

IP EXTENSION

As employers keep their distance, helps struggle to make ends meet

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WITH MOST of their employers refusing to let them return to work, over 40 domestic helps living in a building at Hasanpur village near East Delhi's IP Extension are struggling to make ends meet. Saraswati (50), whose husband is a daily wage labourer earning around 8,000 a month, used to work as a cook in three households at various societies at IP Extension, earning Rs 13,000-14,000 per month. On July 11, one

household asked her to return to work. "I have been working at these households for over 15 years. None of them paid me during the lockdown," she said. With a 15-year-old son to look after and her husband's work being erratic after the lockdown, Saraswati has asked her son-in-law, a bank manager in Bihar, to send her Rs 8,000. "We faced much difficulty getting food to eat during the lockdown. We had to go to a nearby temple where they distributed food. We still go there. We got ration only twice through the online system, as we don't



Anita Devi (left) and Saraswati are among 40 house helps living on rent in a building in IP Extension

have ration cards," she said. Hailing from Samastipur, she



said, "What is the point going back? There is no work back home

either. I don't even have family there. And it's flooded right now." Several others are considering heading back to their villages. Anita Devi (30) used to work at three households. Her husband is a packaging worker at a company in Patparganj, and the couple have two children aged 7 and 6. She said, "I used to earn Rs 6,000 per month, but none of these households are asking me to work now. My husband is being paid for just 15 days after one month's work, which is Rs 4,000." She said that feeding her family has become difficult: "We

come from Motihari in Bihar. We sometimes talk of going back but there is no work there either." Minto (22), who has two toddlers, used to work in three households, earning Rs 5,000-6,000 per month. Her husband, a mechanic, earns Rs 6-7,000 per month. Now out of work, she is considering returning to Muzaffarpur in Bihar: "I asked them when they will call me for work, and they said to wait for a few more months. What can we do here?" Only a few employers offered to pay them during and after the lockdown. Parmila (37), who

used to work at nine households, was paid in full by three during the lockdown. Three households paid her partially and three did not pay her at all. "It is up to the goodness of the employer if they pay. Most of the 40-50 maids who live here have not been paid during lockdown or after," she said. None of them have paid their rent in the last four months. "Rent comes up to Rs 5,000-6,000, not including the electricity. None of us here have paid it. The landlord said we could pay back the rent slowly as and when we earn something," said Parmila.