

The Business

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Why lockdown?

All over the globe the coronavirus pandemic is on an explosive trajectory, and in the process is dictating a new guidebook on inter-state and intra-state socio-political and economic relationships. It has vandalized world economies, degraded inter-state tensions and forced political rivals to share the table. One such instance took place in Karachi when all political parties, religious leaders and people from different walks of life met at the behest of the Sindh Chief Minister and jointly decided that a lockdown should be imposed in the province to contain the rising threat of Covid-19. "The local transmission cases of coronavirus are spreading and we have to contain them, otherwise everything will go out of our control," said Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah. Accordingly, it was decided that all the offices, gathering places, public transport and bus-stands would remain shut for 15 days. And nobody would be allowed to come out of his or her home unnecessarily. The exceptions to the restrictions would be dictated by hard needs to visit hospitals, grocery shops and vegetable stalls. In Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, too, where the second fatality is a young doctor assigned to treat infected patients, the authorities imposed lockdown. In Punjab, a lockdown was also imposed, but without conceding it is a lockdown. The other two provinces and federal capital have announced shutdowns, but at the end of day they don't seem to be having any other option over the coming days and weeks. Their reluctance stems essentially from the thinking of the prime minister that in the wake of a countrywide lockdown about 25 percent of population would suffer extreme hunger. On the other hand, to lockdown or not to lockdown the entire country the infection statistics over the coming few days would make the choice. Hopefully, the residents of Sindh, particularly of Karachi, put up with lockdown rigours by confining themselves within their homes — because as of now there is no other option with them to fight the rampaging virus pandemic.

The only country that has so far successfully checkmated the coronavirus is China. In that fight its weapon was a two-pronged strategy — social-distancing and personal hygiene. As the coronavirus began raising its ugly head in Wuhan the Chinese government imposed a stern lockdown on the city of 11 million people and then rest of Hubei province putting some 50 million people in mass isolation. And across the country people were strongly encouraged to stay at home. The WHO chief has, therefore, concluded that "China's success story provides hope for the rest of the world". Of course, hectic efforts are afoot in all developed countries to produce anti-coronavirus vaccine, but as of now there is no breakthrough and deadly virus keeps walking tall all over the world. As of now, the only option available to people is to bide for time and protect themselves by observing social-distancing and maintaining high levels of personal hygiene.

Corona in Gaza

NEVE GORDON

For the past few weeks we have been inundated with information about the preparedness of health care systems and how they affect mortality rates. Giving South Korea as an example, experts suggest that testing for Covid-19 is essential for saving lives, comparing that country favorably with Italy and Spain. Yet in Gaza, there are currently very few test kits (about 200), and, according to Ghada Majadli of Physicians for Human Rights, Israel, as of March 23, only 99 people have been tested.

We also know that people are dying in many countries because hospitals are overwhelmed, unable to cope with the mass influx of new patients in need of ventilators. Doctors are warning that with 52 and 40 ventilators per 100,000 people in the United States and Israel, respectively, stocks are simply insufficient. In the Gaza Strip, by contrast, there are three ventilators per 100,000 people. This will undoubtedly become a death sentence for many.

More generally, Gaza has around 30 hospitals and major clinics, providing an average of 1.3 beds for every 1,000 people, while Israel has more than double this, with an average of 3.3 beds per 1,000, while the European Union averages 5.4 per 1,000. The contrast with Israel, which directly occupied

the Gaza Strip for 40 years and continues to control its borders, is not only striking but also a manifestation of what Harvard University Professor Sara Roy has called de-development: the intentional weakening of the economic and social capacities of Gaza's population.

But a narrow analysis of a county's medical capacity to cope with the virus provides a very skewed perspective. Indeed, one of the first things I emphasize in my course "Human Rights and Public Health," which I teach at the Global Health Program at Queen Mary University of London, is that the conditions people are born into, and grow up, live, and work in, are no less significant than the quality of the health care system they have access to.

For example, in order to explain the gap between Gaza's infant mortality rate of 19.6 deaths for every 1,000 births with Israel's rate of 2.6 deaths for every 1,000 births, or to understand why Israelis live on average 10 years more than their counterparts in the Gaza Strip, we need to look at the kind of health services accessible to each population as well as the factors that serve as social determinants of health. The fact that a staggering 53 percent of the population — around 1.01 million people, including over 400,000 children — earn less than the international poverty line of \$4.60 a day helps explain why lives in Gaza

IRSHAD AHMAD

A month on, confirmed Covid-19 confirmed patients have passed from zero to more than 1400 in Pakistan. Sadly, people are not only horrified at this steepest rise but are also concerned about the federal government's indecisiveness regarding a lockdown and the lack of a concrete strategy.

