

April 2021

Dear Friends,

In an eerie déjà vu of this very time last year, we've suddenly come to the end of our 20-21 school year. The mood here in the city is one of shock and disbelief as we are currently in the middle of our worst corona wave yet. It seems like every other person I talk to is sick or has a sick family member. At least two of our teachers have tested covid positive in the last couple weeks (most likely from sources outside of the school). Several students have been sick. Hospital beds are difficult to find. There are waits of 4-6 hours to cremate a body. (Typically there are no wait times for this.)



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In early March, new corona cases were at an all-time low and everyone was feeling quite relaxed about the situation. The vaccine campaign had gotten under way, and people felt that we might have gotten through the worst of the pandemic. As far as school went, the students were coming to classes twice a week. We had managed to review critical knowledge and were beginning to dig into new material.

Then, the week before Holi, new cases started a steep rise. In our state, schools were ordered to close on March 24th, a couple days earlier than our scheduled 4-day holiday. We were due to re-open on April 6. This was postponed to the 16th, then to the 30th and now the earliest we could open is May 16th. This is after we usually close for summer vacation, so our school year is essentially over. I just hope we can open by June or July so that we can have a more normal 21-22 school year.

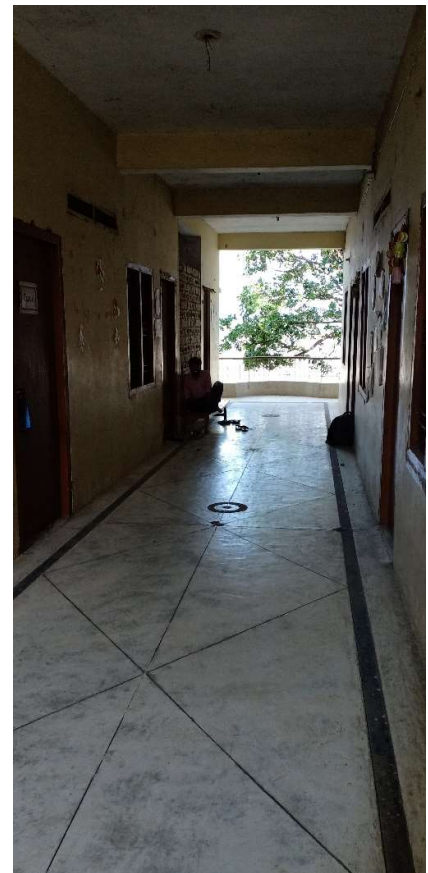


It took some time for people here to realize how fast the virus was spreading. Initially people were chalking up their illnesses to typical viral fever, normal digestive ailments, or the like. By the time we understood that all this illness was actually corona, it had already spread rampantly. It will take some time to bring the situation under control.

At least in the past several days, people have gone back to being more vigilant in taking precautions. In public, everyone is back to wearing masks and keeping some distance. Fewer people are going out at all. We had prepared, but, due to the early closure, not been able to distribute entrance exam syllabi to our students. (We are planning to give entrance exams in June in lieu of the final exams we normally give

in April in order to give the students an extra couple months to study.) So, we passed word around that the kids could come to school to pick up the list of what they needed to study. (At least they were all able to get their textbooks while school was open!) When these 4th and 5th graders showed up the other day, I was at first disappointed that they had shown up in a largish group (8 kids). But, without any instruction, they organized themselves in the hallway (photo below), wearing masks and all spaced out. So people are taking better care.

Overall this has been a very empty school year. Even though we taught however and whenever possible (at teacher's homes in small neighborhood groups, online classes for our older students, homework packet distribution once a week, and twice a week classes) the maximum days any student had interaction with their teacher this year was less than 30. While a few of our students may have gotten enough help studying at home with older siblings or cousins to be promoted in July, most of our students will lose a grade this year.



*Quiet school in 20-21*



*Playground, October 2019.  
Compare below, August 2020.*



*One of our teachers, teaching from home.*



Our 41 graduate students fared a bit better since high schools and colleges did not face such long closures. All of our 9th graders have been promoted to 10th grade. Our 10th graders, who have had regular instruction for several months, are due to take their board exams in June; it remains to be seen if these exams will be cancelled or postponed. Our 11th graders have been promoted to 12th grade. We only had one 12th grader this year, Ravi. His results will be announced soon, but we expect that he will graduate from high school.

As far as land goes, we finally have found a piece that we intend to buy. It is in the area that I mentioned in my last letter, just on the outer edge of a poor community that would welcome a school in their locale. It is just over a half-acre (2500 sq meters). We were planning to go there with a lawyer and the city land surveyor and the owners on March 31 to verify the boundaries and set the price, but that got postponed due to corona sickness and closures.

The land surveyor's office is closed until mid-May, so we are again in a waiting game. Hopefully it will be good news next time!

Thank you to those of you who have continued to support Asha Deep through this difficult year. Your financial gifts have enabled us to keep our doors open whenever possible and have enabled us to help families especially hit by economic hardship in this time. We will continue to support deserving families with food, rent, and medical aid as needed.

love,  
Connie