

THE OCTOGENARIANS

Partition, riots, famine, cholera—they have seen it all. As covid-19 casts a pall of fear, Lounge speaks to men and women who offer context for the durability of life



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The politics of Satyajit Ray

VANTAGE
Putting homoeopathy to the test

STYLE
Is menswear stuck in no man's land?

FOCUS
The pain and cruelty of 'conversion therapy'



COVID-19: BUSINESSES TAKE TO 'CORONA PRODUCTS'



From handcrafted masks to sturdy face shields, small firms are turning to products that are in demand during the pandemic

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The covid-19 pandemic is forcing businesses to stare at a bleak future to enter the field of what they term "corona products". In the US, experts are warning for weeks that are now being labelled "covid-campers". These are nothing but traditional RVs, also known as motor homes or travel trailers. According to a recent report by Bloomberg, some people are spending upwards of \$100,000 around US, which they can travel while staying away from everyone else. "Social distancing is apparently a lot easier when you are living along your own kitchen, bathroom and bedroom," he reports.

In India, too, businesses that have suffered losses are trying to think innovatively, either looking at new production methods or modifying their existing ones. Be it customised face masks and face shields or

digital infrared thermometers and sanitizing tunnels. Take the face masks category. A recent report published in *The Lancet* medical journal says wearing a face mask can actually bring down the chance of infection to just 3%. According to the report, face shields and goggles could add "substantial protection". The comprehensive report is based on 172 observational studies across 69 countries and six continents.

"Given what's happening because of covid-19, I am not out of the question right now for many people. Everyone's looking to procure the basic requirements and face masks are an absolute must. Who wouldn't want them? I wouldn't leave the house without one," says Dalvir Singh, director, The Flag Company, a Mumbai-based firm. The company, which has been manufacturing flags, banners and backlit fabric light boxes, has set up a unit to make face masks.

It has come up with customised 2-ply fabric face masks that are breathable, UV-protected and washable. They are made from 100% woven polyester and can be personalised for a particular brand or company—they are customised masks for children and masks that can have half of your face printed on them too. "It's a great way of advertising and creating awareness about the importance of face masks at the moment. So far, everyone from small to large enterprises has shown interest in the product. We are also expecting to start exporting them soon," adds Singh.

For now, the company has fixed the minimum order at 12 pieces. But at ₹25 each, the affordability factor is also taken care of. "Till the time there is no vaccine or medical intervention, people will be using all the means possible for proper sanitization, one is the hand sanitizer, and the other, face masks," adds Singh.

The Start Store, also a startup based in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, had been designing travel bags and essentials but has now diversified into handcrafted face masks. "When the pandemic struck, the travel business went down. But we decided to make these masks because travel is still well in vogue. People might be modifying their existing ones. Be it customised face masks and face shields or



(top) Face masks from The Start Store, and the FaceARMOR face shield has several variants.

tunnels and the idea was to design these masks to keep them safe," says Valshek Khosla, part of the founding team at The Start Store. The team went through a detailed market research process before settling on handcrafted four-layered masks that use denim, linen and Khadi cotton. For protection, two filtration layers, including an antibacterial one, are used in every mask. "These are the same layers used in surgical masks," says Khosla, adding that after a quiet period of business they are now receiving orders of up to 150-200 masks daily. They cost a little as ₹269 for a set of three.

It's not just face masks. The sanitization tunnel too has caught the imagination of manufacturers. Across the world, these tunnels and chambers are being placed

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM FACEBOOK/THE START STORE

A shield of trust

Desmania Design, a studio based in Manesar, Haryana, is using rapid prototyping and 3D printing processes to develop a face shield. "People were either making disposable masks or normal (not necessarily reusable) face shields which were creating waste management issues," says Anuj Prasad, founder of the design studio. The FaceARMOR is a mask, a face shield and modular filter. It will have two variants: one for general users and an entirely transparent one mainly for doctors. "The whole aspect of human relationships is actually based on a person's identity and their facial expressions," says Prasad. "We thought of designing a transparent shield where the face is visible... The trust (between a patient and doctor) actually builds by looking at the face and understanding what they are talking about," he adds.

