

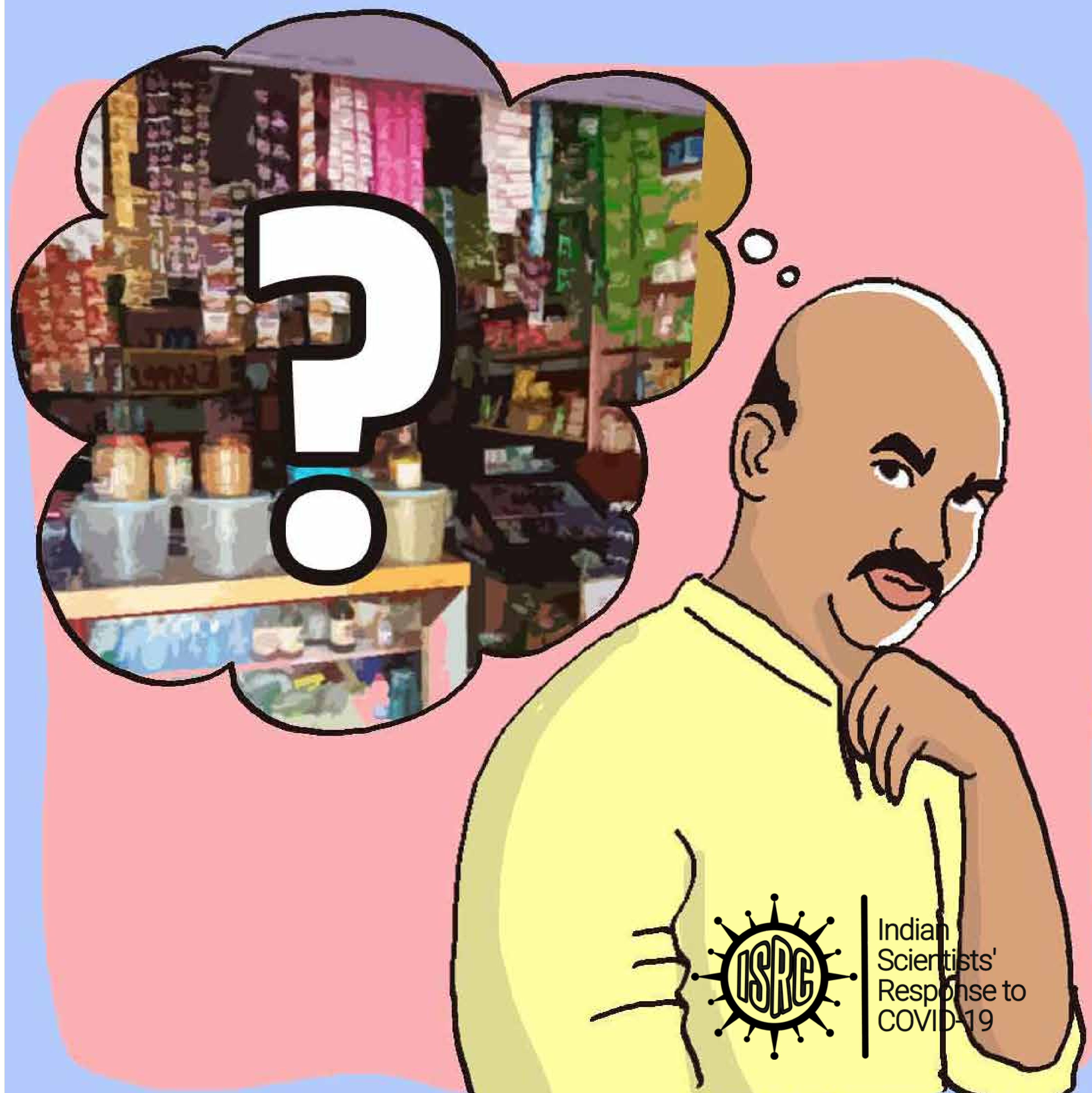
Govindan makes his shop corona-proof

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by Indian Scientists Response to Covid

