrocities across the country during the lockdown and thereafter (DHRD, 2020). A fourteen-year-old Dalit boy was beaten by this force for stepping out to get essentials. The police followed him back to his village, where they dragged out twelve young men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five and assaulted them – beating them and subjecting them to casteist verbal abuse – in the name of enforcing lockdown rules.

Hatred and marginalisation against Muslim communities existed long before the pandemic. The lockdown period, however, with its strict physical distancing mandates, gave that pre-existing hatred a new language along with state backing. Tablighi Jamaat congregation in March 2020 was used as a toolkit to spread hatred, which took place even before the lockdown was announced. This incident was seized upon by media and political figures to brand Muslim communities as deliberate spreaders of the virus. In a moment when widespread fear around contamination and contagion had already been manufactured, attaching that fear to a specific religious community had immediate and lasting consequences.

The language of "spreaders" was used against Muslim, Dalit, and Bahujan minority communities. People were denied healthcare, and many lost their jobs, pushing them into severe economic precarity. As stigma increased, so did violence – all under the cover of a public health emergency.

The state's silence in the face of atrocities, harassment, discrimination, and violence against Dalit, Bahujan, and Muslim communities during the pandemic is a matter of documented record. What was called a physical distancing measure operated, in practice, through the logic of a social distancing that this country has long known in the form of caste, class and religion – with a new language, state enforcement, and the full cover of a public health emergency.

Six years on, the record is no longer unclear. WHO did not recommend lockdowns as a default instrument of governance. It warned that such measures would harm the most vulnerable. The Indian state chose something else. It turned lockdown into command and left citizens — especially workers, migrants, the poor, and informal communities — to bear the cost.

The questions that must be asked, and must continue to be asked, are simple: used for what, on whose mandate, and against whom? Why has there been no government accounting of the impact of the lockdown on citizens? Why has no one answered for a measure that was never meant to become a substitute for governance? Why has lockdown increasingly become a tool through which the state manages people, rather than serves them? And if a nationwide lockdown could be imposed with only four hours' notice, why has accountability for its consequences not arrived even six years later?

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#### WORKERS & DIGNITY

## **From Chicago's eight-hour struggle to Noida's workers protest, workers have never stopped demanding dignity. The question is what did the state do through all this time?**

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May Day was born in blood and solidarity, from the working-class struggle. In 1886, workers in Chicago and the United States walked off the job demanding an eight-hour working day, equal wages, basic rights, and protection against the violence of industrial capitalism. The state responded with violence. But the demand and the fight did not die. The demand for rights and justice echoed across continents — until May Day became a reminder of what labour is owed and what is denied.

In 1918, at the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras, workers were not even given a break for lunch. A lawyer named B. P. Wadia intervened, leading to the formation of India's first organised trade union, the Madras Labour Union. When the management attacked and sued the union, Wadia took the matter to the International Labour Conference. The pressure from the ILO led to the Trade Unions Act of 1926, which later gave registered trade unions legal status and immunity from civil and criminal liability. In India, the labour movement grew intertwined with the independence struggle,

where workers fought against colonial and capitalist exploitation, which were two sides of the same coin. The formal association and celebration of May Day began in 1923 in Madras, when the day was hosted by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan.

Behind its radical origin, May Day imagined the worker at the centre, people at the centre, and rights at the centre. But the question today is not just whether the worker is in the picture. The question is: what is the state trying to refuse in the very identity of the worker?

Recently, the Panipat workers' protest, which began on February 23, 2026, brought this question to the streets again. More than 30,000 workers marched out of the oil refinery demanding equal wages, occupational safety and health facilities, and an end to unpaid overtime. The protest was triggered after contractual labourers were injured in an on-site accident, and the IOCL corporation did nothing. The protest was met with force and intimidation, with reports of lathi charge, CISF firing in the air, communication restrictions, and criminal cases against unnamed workers.

In Noida, the protest began on April 10, 2026, when workers from different companies in the Special Economic Zone came together over wages, working hours, overtime payment, weekly rest, and basic dignity at the workplace. The mobilisation drew thousands of insecure and contract-based workers, including a large number of women, and became strong enough to force several managements to sit across the table with workers and trade unions. But on April 13, the Uttar Pradesh Police brought the strike to an end. A later fact-finding report by lawyers' and student groups said that, in the crackdown that followed, more than a thousand people, including workers and children, were untraceable for some time. Instead of addressing the workers' demands, the police filed seven FIRs, naming a few individuals while placing serious criminal charges on more than 4,000 unnamed people. Charges such as attempt to murder, rioting, attack on public officials, destruction of property, criminal intimidation, and breach of peace turned a demand for wages and dignity into a criminal case against the working class itself.

