

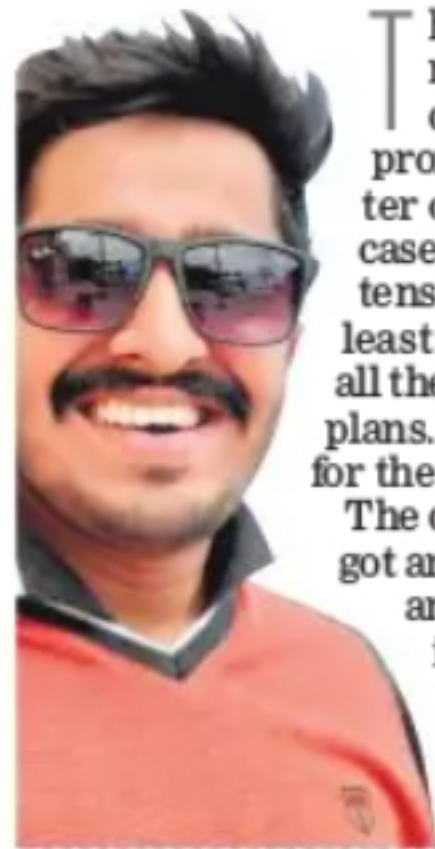
## LANDING IN LOCKDOWN

When Ayswarya V flew down to Chennai just a night before the pre-wedding events were set to start, what awaited her was not just her family and wedding anxieties but also news of the lockdown being imposed across the country in response to the coronavirus threat. She had planned a simple and intimate wedding — with a guest list of just 150-200 people — with boyfriend of many years, Srinivasan N. They were to be wed on March 25-26. When the blanket ban on mass gatherings was put in place, they had no choice but to cancel the wedding and wait for things to get better.

Srinivasan and Ayswarya were to wed on March 25-26

Srinivasan, senior manager at a management firm operating out of southeast Asia, is practical about the hold-up. "The wedding ceremonies and rituals were just to announce each other as husband and wife to society. That's the reason we kept it low-key with near and dear ones. We did all that we could but certain things are beyond control. We had to accept it and move on," he offers. Ayswarya, an information systems auditor in London, is happy that their families have been supportive through the decision and the consequent chaos. "More than the decision to postpone the wedding, it was the process of making that decision that was painful. The state and central governments had different things to say and it kept changing every minute. We're not sure if things will go as planned the second time. Only time will tell," she finishes.

## PRINTED CARDS, CANCELLED TICKETS



Though his wedding was not till April 19, Mohamed Ansari did not want to take any chances. Even before the national lockdown was put in place, the Bengaluru-based hospitality professional realised that things were not going to get better overnight and called off the wedding. As COVID-19 cases continue to mount and the country expects an extension on the current lockdown, he plans to wait at least a month more to reschedule the ceremony. Luckily, all the vendors involved are on-board with the postponed plans. They are keeping their advances and would work for the new date, just as planned.

The decision did not come without some losses. "We never got around to sending out the wedding invites. They are printed and will now go to waste," he points out. Next to take the beating was the trip to Sri Lanka that was meant to be his honeymoon plan. "We lost the ₹30,000 that we spent on flight tickets. We could only get a refund on the tour package," he says.

Mohamed Ansari was to wed on April 19

## TWO STATES, ONE DISASTER

A techie couple from Hyderabad, Rithisha and Prajwal Reddy, was to wed on April 8. Come virus threat and nationwide lockdown, they find themselves in two different states — she in her hometown in Khammam, Telangana, and he in his at Rajamundry, Andhra Pradesh. "The date was fixed in December 2019. With the government announcing a lockdown, we had to push our plans," says Rithisha. She has been lucky with the wedding details in Telangana; the wedding venue manager and the caterer has promised to work on the postponed date or offer full refund if they were to cancel all plans. But things did not go the same way for the reception plan in Rajamundry. "We were told that we cannot get a full refund on the hall charge. Even the catering guy was not ready to refund as he said that since he accepted our order, he lost out on many and cannot return the amount. We lost about ₹50,000 in the whole episode," she details.

Rithisha and Prajwal Reddy were to wed on April 8

# WAITING FOR WEDDING BELLS

For a country that hosts at least two crore weddings a year, the news of the lockdown is not one that can be taken lightly. From dealing with vendors, playing mute to ill advice, negotiating through financial loss and sorting through the emotional stress, there is plenty to cancelled weddings, as much as it is with going through with one, say these couples.

The date was set, the food menu was fixed, invites were sent to guests, marigolds and jasmines were ordered and two families in Chennai geared up to officially become one big happy family. Eight thousand-odd kilometres away, despite the pandemic scare and sanitisers replacing souvenirs in their travel bags, Kaushik Rajan and Malavika Sankararaman packed their luggage to revel in the joy of their engagement ceremony.

