

The Business

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The coronavirus spectre

Coronavirus has taken everybody by surprise. Those who thought they are too far from its epicenter in China to be infected are now in the midst of coronavirus storm, which retains its unpredictability as to how it would play out in weeks and months to come. As soon as Yahya Jafri, the first Pakistani recovered from coronavirus disease and went home the concerned quarters thought the game is over. But it did not. The National Security Committee (NSC) was told that the number of those who have been tested positive has been rising on daily basis. Hopefully, the decisions made and steps taken by the NSC would help sharpen public focus on this apocalyptic risk. This requires an informed public mindset, nurtured by national mass media. Among the decisions made by the NSC and to be implemented by the National Coordination Committee comprising civil and military representatives, as some will deny entry of virus-ridden travellers from abroad the others aim at securing an infection-resistant polity. Even when there is a debate about its origin, the impression persists that China is the birthplace of coronavirus. But now the disease has spread to over 100 countries, including Pakistan, infecting more than 145,000 people and killing more than 5,400.

Keeping that in mind, the NSC ordered closure of country's borders with Iran and Afghanistan for a fortnight. It also decided that foreign flights would be allowed only at airports of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore. That done then efficient screening of travellers at the entry points is the real challenge. Internally, a variety of dos and don'ts has been put in place. All educational institutions are shut; there is complete ban on major public gatherings of all kinds; and the remaining matches of PSL were held in empty stadiums with semi-finals and final decided on teams, performance. Cinema houses and wedding halls too would remain closed. The 23 March military parade too will not take place.

More importantly, the government is also required to devise a long-term strategy to fight the coronavirus demon, particularly on two fronts - economy and food security. The free-fall of stock exchange over the last week does paint a dropping trajectory on all other economic and financial fronts, requiring urgent remedial inputs by relevant quarters. However, the area of far more serious concern is food security especially when prices of essential food items have already registered an upward trend. It is only natural that in times of crises, a kind of panic grips the common folks who rush to the grocery shops to collect more than usual stocks of food-stuff. Given the government's failure to catch the culprits responsible for the recent wheat and sugar shortages, the Ministry for National Food Security to pull up its socks without any further loss of time.

The indomitable women of the Pakistan Movement

FIZZAH FATIMA

Creation of Pakistan wasn't only a struggle for independence or a demand for a separate piece of land.

It was a moment of rejuvenation that required the spiritless Muslim population to be awakened out of their slumber — both men and women alike.

For men there were many names to be inspired by, but for women, initially, there was a vacuum that only got filled once women like Fatima Jinnah and Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan entered the scenario.

They worked tirelessly and inspired the women of the subcontinent to do the same, at a time when women working outside their houses was taboo and something that women were scorned for.

But these women defied all the bounds and traditions and worked side-by-side men for a purpose they believed was bigger than anything else.

As is said, all great reformers lead by an example. Fatimah Jinnah, the affectionate and supporting sister of Quaid-i-Azam, was an inspiration for not just Muslim women but for women all over the Subcontinent. She was the Vice President of All India Muslim League Women's Wing.

A dentist by profession, with her dignified demeanor, graceful mannerisms and high intellect, she inspired women to acquire higher education.

In 1932, she accompanied her brother to London and stayed with him after the Second Round Table Conference.

Later, she became a member of the Working Committee of the Bombay Provincial Muslim League. After Jinnah's return to India and his revival of All India Muslim League, she accompanied him everywhere.

When orthodox Muslim masses believed that for a woman Pardah was the only way of spending life, the sight of a sister Fizzah Fatima standing shoulder-to-shoulder with her brother was a unique and unusual one. She rightly realized that the way forward would only be when women start participating actively in the political arena of India.

She was among the pioneers of establishment of Girl Guides Association, which itself was a breakthrough in the conservative milieu of subcontinent.

As she travelled the length and breadth of the Subcontinent, she delivered fiery speeches, emphasizing to women the importance of acquisition of education. As she interacted with women, she explained to them the importance of breaking free of foreign rule.

This was the beginning of a strong agitation movement. For the welfare of women, she organized many committees but never accepted an offer to head one. After independence, Pakistan was bowled over with many issues, prime among which was the rehabilitation and accommodation of refugees.

To help them settle and start a new life, Fatima Jinnah established refugee rehabilitation centers.

Various other organizations followed suit. She would regularly visit camps, communicating with the refugees not only to listen to their problems but giving them hope as well.

