By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

There is the oft repeated saying popularized by Mark Twain, that there are three types of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics. And that is what comes to mind as one tries to grapple with the basis on which the COVID 19 statistics, that are released each day to the press, are computed. Reliance is said to be placed by the Government on tests conducted. Fair enough, there had to be an yardstick by which an designation of someone being COVID 19 positive qualified to be entered as a statistic. So one would assume that it is after testing positive that a number would be entered in the statistical records.

But that is where the catch lies. In the first place, as long as Goa was a green zone, this green-ness had a lot to do with the fact that only those who had a travel history, and also exhibited the comorbidities critical to COVID, were examined for COVID 19 when they reported some illness. A community survey was conducted as an aid to understand the possible wider prevalence of COVID 19. But the community survey, which the Government claimed was successful despite the opposition to it, was not followed by the required level of testing. To date, one does not know what was the impact and purpose of the community survey, and how it helped as a strategy to prevent or redress the prevalence of COVID 19 transmission.

The constant refrain was that the cases of those found positive all had to do with travel history, conveniently forgetting that the focus on testing was only of those who had a travel history and other persons who wanted to consult a doctor, including even cancer patients, had by and large no access to a doctor during the lockdown, and were advised to bear up till the lockdown is over. (One was reminded of the initial testing for HIV/AIDS that only focussed on testing prostituted women and jumped to the conclusion without testing others that only prostituted women were HIV positive and therefore the transmission of HIV/AIDS was through the sexual mode). One therefore does not know for sure whether the deaths that took place during the lockdown were connected to COVID 19 though the Government categorically states that they weren’t.

Then came the break out of the disease, with the incidence of COVID 19 spread at Mangor Hill and then one odd person somewhere, and more persons from different villages. In all that process the Government was forced to acknowledge that community transmission of the corona virus exists. Closer home, a case of a man from Taleigao who tested positive and later died came to light. This case did not figure in the statistics of the day, in terms of location. There was not even a mention of Taleigao. One knew of it as there was a bee line made by people at what seemed like a temporary testing centre set up in the building of the Communidade of Taleigao.

An inquiry revealed that people from the concerned ward were contacted by the BLO (Booth Level Officer) to go for testing as someone from their ward had tested positive. So those who had not gone to work yet headed for the test in the morning. Others who could not go there in the morning, and went there in the afternoon were told that the equipment required was over, and they should return the next morning. The next morning when the persons went there, there was no sign of anyone and it was learnt that the personnel doing the testing had moved to Chimbel, since someone had tested positive there and that in any case there was no need to test any more people as the results of those who had been tested the previous day were negative. That was the end of Taleigao's testing story for the people of that ward.

Then came the story that a court personnel had tested positive. And this was followed by the notification to lawyers concerned who may have contacted the concerned court staff, as part of what I understand is contact tracing. They were required to go for testing the same day at a designated place at Panjim. But that was assuring of nothing, because we are told that the incubation period of the virus ranges from 2-14 days. In the mean time, the 66 year old man from Taleigao who was tested positive, breathed his last on 1st July. But Taleigao did not figure in the official statistics till his end, as a village where there was a person who has tested positive.

With all these orchestrations, or disorganized planning of testing, can it be hoped that we will get authentic statistics of how many people are actually positive? I doubt so. If we cannot get a nearest possible estimate, it is difficult for the Government to plan and for the community to participate in working towards making their area a green zone, and we can only be seeing a continuing spike in cases, with no end in sight. Three months of lock down mode, seem to have been leveraged by the Government not for preparedness, but for gagging people and pushing through projects in which they have vested interests, and which are not even essential. This, even as the monies of many or all the Government welfare schemes were not dispensed for three long months, and many people, both local and migrant were left high and dry.

The people have to be taken into confidence, not treated like enemies who governments have to be protected from, via armed police. As a matter of fact, when people in containment zones are gagged, sometimes even with threats of demolition of their premises, they have no option but to shut up about what is happening, or what they are seeing or know of the situation in their localities.

In such circumstances, statistics can only lie, and damned lie, and be of little use for anything, leave alone control of the pandemic.

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