

An update from Regional Representation for Asia and the Pacific, Tokyo



Travel restrictions have changed our way of working significantly. Japan has relatively light restrictions compared with most countries, but working from home was initiated in the Tokyo office on 7 April. Since then, we have been using Zoom or MS Teams to connect with everyone, even with each other in Tokyo.

During this period, our staff have learnt new lessons and have found different ways to stay connected and healthy, here are some of them.

When working from home, Lesa discovered that touchscreen laptops are particularly sensitive to cat paws making for interesting typos! She is a keen cyclist and after the cancellation of several planned events, she embraced virtual exercise platforms – so instead of embarking on a cycling trip with friends to Hokkaido, they completed a virtual tour of Europe this month. Fortunately, they found some country-appropriate wine-pairings along the route.



A new member of staff, Asako Endo joined the team the week before we started to work from home, so she has only physically been to the office a handful times and hasn't even met all of her colleagues in person yet. However, it's not all bad, staying home has enabled her to spend more time with a new family member. Puipui is a degu, a type of rodent, and Asako welcomed him to her home just a few months ago. She is teaching him some tricks and one of her goals is to teach him to master some of them during the restriction period.

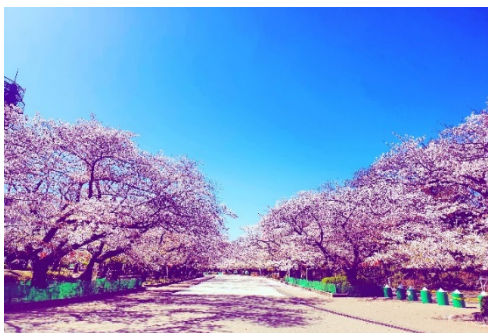
Izumi Goto is famous in the Tokyo office for her competitive marathon running. At the beginning of March, she was supposed to run the Nagoya Women's Marathon, an event which holds the Guinness World Record for the largest all-women's marathon, with over 20,000 female runners registered. Every year when the runners cross the finish line, they are congratulated by men in tuxedos with a small signature Tiffany's blue box with a white ribbon in which

nestles a specially designed Tiffany's necklace as a finisher's medal.

However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the race was open to invited elite runners only this year. As she has not quite reached elite status (unfortunately :)), Izumi could not participate in person, but was invited with all other non-elite runners to complete the race virtually instead! Runners of the virtual marathon could record their mileage anywhere at any pace using a downloaded app with GPS functions. And the good news is that the organiser has confirmed that she will receive her Tiffany's finisher's medal in June. It doesn't replace the joy of an actual race to run through the city without stopping at traffic lights in the midst of cheering spectators, but the Tiffany medal is some comfort. :)) Goto-san and her running mates are chatting online and calling each other 'robbery runners' these days!



For Caitlin, this is the first time she has had a lot of downtime in Tokyo and she has taken the opportunity of *Hanami* or springtime cherry blossom season to explore her local area, which would normally be very crowded with tourists viewing the natural spectacle. She has found many new cycle routes past virtually empty tourist attractions in Shitamachi, or downtown Tokyo, where there are many temples, shrines and traditional Japanese sites.



For Kinzang, staying under lockdown allowed him more time to reflect on the fragility of life while undertaking daily meditation and prayers for an early end to this pandemic. It has also allowed him to have extended yoga sessions following daily jogging to keep both mind and body toned up.

Accounting officer, Kanako Koike, felt that working with your hands, for example, cooking, sewing and gardening, could soothe anxious minds during these difficult days. Facial masks have been out of stock everywhere for a long time and realising that her own supply of masks was running low, she decided to make them herself. There are a lot



This sewing machine had been unused for more than ten years.



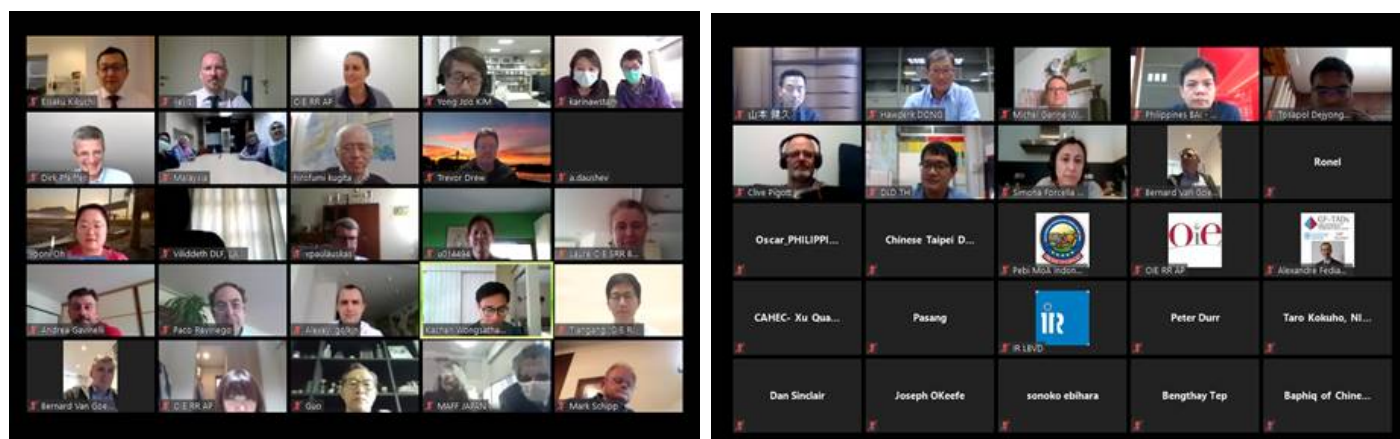
These masks are made from Uniqlo T-shirts and handkerchiefs.

of how-to videos and patterns of home-made masks on the Internet, which were uploaded by handcraft lovers. Many of them are very beautiful, unique and elaborate and they attracted her interest. Using several webpages as references, she made fabric masks for herself, her family and

colleagues. She found enjoyment in selecting the fabrics for each of her loved ones.

Some Japanese manufacturers are now significantly increasing the production of disposable facial masks. While they may become easier to purchase in near future, she hopes these masks will go to healthcare workers, who really need them. Koike-san loves her washable and reusable fabric masks made with the Japanese *mottainai* (waste not, want not) spirit. If anyone else is interested in making masks for themselves, here are some references: [HK Mask](#) & [Yuzawaya](#).

From Tokyo, we are hosting many Zoom meetings and webinars and have been amazed at the enthusiastic participation from our regional members and globally. With so many experiencing similar travel restrictions and lockdowns, it has, in some ways, made us more connected and closer to colleagues around the world, while we are physically isolated.



We wish to deeply thank our colleagues from the RRAP Tokyo for writing this article.

■ OIE In-house Times – 30 April 2020