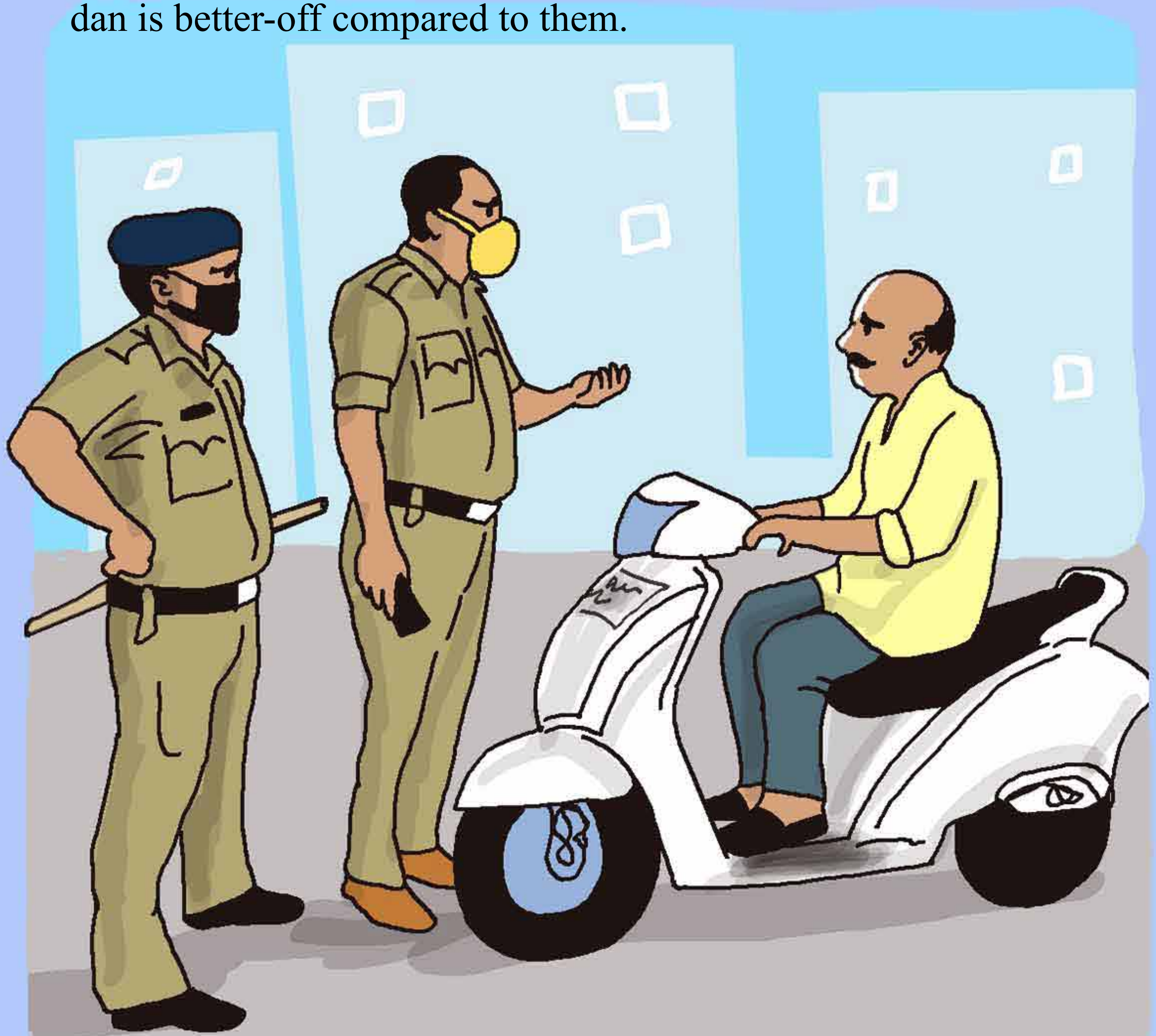
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The shop is open again, and Govindan Nair is a happy man. He runs a grocery store, and it has been shut for 10 days now. “Only 10 days? It feels like years!” he thinks. He had been told, when the lockdown started, that groceries were essential and he could keep the shop open. But, when he tried the first day, he had too much trouble explaining to a policeman and gave up. Reaching his shop is not easy; he is used to going on his scooter, but policemen are looking out for all two wheelers and catching them.