Still, we are optimistic that we can overcome this pandemic by fulfilling our personal responsibilities and supporting our heroes, who are serving us in this hard time. Recently, to reduce the chances of spreading the Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions were closed, and other public officials were also sent on vacations. And the government recommended the public 'to stay at home, practise social distancing, wash hands for at least 20 seconds, use hand sanitizers and avoid non-essential travel to public places'.

Still, in this fight against Covid-19, some front-liners are serving us while risking their lives, in the course of their duties. They are our real heroes, who need to be protected and appreciated for their sacrifices. Like in Wuhan, China, our doctors and paramedics staff too are fighting at the forefront since their services are priceless and incalculable. We shall never forget the sad death of Dr Osama Riaz, after having contracted Covid-19, in the course of his duty while serving the Taftan pilgrims who had returned from Iran to Pakistan.

Dr Osama's sad death only confirmed the worrisome facts and details that doctors across the country had been com-

plaining about: the deficiency of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other facilities as per WHO standards. They reportedly had no other choice but to buy those for their own. Hence, without risking other doctors, it is the time for the government to ensure at the earliest that all the doctors and paramedics get the required personal protective equipment. Ultimately, the public can acknowledge the sacrifices of Dr Osama and services of other doctors and paramedics, by staying at home, maintaining social distance, washing our hands properly, using masks and sanitizers and following the SOPs of the WHO for avoiding the Covid-19 infection.

Besides healthcare workers' warnings and advice, it has been observed that various placards and banners have been placed at different places in Peshawar, by the municipality, requesting the public to "stay at their home as they (municipal and sanitation workers) are out to serve the public".

There has been no holiday for municipal and sanitation workers; they put their lives at risk to work at disinfecting Covid-19 affected areas (red zones), quarantine places and hospitals, by chlorinating, washing buildings, streets and roads, fumigation and spraying, and disposing of domestic and hospital waste. They are present every time, on the front line, in the war against Covid-19. Courageously, they are supplying water and other neces-

sities to the quarantined places and to patients in isolation, washing and cleaning these places and also sensitizing people about the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a fact that the municipal, sanitation and janitorial workers employed with the water and sanitation companies and other municipalities are often the least privileged people who are getting low wages and are serving in low grades. Imperatively, all the janitorial and municipal workers who are engaged in the disinfection of Covid-19 infected spaces including cleaning, washing and removing solid waste should be protected and their health and welfare should be prioritized.

Consequently, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has also urged the federal and provincial governments to ensure availability of personal protective equipment to such vulnerable workers. Their services and sacrifices should be acknowledged with financial support and appreciation. What can the public do to help the sanitation and janitorial workers in the present scenario? Possibly, if we remain indoor, throw our domestic waste into the designated places and not into the streets and drains. We can share the burden of municipal workers by keeping clean as much as we can.

Similarly, we also need to appreciate our police force for their services. Unfortunately, there are also reports that police officials also have no personal protective equipment and regrettably many have

bought masks made of cloth while performing their duties and requesting people to stay at home. Besides this, they are also guarding the sensitive areas, hospitals and quarantined places where they are very vulnerable to the Covid-19 virus. Immediately, all those police officials who are serving at quarantine centres and hospitals should be provided with all necessities including personal protective equipment. We the public can support our police force by curtailing our outdoor activities to the maximum. Likewise, rescue workers, Edhi workers and officials from the district administration who are working tirelessly in the fight against Covid-19 are all invaluable. Their safety should be prioritized by supplying them the necessary precautionary kits.

The media has not only a very important role in highlighting the sacrifices of doctors and paramedics, police, municipal and other workers but in sensitizing the public to follow precautionary measures appropriately to evade the Covid-19 virus. The government should ensure every doctor and paramedic, every police official, janitor or municipal worker is properly protected by ensuring the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) as per WHO and OSHA standards. The safety of these people should be ensured as they have put their lives at risk for us. Besides government recognition, there is a need for public support. Every individual has a role in the eradication of the Covid-19 pandemic, which they should play with responsibility. Let's stand by the people who are putting their lives in danger while saving ours.



Has Pakistan won in Afghanistan?

HUSSAIN NADIM

It appears that Pakistan has emerged as a "winner" in the US-Taliban peace deal: that the Taliban are back in business, the US is on its way out, India and its investments in Afghanistan are down the drain, and China is likely to be more involved in Afghanistan's post-war setup are all things that Pakistan had hoped for. After two decades of war, however, it is hard to tell a victory from a defeat. The post-deal mood in the Pakistani security establishment is less of jubilation and more of a sense of relief.

