

# A YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

**T**HE images that illustrate 2020 are like flashes from a nightmare: lockdowns and isolation, jobless migrants trudging hundreds of miles to get home after the economic devastation, crowded hospitals and PPE suits, masks and social distancing, and scariest of all, a reminder of the immortal lines from the *Bhagavad Gita*: “I am become death, the destroyer of lives.” Covid-19, an invisible, silent enemy, had, till last week, taken the lives of close to two million people in 218 countries and territories around the world, with India earning the dubious distinction of the second highest infection rate in the world after the US.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote the classic *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which, behind the magic realism, had a direct connection to the global pandemic—a place where beliefs and metaphors become fact, and where facts become uncertain. The basic rhythm of everyday life was turned upside down. Our world was not only being challenged by a scary new normal, it was also under pressure from immense economic uncertainty. Not the two World Wars, regional conflicts, terrorist attacks or financial meltdowns had disrupted the world like this crown-shaped virus from Wuhan. This was, at its most basic form, a rude reminder of our collective mortality. Samuel Pepys, the world’s greatest diarist, had lived through the Great Plague of London and witnessed family members fighting over who would get their own grave. His observations of the times had eerie echoes of our contemporary situation—“How everybody’s looks, and discourses in the street, is of death and nothing else...”

Nothing illustrated the devastating impact of the pandemic like the justice system. The Supreme Court

and all other courts were forced to switch to virtual hearings, for which they were clearly unprepared, as were the lawyers and petitioners who now pled their case over Zoom from their homes and offices while *force majeure* (a “superior force”) was increasingly invoked in cases of contractual obligations and disputes. At no time in its history has the legal system faced such massive upheaval, forcing the Supreme Court to issue a new set of rules of business, mainly a switchover to video conferencing technology for hearing arguments. It did lead to some glitches and embarrassing moments, but the bottom line was that the inevitable slowdown will lead to another massive increase in pendency statistics and a delay in important judgments.



**India Legal through its Covid-related coverage paid tribute to doctors, nurses, frontline workers and volunteers who stepped forward during the health crisis. We thank our contributors, who, despite financial disruptions, graced our pages with their expert views and analyses.**

The bigger challenge was for governments, performing a dangerous balancing act between lives and livelihood. Few, if any, got it right and by the year-end, reports of a new mutant strain of the virus dampened the flicker of hope that arrived with the rollout of vaccines in many parts of the world. India waits in line as immunity becomes the watchword of the year. Every crisis produces its heroes and *India Legal* has through its Covid-related coverage paid tribute to them—the doctors, nurses, frontline workers and volunteers who stepped forward during a health crisis no living human being has experienced to serve humanity and at great risk to their own lives. Also relating to our coverage, we at the magazine would like to thank and acknowledge the contributions of our contributors who, despite the financial disruption and its impact on remunerations, have steadfastly continued to grace our pages with their expert views and analyses.

As the year draws to a close, it is perhaps appropriate to recall the words of the 18th century poet Alexander Pope, who wrote these inspiring lines in his *Essay on Man*: “Hope springs eternal in every human breast...even in the bleakest situations.”

With that comforting thought, we would like to wish our readers a safe and hope-filled New Year.