These face shields, which will cost ₹500-1,200, are made of transparent polycarbonate or PET (polyethylene terephthalate) and can be washed and reused. "We have identified four important (use) areas: delivery boys, industrial or police workforce, travellers and doctors," says Prasad, who hopes to begin deliveries later this month.

So on, Rowl Point India sells two models that have already been installed in some school and private offices in Delhi, even the M-block market in Greater Kailash-1, he says. For branding purposes, Chadha listed these tunnels under a "corona products" category on a new, stand-alone website. The models cost ₹64,000 and ₹10 lakh each, he says.

"Many malls, cinema halls, schools and residential societies are now reaching out as well. If an outsider is entering certain premises, they would want them to be sanitized," adds Chadha. He adds that the company is only manufacturing and supplying the tunnels. "We have no say or suggestion for the kind of disinfecting agent being used in the tunnels. Our job is just to provide the channel," he says. There is much more. From safety keys that help you avoid touching surfaces to foot-operated hand and ear dispensers, the growing number of innovations in some of the few good things to have come out of this pandemic.

Cyberattacks—be wary of the other 'virus'

Fear and the hunger for more information on the pandemic have fuelled a disturbing rise in the number of cyberattacks

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In a new report, multinational cybersecurity company Check Point Research has made public startling figures on cyberattacks built to take advantage of the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the three weeks leading up to 12 May, the company recorded around 192,000 coronavirus-related cyberattacks every week, staggering 30% rise on the previous weeks. The April-May period also saw 20,000 new coronavirus-related domains on the internet. 47% of these were malicious or suspicious, according to the report. So, why has there been such a spike in cybercrime this year? Cybersecurity experts point to two aspects: fear and the need for more information. The rapid spread of coronavirus and the lockdowns that have been clamped to check it have



People working from home are among those most vulnerable to cyberattacks. ALAMY

malicious. The number of URLs that carry malicious content also goes up," he says. The scaled-up problem is so unprecedented that international organizations like Interpol and the World Health Organization (WHO) have been releasing regular alerts for the general public on covid-19 cyberthreats. Last month, Interpol's cybercrime programme released a report, *Global Landscape On Covid-19 Cyberthreats*, which highlighted the latest methods and threats. Online scams, phishing and disruptive malware, including ransomware, are the most common. "We have seen a lot of emails that came with the subject 'You have been added to a team in Microsoft Teams', the Check Point Research report notes. Clicking on the URL that accompanied this email would install malware on your system, compromising its security. "This is a world that is spaceless, borderless and you really don't know who is sending you an email," Krishnamurthy says. "Even organizations as big as WHO have been used as a smokescreen. Users have been receiving an email, supposedly from WHO, offering information on safety tips and how to stay safe. Hence, you get

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tions, says that with the majority of the workforce adapting to work from home, organizations will have to rethink the approach to security to counter cyber threats.

"A threat vector that is being widely reported is the usage of covid-oriented themes for health or system updates for phishing or malware attacks as home workers are more prone to succumb to this technique," says Prasad, on email.

The scans are not aimed only at individual users. During the lockdown months, banks, real estate companies and other institutions too have been sending out SMSes and emails, asking customers to be wary of suspicious calls or emails. The education, healthcare and financial sectors, says Krishnamurthy, are particular targets. "People are looking for protective equipment, sanitizers, masks, cyber criminals are using that need to create spam emails and URLs where they advertise such products at cheap prices," he adds.

This is not the only time a disease outbreak has led to a rise in malicious activities on the internet. Similar trends were witnessed during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. "These methods are used over and over again. It's just that the cause varies from time to time."

Clear, phishing and other cyberattacks are being used. Hence, you get

THUMB RULE

BY NITIN SREEDHAR

AN APP A WEEK TO KEEP YOU ON TRACK

THIS WEEK SOCRACTIC CATEGORY: LEARNING AND EDUCATION

A LEARNING BUDDY FOR STUDENTS



Learning with the help of technology is a constantly evolving process. Today, there are apps to help you out if you are struggling with certain subjects. Socratic, powered by Google's Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, is one such tool, designed for school and university students. Solving a mathematics equation but can't figure out the next step? Simply point your phone's camera, using Socratic, towards the equation, whether it's on a screen or on a poster, and click.