If we go by the account of Steve Coll in Directorate S, Pakistan urged the US right after 9/11 to find a political settlement with the Taliban and arrest Osama bin Laden. However, the US persisted with war. For the next 19 years, Pakistan continued to convince the US that the war had no military solution and that a political settlement with the Taliban was the only way forward to avoid a total collapse in Afghanistan. Yet, for its principled stance Pakistan was tarnished as a state sponsor of terror with its agencies blamed to have gone rogue. The US-Taliban peace deal, for Pakistani officials, hence provided the much-needed vindication and credibility to Pakistan which — especially under the new Prime Minister, Imran Khan — championed for a peace settlement in Afghanistan.

Even the PM for his stance on peace was for over a decade labeled as Taliban Khan. Second, Pakistan is also very glad to see India out of the picture in Afghanistan and its future. This was one of the main points by Pakistan in its negotiations with the US. For as long as Indian presence was in Afghanistan, Pakistan's security calculus did not allow it to provide US full assistance in the Afghan war. With assurances from the US to keep India at bay, Pakistan is optimistic that post-war Afghanistan will not be a safe haven for Indian covert operations against Pakistan. At the

same time, however, there is a caution in Pakistan over the Taliban. Having dealt with them for well over 40 years, the Pakistan Army is not under an illusion of Pakistan-Taliban brotherhood. The Taliban relied on Pakistan out of desperation; however, there is deep-rooted resentment on both sides. The Taliban view Pakistan Army as mostly a Punjabi-dominated and Western influenced army that cannot be entirely trusted as an institution. Therefore, the relation that Pakistan maintains with the Taliban has been less institutional and more based on individuals on both sides. Similarly, there is a sentiment within the Pakistani security establishment that the Taliban have a history of going back on deals and are treacherous in their engagements. The concern is that the Taliban may not entirely prove to be a friendly partner to Pakistan in post-war Afghanistan. For this reason it has been in Pakistan's interest to forge relations across the board with actors in Afghanistan. For instance, PM Imran Khan's acceptance of Ghani as President is one aspect of Pakistan diversifying its stakes in Afghanistan unlike India, that has been less pragmatic in its foreign policy approach to Afghanistan.

Finally, a key issue that Pakistan hopes to resolve now that the US has a deal with the Taliban is to secure its removal from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list. From Islamabad's perspective, Washington lobbied the FATF to put Pakistan back on its grey list in February 2018 to exert pressure on Pakistan to deliver in Afghanistan. But the listing has brought Pakistan on the verge of economic collapse. With the US-Taliban deal completed, Islamabad hopes Washington would ensure it gets off the list. Since peace negotiations in Afghanistan are ongoing, it is impossible to gauge who the "winner" is, especially since all parties have suffered a great deal. But for now, it seems that the Taliban, Pakistan, and the Trump administration have all got a little of what they wanted.

The coronavirus

DR AQ KHAN

The whole world is in upheaval due to the coronavirus pandemic. About 195 countries have fallen victim to it. Thousands of people have died and hundreds of thousands are affected and are, or have been, under treatment. Medical facilities, etc have been stretched to their utmost limits.

Different countries are using different strategies to combat this menace. The best and the quickest strategy was adopted by the Chinese. The Wuhan city (from where it all started) was immediately totally isolated. Nobody could go in or out. Thousands of doctors and para-medical personnel were sent from neighbouring cities. It took a heavy toll, but it was confined. Within a few weeks it was under control, the city was opened up once again and people were able to start their routine lives. The people and the government gave their heroes (the doctors, nurses, etc) well-deserved accolades. Unfortunately, modern air travel has enabled the virus to spread all over the world within a few weeks. The matter is serious. Doctors all over the world are trying to find a vaccine. They will ultimately succeed, but it will take time and meanwhile there is a heavy toll to pay. Italy, France, England and the US are the worst hit. A laboratory in San Diego (USA) claims to have found a good treatment and is already testing it on volunteers. Anti-malaria medication was also said to be useful, but these reports have been received with reservation. According to the Oxford dictionary, a virus is a sub-microscopic infective particle typically consisting of nucleic acid coated in protein which is able to multiply within the cells of a host organism. It causes infection or disease, sometimes (as in this case) quite fatal. Bacteria has been defined as being the plural of bacterium, a member of a large group of unicellular microorganisms which have cell walls but lack an organised nucleus and other structures and include numerous disease-causing forms. Depending upon the origin, the two can cause serious diseases.