The demands of workers have been for dignified wages, safe working conditions, the right to organise, and the right to live as equal citizens in a democratic state. These demands have won important rights through long

struggles. But every gain made by workers has also been met by attempts to discipline, dilute, or take it back.

This was seen during the Emergency, when labour unions were severely restricted and even the right to form associations was suspended. But resistance did not disappear. The decades that followed saw workers continue to fight back, with the Bombay textile mill strike standing as one of the most significant examples.

By the 1990s, the same anti-worker logic found a new language through neoliberalism: flexibility, efficiency, reform, and growth. Contractualisation was normalised, labour protections were weakened, and workers' rights were increasingly presented as obstacles to the market. According to India Forum (2026), the share of contract labour in organised manufacturing rose from 12 percent in the early 1990s to 33.6 percent by 2014.

Then came 2020. The sudden lockdown, announced with only four hours' notice, did not only expose the disposability of workers; it also became the political moment through which the state accelerated the stripping away of labour rights.

In May 2020, several states moved to relax or suspend labour protections. Uttar Pradesh approved an ordinance seeking to exempt factories and manufacturing establishments from almost all labour laws for three years. Several states also increased maximum daily factory working hours to 10–12 hours, with PRS noting that this raised serious questions in relation to ILO standards on working hours.

This was not only about changing labour laws on paper. The pandemic also strengthened an older emergency logic in which workers were repeatedly told that their labour was essential, but their rights were not. ESMA-type laws and state-level Essential Services Maintenance Acts gave governments the power to prohibit strikes in the name of maintaining essential services. The language was always public order, public interest, normal life. But in practice, it meant that workers could be declared indispensable when work was needed and disposable when they demanded rights.

The right to strike, organise, refuse unsafe work, or bargain collectively was pushed further into the zone of illegality. ESMA frameworks include powers to prohibit strikes, punish illegal strikes, punish instigation, and penalise financial support to illegal strikes.

This period also marked a major political shift in labour history: the passing of the labour codes. The state used the pandemic period to push out 29 existing labour laws, built over 70 years of struggle, workers' protests, court judgments, and negotiations, and reduced them to four codes. The four Labour Codes were later made effective from November 21, 2025, rationalising 29 existing labour laws.

This rewrote the architecture of the relationship between workers and the state. Power shifted further towards the employer, while workers were left with fewer protections and weaker rights to organise. Under the Industrial Relations Code, all persons must give a 14-day prior notice before a strike or lock-out, and strikes are prohibited during and after conciliation and tribunal proceedings. What was once a right won through struggle is increasingly converted into a procedure that can be delayed, restricted, and punished. PRS notes that this 14-day notice requirement, earlier applicable to public utility services, was expanded to all industrial establishments.

The effect of this dilution is not abstract. It appears where workers are most vulnerable: in contract work, unsafe workplaces, unpaid overtime, delayed wages, weak bargaining power, missing social security, and police cases when workers protest. This is why Panipat and Noida matter. They show how the stripping away of workers' rights moves from law and policy into the everyday life of workers.

Here, the connection becomes clear. The worker is first made insecure through contract work, then made disposable through weak safety and wage protections, and finally made criminal when they organise. At Panipat, the worker appears as contract labour: needed for production, but denied safety and dignity. At Noida, the worker appears as a suspect: organised for wages, but treated as a threat to law and order.

This is what May Day asks us to see. The state does not simply ignore the worker. It refuses to recognise the worker as a person with rights, dignity, and the power to organise.

**The question, then, is not only what May Day means today. It is what the state gains by curbing rights and freedoms so violently that barricades, beatings, arrests, and even deaths begin to look like normal governance. Do we want to live in a society where every demand for dignity is treated as**

war, or can we still learn from workers' struggles that rights are not a threat to democracy, but the very ground on which democracy stands?

THEN & NOW

## 2026 VS 2020



Cartoon: *KP Sasi*

### 2026

As the Iran war fuel crisis deepens, migrants in Indian cities are leaving for their homes. Rising fuel prices, soaring food costs, and widespread layoffs have disrupted the livelihoods of many, forcing them to flee urban centres. According to a report by [The Guardian](#), Delhi – home to thousands of migrants – has been experiencing a wave of reverse migration, with a large proportion of its workforce returning to rural areas.

VS

### 2020

This echoes the crisis of 2020, when the pandemic lockdown left migrants working in urban and semi-urban areas suddenly jobless and homeless. With no food security, employment, or shelter, they were forced to abandon the cities. Hundreds died on the journey home — deaths that went largely uncounted and unacknowledged.

## HEALTH TIMELINE

# Health Timeline 2020–2026: Tracking Crisis, Schemes, Failures, Law, Data, Pharma, and WHO Guidance in India's Public-Health Journey

Crisis

Scheme

Failure

Legal

Data

Pharma

WHO

## 2020

### CRISIS & RESPONSE · JANUARY 2020

First confirmed case: a 20-year-old woman in Thrissur, Kerala, with cough and sore throat. India's public health system enters the crisis with just over 1% of GDP on public health and 0.5 beds per 1,000 people.

