

## Go Corona, Go! Gavi, a forest village in Kerala has no Covid patients

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PATHANAMTHITTA: Gavi, the district's small forest village famous for its rich wildlife and eco-tourism, is getting attention for a different reason this time: It does not have a single Covid case at the moment. Situated in Seethathodu grama panchayat, the village has 1,000 villagers --- 163 of them tribals and a majority of the rest Sri Lankan Tamils. Seethathodu primary health centre (PHC) medical officer Dr J Vincent Xavier told TNIE that the villagers have been following instructions and Covid protocol strictly.

"They wear facemasks properly, maintain social distancing and sanitise their hands frequently. They are not visiting other houses and all of them are confined to their houses. This is a forest village and they are not going to towns or any crowded places either," said Xavier, who has been working for the people of Gavi for the past 19 years. "Every week, a PHC medical team visits Gavi and checks the villagers' medical condition. At present, all of them are fine," said Seethathodu PHC health inspector Sharafudeen I.

Chandrakumar R, a youth belonging to a Sri Lankan Tamil family, said the villagers actually do not know about the current Covid situation in the state and the country. "We don't have televisions. We can't use mobile phones since we don't have network coverage in our village. The health officials informed us about the alarming situation and told us about the precautions we need to take. We are strictly following them," he said. "At the start of the second wave, a villager who was working outside reached Gavi with Covid symptoms and he tested positive. We gave directions to his family and villagers about quarantine and precautions. All of them followed that. The patient later tested negative," said Sunil N, junior health inspector. "We have already started taking steps to vaccinate the villagers. Gavi's main issue is that it doesn't have internet connectivity. A medical dispensary is also working in Gavi," said Sharafudeen.

### The Lankan connection

There were 700 Lankan Tamil families in Gavi earlier and now their number has come down to 360 families. Tamils, who had gone to Lanka earlier, were brought back to India first as part of an agreement signed between the two countries in 1964. Sri Lankan Tamils began to settle in Gavi in the 70s and started cultivation by clearing a portion of the forest. At present, the Lankan Tamil families work in cardamom plantations of the Kerala Forest Development Corporation and the Gavi eco-tourism project.

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