We Muslims usually look towards the Almighty to come to our rescue. The ulema have mentioned Quranic verses to recite to get rid of disease. Some ulema have advised reciting Allah's name: Ya Allahu, Ya Hafezo, Ya Salaamo numerous

times, adding Darood Sharif before and after these noble names. In addition to these, there are six healing prayers (Dua-e-Shifa) given in the Holy Quran which were conveyed to one alim Abul Qasim Qasheri by our Holy Prophet (pbuh).

Qasheri's son was seriously ill, almost on his death-bed. He prayed to the Almighty. He dreamt that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) came to him and said that the Holy Quran has six healing verses. When he woke from that dream, he searched and found the following six Ayats: 1) The Almighty heals the breasts of the believers (9:14); 2) And a healing for the disease in your hearts (10:57); 3) There issues from the bodies (bees) a drink of varying colours (honey) wherein is healing for men (16:69); 4) We sent down, stage by stage, in the Quran that which is a healing and mercy (17:82); 5) And when I am sick, it is He who cures me (26:80); and 6) It is a guide and a healing to those who believe (41:44).

There has been general guesswork doing the rounds that this virus is a result of the combination of viruses from a snake and a bat. It has managed to sweep across the whole world in a matter of weeks, not months or years. On TV one can see it in colour. Thanks to the electron microscope, items can be enlarged to hundreds of thousands of times their original size, thus making it easy to photograph and identify bacteria and viruses and to prepare medicines for treatment and vaccines for prevention. It is said that this particular virus enters through the mouth, nose or eyes and then settles in the throat. After two or three days it causes a dry cough and a sore throat. If not cured at this stage (hot lemon water, etc), it goes down to the lungs where it causes mucus to thicken to such an extent that breathing becomes impossible and the patient dies. Timely treatment is of utmost importance and can save the patient's life. If someone has a sore throat (and mild fever), the first line of defence is to gargle with warm water laced with salt and lemon juice. Preventative measures are frequent washing of hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizers and stay away from other people, maintaining a distance of at least 1.5 meters if avoidance is not possible. Cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and get rid of the tissue immediately. Stay at home if at all possible and don't receive guests.

Letters to the Editor

Water for Kharif

According to some media reports, better water availability during the upcoming Kharif crops, unlike previous years, could help farmers. Ample supply of water in the early Kharif season means sowing of important crops like cotton and rice on a greater area. As snow melt accelerates from June, water availability improves considerably in the late Kharif season. It merits a mention that Kharif sowing starts from April-June and is harvested during October-December. The main Kharif crops include cotton, rice, sugarcane, maize, pulses such as moong, mash, bajra and jowar. Pakistan's agricultural productivity is primarily dependent upon the timely availability of water, as almost 90 percent of crops are cultivated in the irrigated zone. It is pertinent to note that a better water situation

is being foreseen for the forthcoming Kharif season compared to the previous one due to better hydro-meteorological scenarios. Both the water reservoirs of Tarbela and Mangla dams are expected to be filled to maximum level after meeting all irrigation requirements during Kharif season.

Khan Faraz
PESHAWAR

What relief?

Recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced a relief package for those families that are economically affected by the coronavirus. As per the package, the government will donate Rs3,000 per month to 70 lakh families of daily wages earners. It is not mentioned that if a family has more family members than what

measures will the government take? For instance, the government if it donates Rs3,000 per month to the families of daily wagers that means Rs100 per day. Individually, if a family has 10 family members then will the government donate every family member Rs10 per day? Is that relief? The government is advised to provide ration as well as monetary help to daily wagers.

Aijaz Ahmed Bhayo
KANDHKOT

Contain now

Now that two confirmed cases of Covid-19 have been reported in Nasiri Wala, a hamlet in Tehsil Esa Khel, Mianwali, the district administration must swing into action to limit the virus from spreading further. The onus lies on the

relevant corners to shore up preventive measures in the area without any further delay. The entire area must be cordoned off. Ration and other amenities of life must be provided to each and every household without any disruption. The entire population must be tested so that the spread of the disease is detected and halted in a timely manner. It is unfortunate that most of the individuals are still taking this panic situation very lightly. Law-enforcement must tighten the noose against those who are found violating the lockdown measures. The inter-district and intra-district movement of the people should be restricted with immediate effect. Undoubtedly, the authorities are doing their bit to contain the epidemic but without the support and cooperation of the masses the fight against the deadly outbreak cannot be won.

Muhammad Fayyaz Nawrah
MIANWALI