### CRISIS & RESPONSE · MARCH 2020

Nationwide lockdown announced with ~4 hours' notice for 21 days, at ~500 confirmed cases. Social and economic fallout was immediate, especially for migrants. National Task Force (NTF) formed.

### CRISIS & RESPONSE · MARCH 2020

Tablighi Jamaat congregation at Nizamuddin Markaz framed as a Muslim-caused 'superspreader' by government briefings and pro-government media, fuelling Islamophobic hate and attacks on Muslim vendors, workers, and communities.

### GOVERNMENT SCHEME · APRIL 2020

Centre announces special COVID-19 package under Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY: free tests and treatment for eligible poor at public and empanelled private hospitals. Many private hospitals immediately refused admissions due to delayed reimbursements.

### SYSTEMIC FAILURE · APRIL 2020

ASHA and Anganwadi workers begin door-to-door surveillance with little PPE, facing hostility and delayed incentives.

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · MID-2020

COVID stigma grows; frontline workers in UP, Delhi, and Telangana face caste/religion-based targeting. Bodies of suspected COVID victims found floating in the Ganga and buried in shallow graves in UP — uncounted in official death tolls.

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · 2020-21

ICMR issued 32 notifications — 16 on administration, only 1 on patient rights. Zero notifications on cost of treatment, COVID protocols, grievance redressal or vaccination. A stark gap in patient-centred pandemic governance.

## 2021

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GOVERNMENT SCHEME · JANUARY 2021

India launches vaccination drive prioritising healthcare and frontline workers. At Davos, PM claims India is the 'pharmacy of the world' — domestic safeguards remain fragile.

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · FEBRUARY 2021

Early warnings of a second wave ignored. NTF does not meet through Feb–March. Decision-making concentrated in a few politically favoured figures detached from ground realities.

CRISIS & RESPONSE · MARCH 2021

Cases rise sharply. Kumbh Mela proceeds in Uttarakhand. CM declares: “*Ma Ganga’s blessings are there... so there should be no corona.*”

CRISIS & RESPONSE · APRIL 2021

Hospitals in Delhi, Maharashtra, UP and MP issue SOS messages over oxygen shortages. Apr 21: at least 22 COVID-19 patients die after hospital oxygen supply disrupted.

CRISIS & RESPONSE · APRIL 2021

India records a global record of 3,14,000+ new daily infections and 2,104 deaths. Kumbh Mela attracts ~70 lakh participants. PM Modi addresses a massive Asansol rally the day India records 2.34 lakh cases.

LEGAL & JUDICIAL · 30 APR & 31 MAY 2021

Supreme Court takes *Suo Motu* cognizance (Writ Petition (C) No. 3/2021) — scrutinising the Liberalised Vaccination Policy, oxygen supply, essential drugs and CoWIN access. Delhi High Court orders Centre to divert industrial oxygen to hospitals.

GOVERNMENT SCHEME · MAY 2021

Centre announces Liberalised Pricing and Accelerated Vaccination Strategy (effective May 1): states and private hospitals to procure 50% of doses at market rates; ₹250 private hospital cap removed. Supreme Court later terms this 'prima facie arbitrary.'

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · MAY 2021

MP implements PMJAY COVID package only now – months into the crisis. Bihar revises COVID death toll from ~5,400 to 9,429 after a court-ordered audit. Dr Kafeel Khan arrested for oxygen failure at his hospital.

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · MAY-JUNE 2021

Oxygen crisis peaks. Widespread reports of patients dying from lack of oxygen. ASHA workers continue 12–15-hour days with delayed or withheld payments.

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · MARCH 2020 – DEC 2021

78 lakh COVID hospitalisations estimated; only 9.31 lakh (11.9%) treated free under PMJAY. Only 55.28 lakh free COVID tests – 16% of total.

DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY · JAN 2020 – JUNE 2021

WHO estimates 3.3–4.7 million excess deaths in India – ~10× the official toll of 4,81,000. Deaths invisible in official records due to poor death registration and political minimisation. Lancet, The Wire, Think Global Health analyses corroborate.

## 2022

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CRISIS & RESPONSE · JAN-FEB 2022

Omicron wave rises. Election rallies packed without masks despite health guidelines. Congress marathon in UP; Delhi CM Kejriwal tests positive after campaigning maskless.

SYSTEMIC FAILURE · MARCH 2022

Data confirms <12% of COVID hospitalisations treated free under PMJAY (March 2020–Dec 2021). Only 16% of total tests conducted free under the scheme.

LEGAL & JUDICIAL · 2 MAY 2022

Supreme Court – Jacob Puliyl case: Court stresses bodily autonomy and proportionality (Puttaswamy framework). Blanket vaccine mandates

constrained; transparency on AEFI and trial data urged.

DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY · 2022

WHO global excess death report released – confirms massive India underreporting. Government disputes findings, calls them 'statistically unsound,' refuses to release complete CRS data.

## 2024

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LEGAL & JUDICIAL · 15 FEB 2024

Supreme Court strikes down Electoral Bond Scheme as unconstitutional – citing secrecy and potential for quid-pro-quo corruption.

PHARMA & CORRUPTION · MARCH 2024

₹945 crore in electoral bonds donated by 35 pharmaceutical companies. At least 7 firms under drug-quality probes donated to ruling parties in states where they have manufacturing plants – raising fears that pandemic-era regulatory action was compromised.

## 2025

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DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY · MAY 2025

Newly released CRS data confirms excess mortality in 2020–2021 was nearly 7× higher than official COVID fatalities. Rural death rates rose disproportionately higher than urban – pointing to the collapse of rural healthcare and deliberate invisibilisation.

GOVERNMENT SCHEME · JUNE-DEC 2025

PM-ABHIM 5-year mission (₹64,180 crore) concludes. 1,84,235 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs operational. eSanjeevani completes 37.2 crore teleconsultations. But 75% of PMJAY resources still benefit private hospitals; Union government's health transfer share falls to 51%.

GOVERNMENT SCHEME · 2025

Tele MANAS expanded nationwide – 36 states, 20 languages, 24×7 counselling; 3.28 million calls handled. Positive step, but mental health spending remains under 1% of the health budget with no accountability for lockdown-related trauma.

## 2026

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NEW

WHO / GLOBAL · JANUARY 2026

WHO states: “WHO recommended the use of masks, vaccines and physical distancing, but at no stage recommended mask mandates, vaccine mandates or lockdowns. We supported sovereign governments to make decisions they believed were in the best interests of their people, but the decisions were theirs.” — January 24, 2026 statement. Maria Van Kerkhove adds: “All untrue. We don’t ignore science and WHO never recommended lockdowns.”

GOVERNMENT SCHEME · FEBRUARY 2026

Budget 2026–27: PMJAY allocation raised 5.56% to ₹9,500 crore. Ministry of Health launches Strategy for AI in Healthcare (SAHI) — first in South-East Asia. Five integrated medical hubs in public-private partnership. 863 million ABHAs created. Public health spending stagnated at 1.2% of GDP; 2017 NHP target of 2.5% missed.

THE READING CORNER

## The Reading Corner

SHORT STORY

### ‘Migrants’

*A powerful fictional account of the migrant crisis that reflects the hunger, displacement, police violence, and uncertainty faced by workers forced to walk home during the lockdown.*

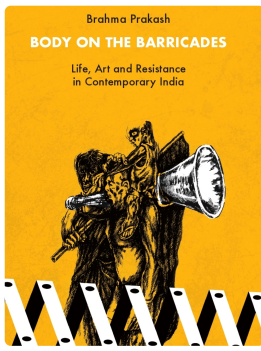
**“We are ruined Mutthu. They promised a lot, and this is what they have delivered. We are stuck here...We have signed the two-year contract as well. We can do nothing but work quietly for two years...” lamented Murugesan. Muthaiyyan didn’t know what to say.**

[Read on Scroll.in →](#)

BOOK

### “Body on the Barricades” — Brahma Prakash

*“In this book, Brahma Prakash opens out to view the interlocking carceralities of economic violence, sexual violence, and pandemic governance in a post-truth regime—and resistance. He does this through a fluid narrative that moves back and forth citing an array of instances, poets, events, and concerns—reflecting on cultures of protest,*



*oppression, aesthetics, and power across time and space in India.”*

– Frontline, 2023

[Read the PDF →](#)

SUPPORT THIS WORK

## Why This Work Needs Your Support

PIC-PC continues this work because the answer to the question of who India is being governed for cannot emerge from television studios. It must emerge from public testimony.

Over the last four years, these collective processes have helped organise and document public hearings among forest peoples, Adivasi communities, fishworkers, hawkers, ragpickers, sanitation workers, informal labourers, displaced communities and urban working classes across India. These testimonies are not charity archives. They are political memory.

This work needs support because official history often erases the voices of those who suffer the most. Independent people's documentation, public hearings, field investigations, legal follow-up, political education and citizen outreach require resources.

Supporting this work means supporting the right of ordinary people to speak, remember, question and organise.

***And if India deserves citizens, not obedient beneficiaries, then this work must be sustained.***

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@

Email: [peoplescommission2021@gmail.com](mailto:peoplescommission2021@gmail.com)

www

Website: [covidtruths.in](http://covidtruths.in)

Instagram: [@covid\\_truths](https://www.instagram.com/covid_truths)

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