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A ROADMAP TO SELF RELIANT INDIA"**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
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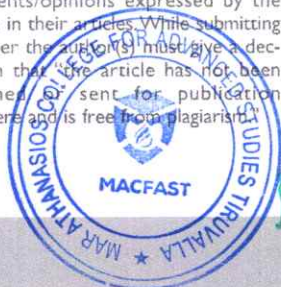
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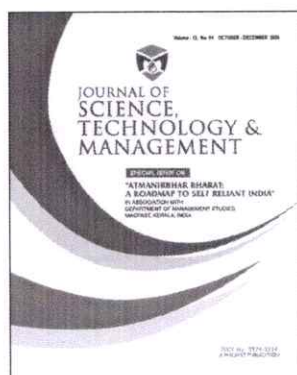
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Extending a helping hand to the rural populace in COVID times - Radio MACFAST: A true companion of the common man

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Abstract: Community radio and journalists are the primary means of mass communication to thousands of people that could not be reached otherwise to assist health workers in educating the public and work closely with local authorities and health workers in times of crises. In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic where social distancing is vital, radio enables the government authorities also to reach a wide audience with critical information that can be life saving and provide a platform for discussion on a range of topics related to resisting and overcoming the challenges posed by the virus outbreak. Community radio stations could be an important medium in helping to reduce the panic of COVID-19 gradually by broadcasting awareness programs and organising social projects. This case study illustrates the significant roles played by a community radio in Kerala, Radio MACFAST 90.4, in combating the spread of COVID-19 by (a) disseminating reliable, unbiased, authentic and timely information to the community, so that they know what they need to do and where they can get help when they need it, and (b) by undertaking several community supportive social projects which empower people to overcome the uninvited and difficult situations that they are in.

Keywords: Community radio, Radio MACFAST, COVID-19, pandemic

Introduction

It was the hilly tracts of Ranni in Pathanamthitta, Kerala that was caught unaware when five persons, three of them came from Italy and their two kin in the home village, were tested positive for COVID-19 on March 7, 2020. It was the second spell of COVID-19 crisis in Kerala. For the first time Kerala witnessed testing five persons positive for COVID-19 at a go.

The news spread like a wildfire and a shell-shocked Ranni went into a self-imposed lockdown from March 8, much before the nationwide lockdown announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24 evening. The scary virus literally laid siege to Ranni. Scared of infection, people restricted themselves to their homes. Shops downed their shutters and vehicles were kept off the roads, leaving a deserted look to the otherwise busy small town. The pandemic had sent shockwaves across the State, Pathanamthitta in particular.

A pall of gloom fell over these hilly tracts and an uneasy scare gripped Ranni as people there, having a good number of relatives and friends in various pandemic-hit foreign countries, were well aware of the lethal disease and its impacts. People appeared to be very much scared of venturing out of their homes for an unknown fear of contracting the disease.



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