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35-yr-old travels 14 days to UP village from Mumbai, dies in hours

With his test results for coronavirus awaited (a postmortem will be done only if Ali is negative), his wife Salma Begum, 32, and family can only speculate why he died.

Written by **Asad Rehman** | Lucknow | Updated: April 29, 2020 7:44:56 am

Insaf Ali's mother (right) at their home in Mathkanwa village of UP's Shravasti district. (Express photo)

Insaf Ali walked or hitch-hiked 1,500 km from Mumbai to Shravasti district in Uttar Pradesh, carrying his last remaining Rs 5,000, and managing to dodge police and checks for 14 days. Just when he had reached his Mathkanwa village early Monday morning, the 35-year-old, who worked as a helper to a mason in Mumbai before the lockdown, was caught and quarantined. By Monday noon, he was dead.

With his test results for coronavirus awaited (a postmortem will be done only if Ali is negative), his wife Salma Begum, 32, and family can only speculate why he died. Salma said before Ali's mobile phone ran out of battery, he told her he was surviving on only biscuits. Officials say that at the quarantine, he kept throwing up.

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Salma said she didn't get to even see Ali after he returned as she was at her parents' home, and his body was taken away before she returned. They have a six-year-old son, Irfan. The rest of Ali's family, including his parents, and his brothers' families, are quarantined. Ali's two elder brothers are also migrant labourers, and currently stranded in Punjab.

Salma said Ali left Mumbai on April 13, telling her he was running out of money. “He had not got any work for weeks. He said that in the village, he would at least be around familiar people and manage.”

Ali kept calling her throughout the way. “He came to Jhansi with 10 others, either walking or hiding in a truck, paying the driver Rs 3,000. From there, he walked till Bahraich, where he was caught Sunday night by police and asked to return. Having lost the others with him, he dodged police and hid at a ghat for the night. After that, his mobile died and I could not get in touch with him. I called all the people he was travelling with, but no one knew anything. Then, on Monday morning, he called and told me to come back to Mathkanwa village.” Before she could return, Ali had died.

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Breaking down as she spoke on the phone, Salma said, “He kept saying how he only wanted to come back to the village. After he did, he could not live for more than a few hours.”

Ali’s sister-in-law Amina Bano (40) said they were not being told when he would be buried or when they could go home from the school they are quarantined in. “Some are saying we will have to stay here for 14 days, some say we will be allowed to go after the results come,” said Amina.

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Shravasti Superintendent of Police Anoop Kumar Singh said Ali died after having some breakfast at the village quarantine centre. “His body has been kept in the mortuary and his sample sent for COVID-19 test to Lucknow. His family members have been quarantined as they had touched the body after his death.” Given the

high risk of contamination, postmortems are being conducted of only those who test negative for coronavirus, and Singh admitted they couldn't give the exact reason for Ali's death yet.

Shravasti Chief Medical Officer A P Bharghawa said the test report was expected soon, adding, "The cause of death is still doubtful."

Uttar Pradesh has started bringing back migrant labourers across states, and shifting them to centres for at least 14 days of quarantine. With Ali managing to reach his village apparently escaping the checks installed by Uttar Pradesh at the borders, Additional Chief Secretary Awanish Kumar Awasthi said they were only bringing back people in coordination with other state governments. "Some cases of people coming in are bound to happen because UP has a huge border, some manage to come through village routes. But whoever is caught is put in quarantine," Awasthi said.

As per data released by the state till Tuesday evening, Shravasti district had four active cases of coronavirus, and one death.

Salma claimed villagers are boycotting her now, suspecting her to be infected. All alone in the house, she said she felt more afraid for her son, who kept asking her for biscuits. "What will happen to him? I have no money," she sobbed.

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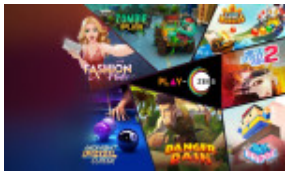

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