He has been talking to Ibrahim and Chacko, they too did not open their shops. The difficulty of getting supplies had deterred them. They all have very small shops that are barely 12 feet long and 10 feet wide, with a narrow passage through which, at most, one person can come in some 3 or 4 feet into the shop. It is a building with 4 such shops: one selling shoes, another selling readymade garments, a “fancy” store and his own. Upstairs is a browsing centre gone to seed, a photo studio in dire straits and a real estate broker whose bravado is always suspicious. They are all not only closed now, but have been doing so badly they might not recover from a month’s loss of business. Govindan is better-off compared to them.

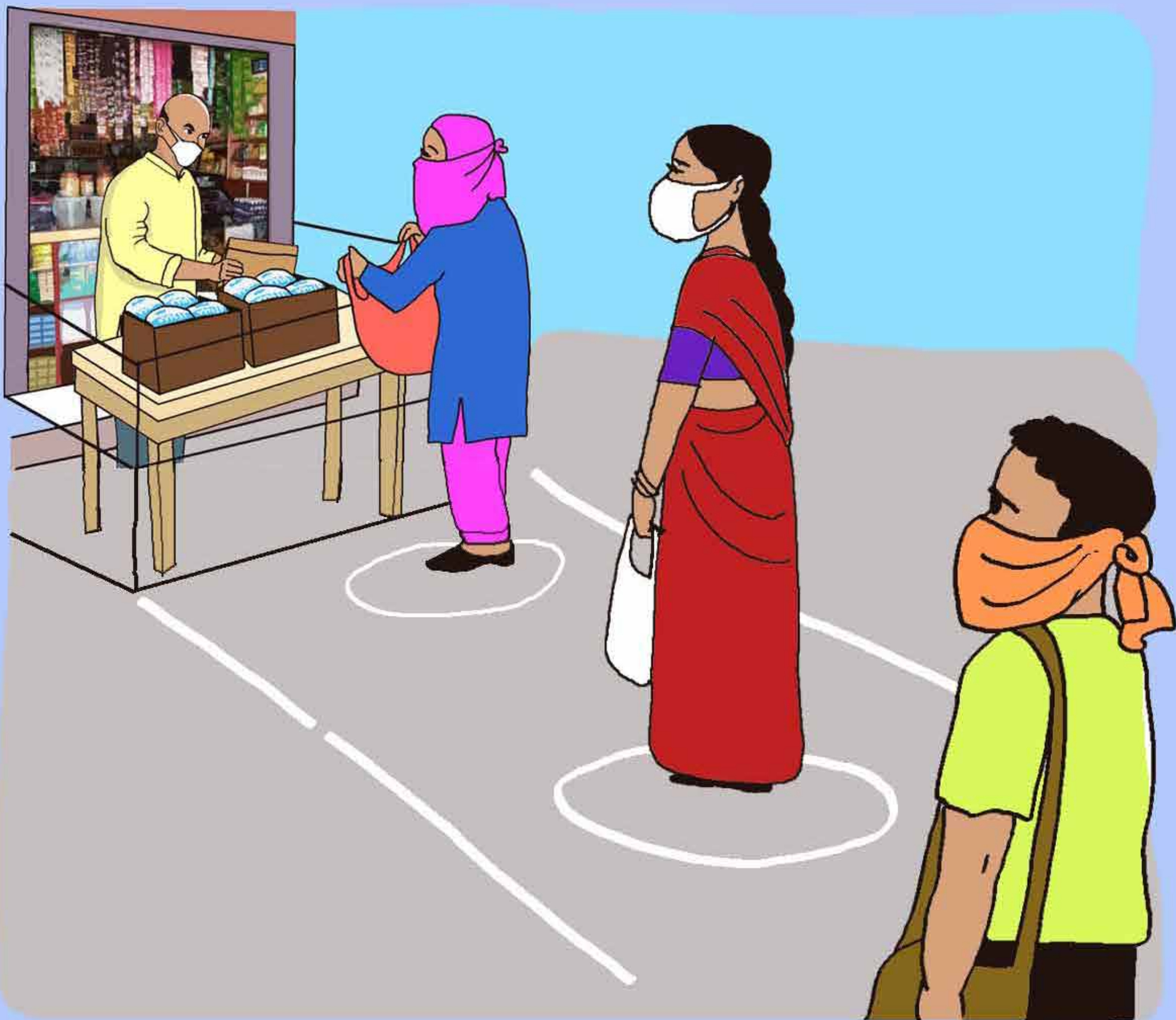


In normal times, Govindan is at the shop from morning to night, with his son Unni, who goes to high school, standing in for him when he goes home for lunch and a little rest. His son also delivers groceries to the few affluent customers who order on the phone.

Now that things have settled down since the lockdown was announced, he can open the shop again. Govindan went to the police station and they agreed that grocery stores could open. He has been given an instruction sheet (issued by the Government and distributed by the police) on what he should do and should not do.

Letting customers inside: At most one can squeeze in anyway, and with Govindan and his son inside nobody else can come in. So this is physically impossible!

Ensure that customers maintain physical distancing: He has drawn chalk circles 6 feet apart outside but is not sure customers will follow this carefully. He will put up a handwritten poster telling everyone to stand only inside the circles, reminding people of the days when they played hopscotch. He will ask Unni to redraw the circles periodically.



It is also easy for Govindan to ensure physical distancing while accepting deliveries. Right now, since there is so little delivery, it is not an issue, and he never has such a rush of deliveries. In fact, Govindan was the one who used to go to the wholesale market and buy, but now he is not sure he can do that. There are no buses and his scooter may not be allowed.

