

## COVID-19 and its impact on snakebite care in India: a bane or a boon?

Deepti Beri

The double whammy of poor-quality care with non-availability of life-saving healthcare services for snakebite in the COVID-19 scenario may result in significant surge in cases of snakebite deaths and cases of disability, especially in the high-burden states, writes Deepti Beri.

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19), a global pandemic that has disrupted the world since early 2020, with more than 4.9 lakh reported deaths worldwide. However, there are several health conditions, leading to thousands of deaths which continue to remain unnoticed. One such condition is Snakebite.

Snakebite leads to nearly 81,000 to 1,38,000 deaths worldwide each year. Despite that, it fails to make a mark on the health policy agenda. Deaths due to snakebite are entirely preventable, given the patients receive adequate and timely treatment. However, it is unfortunate that deaths due to snakebite continue to occur even today.

In India, accurate official figures on snakebite deaths are not available. The government data entirely based on hospital reporting suggests conservative estimates with only about a thousand deaths each year. However, the national mortality survey under the 'Million Death Study' estimated nearly 50,000 snakebite deaths every year in India. This is almost half the burden of all snakebite deaths globally.

Owing to lack of basic healthcare services together

with the lack of education and awareness, it is often seen that people bitten by snakes fail to receive timely medical attention. Amid the COVID-19 crisis, the situation for snakebite patients have got worse while hospitals gear up for responding primarily to the upsurge of COVID-19 cases. Although nearly 70% of all snakebites are by non-venomous snakes, they often need evaluation in a hospital. People bitten by poisonous snakes need timely administration of anti-venom as they may suffer from complications like respiratory failure, renal failure, internal bleeding, or paralysis, requiring intensive care support (ICU).

With severe COVID-19 patients also requiring ICU admission, governments are boosting availability of mechanical ventilation and oxygen supply, in addition to intensive care facilities in general. However, the arrangement wherein life-saving equipment are being reserved exclusively for COVID-19 patients is a major cause of worry.

Snakebite is mostly recognised as a disease of the poor with almost 97% of snakebite deaths being reported from rural areas of India where people are deprived of even basic-medical facilities. With limited infrastructure at government health facilities, not every victim of severe snake envenomation is fortunate to receive an ICU bed or other life support mechanism. With only 95,000 ICU beds and 47,500 ventilators in the public and private sector in India there is a massive disruption of medical services for other diseases in the county. This deficit is put-

ting an immense strain on the Indian health system. The double whammy of poor-quality care with non-availability of life-saving healthcare services for snakebite in the COVID-19 scenario may result in significant surge in cases of snakebite deaths and cases of disability, especially in the high-burden states.

However, India may see a ray of light for managing patients needing intensive care including snakebite treatment as the governments ramp up healthcare infrastructure in response to the pandemic. However, some commentators have opined that addition of ventilators and ICU beds for managing COVID-19 in Odisha, a boon for snakebite victims in future, once the pandemic subsides. However, the pandemic ending is few years down the road and only time can tell if the snakebite challenge is truly addressed with addition of these extra infrastructures. In the meantime, strengthening health systems to address the issue of snakebite is the only real solution at hand.

The George Institute for Global Health, India is conducting a study to understand how and why the cluster-containment strategy for COVID-19 control is affecting access and quality of snakebite care in India. This will help inform health systems response to future pandemics.

**Research Assistant, Injury Division, The George Institute India**

## CHINA HAS A HISTORY OF FIGHTING MENTALITY



Uma Shankar Prasad

"TO UNDERSTAND the tension between India and China, it is important to understand China's mentality. China has a pattern of highlighting the weaknesses of others and use it to weaken their moral. China is in dispute with almost all of its neighbouring countries including India. China aims to be a superpower by 2049 and sees India as her biggest competitor. To eliminate competition, she is using land disputes as a cover-up to control India and refrain us from progressing forward". Lt Gen Thodge an officer decorated with PVSM, AVSM, SM, AND VSM and also consultant to minister of Defence, provided an insight on India-China relations, border issues, and India's preparedness to fight back China. Indian armed forces has such a veto power if "Anybody who tries to mess with us be prepared to face the wrath of the forces". Chinese followed a policy to 'encircle, entangle and envelope'. Indian Government is leaving no stone unturned to find a way out of the issues. The indomitable spirit and enthusiasm of our armed force for a brighter, better and stronger India stands in the Chinese way of achieving their dreams to rule the

world. In every sphere we are ready to face China and contain its ill intentions, countries from all over the world like Japan, US, and Australia have come to our support.

Mao had once said that 'the right time to war is the time when there is chaos all around'. As the world is busy fighting the 'Chinese Virus' causing COVID-19, China planned to attack all the neighbouring countries like Japan in East China Sea, provoked Nepal to start border issue with India, and now land issue with Bhutan. Chinese have planned and executed this war very diligently to capture all resources and gain supremacy amongst all nations. " Chinese policy and International relations strategy are purely based on betrayal, shifting alliances, conflicts, rivalry, deceit irrespective of how good and cordial relations one country maintains with them. The world was facing a situation that was a product of China's attack, planned well for years. Chinese captured all the important technical institutes, invested huge money in research at Harvard University and the likes, planned industrial espionage, stole scientific research and data, and exploited the same for the personal gains. In this critical juncture Indians to stand as one nation and speak one language. We should remain united and have one national narrative for the whole incident. It is the hope of every Indians that our armed forces are competent to give a befitting reply to everyone who dared to pose a threat to India and people should also believe the same.

Columnist  
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## BJP, Congress slam Odisha govt on notice to ineligible farmers to return Kalia scheme fund



Bhubaneswar, July 24 (UNI) Opposition BJP and Congress today came down heavily on the Odisha government for sending notices to ineligible beneficiaries of the Kruskak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme to return the money.

BJP Rajya Krushak Morcha President Pradip Purohit today said the government launched the scheme in a haste just before last election without any budgetary provision and without identifying the beneficiaries just to win the election and capture power. The government, he said, was now trying to create a fear psychosis in the minds of two lakh farmers by sending notices to them to return the money within one month when they are hard hit by the covid pandemic.

Describing the government's move as anti-farmers, the BJP leader demanded the government to withdraw the notice and refrain from collecting the money released under the Kalia scheme.

The KALIA scheme was launched by the state government with an objective to accelerate Agriculture prosperity and to increase the income of the farmers.

Under the scheme, the state government had worked out to provide Rs10,000 per annum

to the farmers in two instalments. But later reduced it to Rs4,000 after merging the scheme with PM-KISSAN scheme of the central government

Mr Purohit demanded that instead of realising the money from farmers the government should recover the money from the officials who identified and distributed the money to farmers under the scheme.

Senior Congress Leader Tara Prasad Bahinipati expressed similar views.

Agriculture Secretary Sourabh Garg said around 50,000 ineligible farmers of the total 51 lakh beneficiaries have received the money and notice has been issued to them to return the money.

### Two OAS Officers Shifted To Gajapati Dist

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Government on Friday deputed OAS officer Laxmikanta Sethi to Gajapati district to assist the district administration in managing the COVID-19 situation.

According to an official order of General Administration and Public Grievance (GA&PG) department, OAS Laxmikanta Sethi, Joint Secretary, Labour and ESI department, will work under the district administration in the pandemic management.