"Our engagement ceremony was set to happen on March 22 and we had invited 150 guests. Both of us live in Ireland and we had set this particular date after

## CAUGHT IN CURFEW AND CROSSFIRE ADVICE



Malavika Sankararaman and Kaushik Rajan were to be engaged on March 22

so much hassle as we wanted our function to coincide with our vacation to India," shares Kaushik, a data analyst.

Two days before the ceremony, Prime Minister Modi's announcement about a one-day Janata curfew, which coincided with the engagement date, came as a shocker to both the families. What turned out to be a double disappointment — the postponement of an important day in their lives and spending their entire vacation within four walls — was made more difficult when the duo was at the receiving end of unsolicited advice and opinions from relatives. "Some of our 'concerned' relatives started asking all kind of questions like, 'check their horoscopes', 'is the groom's/bride's family okay to wait?', 'This is not a good sign'. Luckily, both our families don't pay heed to such things. Overall, we are all just happy to do our bit to contain the spread of the virus by cancelling the event," shares Malavika, a regulatory professional (medical devices).

## PREPARED TO POSTPONE

Raised in Singapore and living in New York, Sindoori Sriram and Krishna Sriram still chose to head back home to Chennai for their big south Indian dream wedding on March 30. Madras is a feeling. We both have strong roots in the city, they say. A self-labelled organiser of her friends' circle, Sindoori admits that it took a while to dawn on her that she was planning her wedding this time around. But it all came to a slow halt, as early fears began creeping in about the virus much earlier in January. "My dad takes frequent business trips to China, and he told us about it. So I wouldn't say we were totally shocked," adds the corporate lawyer. Arriving in Chennai, earlier than planned, on March 13, Sindoori got on with planning the wedding until their venue, the iconic MRC Halls, had to shut down on government order. Still holding on to hope, the couple decided to downsize their 1,200 attendee wedding to 400 and eventually to 200, at Rina's Venue, to see if they could pull it off. But with uncertainty thick in the air, and a general air of sadness in the city they finally decided to postpone their wedding. Now, they plan to get married later this year or even in 2021.

Until then, they've been cooped in Chennai binging on good food and some Netflix. "I put Krishna and me on an intermittent fasting diet for the wedding so now that it's called off, he's quite happily eating some murukku. We've given ourselves a pass in April, and then we'll get back on track," concludes the cheery bride.

(With some contributions from Wedding Wishlist)

Sindoori Sriram and Krishna Sriram were to wed on March 30

## SAVING THE DATE FOR SAFER TIMES

Arpita Ramchandra and Siddharth Ramaswamy plan to keep their date — April 26 — but make it a much smaller and more intimate affair with just their two families in the attendance.

The wedding, originally planned for a farmhouse, has been moved to Arpita's house post-lockdown. "We had planned most of the things for our wedding. Even the clothes were ready; we only had to collect it from the designers but because of the lockdown, we have to wait. Once everything settles down, we can look at hosting a grander reception with our extended family and friends," she says. In the meantime, she has been busy handling the details of the postpone-

ment. "The farmhouse where the wedding was to be held belongs to my aunt; we had booked it without any money transaction and it saved us from collecting refunds. Same was the case with other services like catering, make-up, etc.," she points out.

## CERTAINTY IN CANCELLED PLANS

A simple wedding is something I've always wanted, she says. But after three months of planning and organising for her big day on April 9, Nishtha Balagopal's caught the big fat Indian wedding bug. But as the quarantine

period set in, and her beau, Rohith's, and her big day was postponed, they now find themselves in different cities across the country, but with cheery hope for their future.

Nishtha and Rohith, decided to get married a year after meeting on the Internet and falling for each other, are keen to take this in their stride. "If anything, we're just having an extended period of dating before we get married," says Rohith, while Nishtha says that they are managing to have fun despite being stuck in different cities by arranging virtual movie dates. Their families have been supportive of every decision the couple has had to make. With the groom's parents in Kerala, keeping safe and healthy has taken precedence.

"The first warning bells went off in my head when my relatives and friends, who were supposed to fly in from abroad, began hesitating due to virus concerns," admits Nishtha, a recent MBA graduate. Her fiancé, Rohith Venu, a systems analyst living in Hyderabad concurs. "We were prepared for it, so I wouldn't say it caught us off guard but we waited as long as possible to see what we could do," he adds. "We've already paid our advances for the wedding services and the hall, but all the vendors we've spoken to have been kind enough to arrange a refund. Our reception in Kerala was also cancelled, but there was a government order that refunds should be given, so that was great," they explain. As uncertainty clouds their plans, the new wedding date is yet to be decided by the duo.

Nishtha Balagopal and Rohith Venu were to wed on April 9



Illustration: Tapas Ranjan