Govindan is wearing a face cover, has a few cloth masks at home and will keep washing and reusing them. But gloves? Cap? Overall covering? He has never had any of these and is not sure whether he can work wearing them, in the Kerala heat. Where will he get these? From which shops, when they are all closed?

He will talk to customers about wearing masks but how is he to insist? Will the police come and do this?



Govindan read in the newspaper that soap destroys the virus. Soap he has in plenty! He plans to keep buckets of soapy water, keep changing them too. To be extra careful, he will personally clean all surfaces every hour with soapy water. He has also decided that he will never allow any person with a cough to come near any material in the shop. They have to stand outside and be served outside. He has instructed Unni carefully on what to do inside the shop.

There is hope for home delivery now, though only to houses in the neighbourhood. Govindan is not keen to risk sending Unni far on a bicycle during the lockdown. In any case, Unni will wear a mask, will not enter any house, leave the box outside, wait for the customer to come and take it, and have the money put into a small basket. Govindan has repeatedly told Unni to be especially careful while making home deliveries. If Unni starts having symptoms of a cough or fever, deliveries have to stop and the shop will have to be closed anyway. Unni is excited by all this, being young. Govindan is deeply worried.



If there is one major concern for Govindan, it is the single small and dirty toilet serving everyone in the building. Water supply and electricity have been shut off since nobody has been in the building for 10 days. Now he has had to fight with his landlord to get them on again just for one shop. The water is on now, but is brown like coffee.

Govindan is well prepared and will supply essential services to his customers safely, provided he gets good water supply to clean and disinfect his shop regularly.

These are meant to portray typical scenarios and contextualise the information we provide. Necessarily this simplifies the content. Please make sure that you go through the accompanying documents on the website for scientific accuracy.

