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Covid scare hits business, auto driver ends life

He couldn't find customers as people stayed indoors for nearly two weeks due to the coronavirus outbreak



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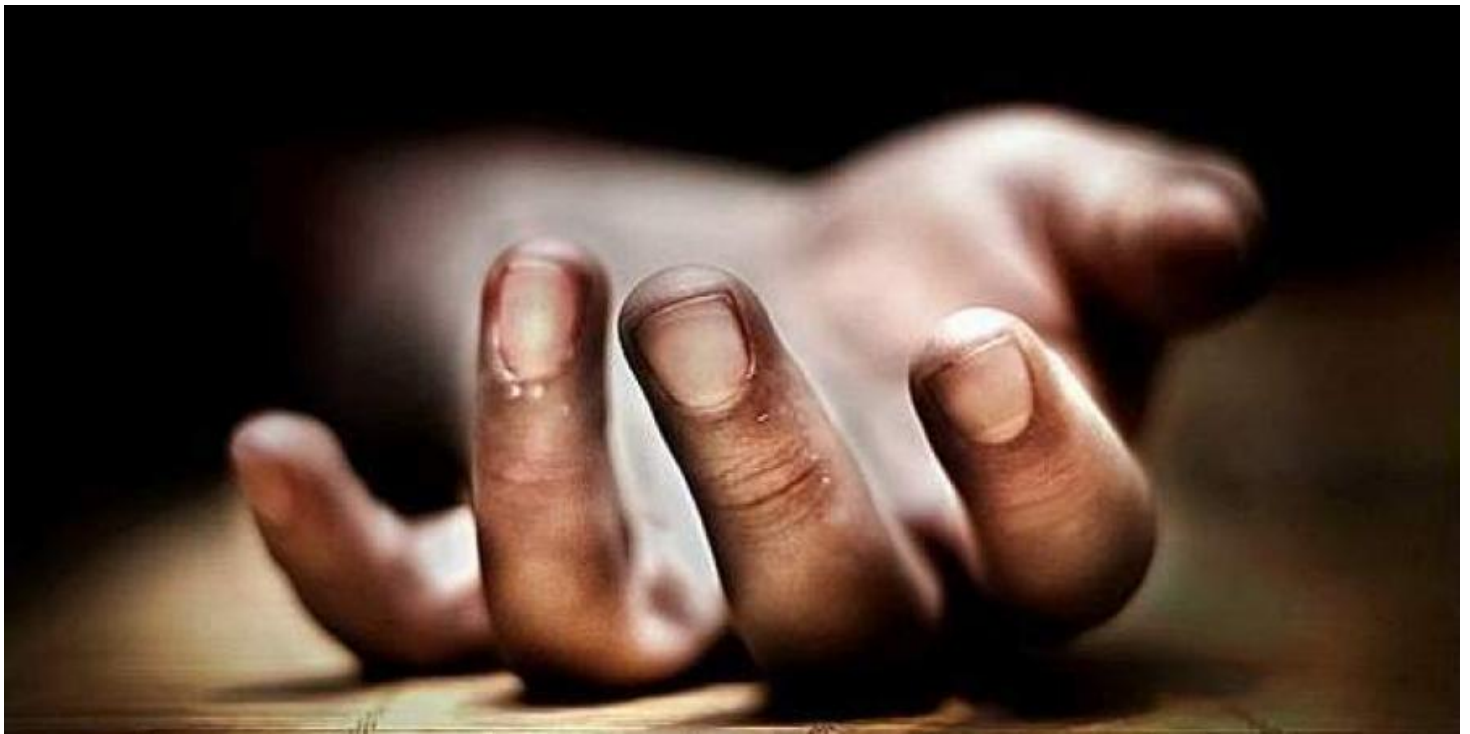
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By Bala Chauhan

Express News Service

BENGALURU: In what could be the first casualty of the extreme economic stress on the lower-income groups and daily-wage workers due to the havoc caused by the Novel Coronavirus, a 24-year-old autorickshaw driver in the city committed suicide on March 19 over loss of daily business for more than a fortnight now.

Shivakumar, a resident of 6th Cross, Modi Gardens, R T Nagar Post, hung himself in his house around 8.30 am on March 19, a day after one of his family members reprimanded him for not driving the autorickshaw and earning money.

The deceased, who was known as Shiva among his friends and neighbours, had not taken out his autorickshaw for more than a fortnight in the wake of the coronavirus threat and absence of passengers on the streets. According to Shiva's friends and neighbours, his older sister, who works as a domestic help in nearby houses, had reprimanded him for not going out and wasting his time at home. The next day, soon after his sister left for work, Shiva hung himself.

“His elder brother is an alcoholic and had landed the family in a huge debt of around Rs 4 lakh. Shiva used to earlier work in an office with a monthly income of Rs 20,000. But after his brother mortgaged the autorickshaw - the only asset the

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family had - and landed them in debt, Shiva had managed to get it released and had started driving the vehicle.

“He was a very nice and helpful boy and had no addictions. Shiva had celebrated his 24th birthday on February 29. He was very stressed because of lack of business and uncertainty over how long this crisis would last. He was also worried about the family debts,” said one of his friends.

Shiva’s death was registered as UDR (unnatural death report) by the DJ Halli Police. The last rites were conducted after the postmortem at B R Ambedkar Medical College. Thousands of auto and tax drivers in Bengaluru are reeling under a huge economic burden because of loss of daily business due to the coronavirus scare and subsequent lockdown.

They are defaulting on EMIs and are barely make enough money to pay for the fuel and take some of it home. Ironically, taxi fares on app-based aggregators have dropped drastically. They are much cheaper than autorickshaw fares because of the virus scare and the fear of surface contamination.

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