She also founded the Women's Relief Committee (WRC), which later evolved into All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA). Her humanitarian work eventually earned her the title of Mader-e-Millat — Mother of the Nation.

Like a mother, she worked tirelessly for Pakistan in sectors of education and health. The Quaid-i-Azam used to appreciate her support saying, "My sister was

like a bright ray of light and hope whenever I came back home and meet her.

Anxieties would have been much greater and my health much worse, but for the restraint imposed by her." One of the other women whose services are worth mentioning and to whom Pakistan owes gratitude is Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan was a highly educated woman with a Masters degree in Economics and Sociology. She found herself at the forefront of the political arena after her marriage to Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan. She actively participated in political activities of All India Muslim League and took it upon herself to spread awareness regarding politics among women masses.

At the time of proposal of the Simon Commission, she was a professor at Indraprastha College for Women in Delhi. She vehemently opposed the commission and successfully assembled the student masses of her college to march towards the Legislative Assembly to protest against the commission.

When Jinnah gave up politics and settled in London, she, along with her husband, went to London and convinced Jinnah to return and lead the dejected masses of the Subcontinent.

She later served as General Secretary of the Muslim League and the Chairperson of the Economic division of the Party.

In 1942, when World War II broke out, she trained the female masses to help them prepare for any untoward incident.

As the creation of Pakistan seemed to materialize, she imagined a welfare state where women would work side by side with men for the development of the nation and work for their own development. To achieve this aim, in 1949,

along with Fatima Jinnah, she formed APWA that worked for the economic, cultural and social uplift of women in society.

She formed women's voluntary service and Women's National Guard (WNG), the role of which was to fight for women's rights and that aimed to prevent brutal treatment of women, either received from their spouses or caused by domestic violence.

After being appointed as the First Lady, she toured USA along with her husband, and made perfect use of the opportunity to reflect the positive image of Pakistan.

She interacted with the elite and lectured in various schools and colleges.

The history of Pakistan is full of accounts of women such as Lady Abdullah Haroon, Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz, Begum Salma Tassaduq Hussain, and many more who worked against the contemporary norms, supported men, and worked alongside them to make possible the impossible — the birth of Pakistan.

If it were not for the services of such fearless and indomitable women, Pakistan might still be just a dream.

The fact that these women were always photographed standing next to but never forward or behind, is a strong message of gender equality for the world.

These women practically demonstrated to the masses that 'nothing exists that women cannot achieve', and in a society women have a role bigger than being bound inside the four walls of their homes. Today, these women are no more among us but they have left an everlasting legacy for the empowerment of women.

Today, thousands of women, admire them and step out of their houses and contribute their share to the development



War chest

FARRUKH SALEEM

Red alert: Unless the government comes up with a solid Rs6 trillion war-chest (15 percent of our GDP) our economy is heading towards disaster. We must fight two wars: one against the virus and the other to save the economy from unmitigated disaster.

The only power that can now save the economy from a complete disaster is the government. Two things. One, export orders are sharply down — because global demand has tanked. Two, Pakistani consumers — after paying out Rs600 billion in additional electricity bills and Rs700 billion in new taxes — have no purchasing power left. That's a recipe for disaster.

The SBP has already played not one but two cruel jokes. First, the Monetary Policy Committee cut its policy rate by 0.75 percent to 12.5 percent (the same in the US is 0 percent; UK 0.25 percent, India 5.15 percent, Bangladesh 6 percent and Sri Lanka 7.5 percent). Second, the SBP announced a 'Temporary Economic Refinance Facility' to provide financing for setting up of new industrial units. SBP please wake up; no one is setting up new industrial units and every central bank in the world is coming up with corona packages to save business units already under stress.

The US is working on a \$1 trillion coronavirus war-chest (5 percent of GDP) that includes payouts to individual Americans (\$500 billion in order to boost household demand); \$50 billion airline industry bailout; \$300 billion small business interruption loans and \$150 billion other affected industries bailout.

Germany has unleashed the "biggest post-war aid package against the coronavirus"; a \$600 billion war-chest (15 percent of GDP). This war-chest will "shore up companies, offering them unlimited credit to keep their businesses afloat". The \$600 billion war-chest is just for starters. Peter Altmaier, the economy minister,



ister, said, "We will reload our weapons if necessary." The UK has unveiled a \$420 billion war-chest by announcing 'lifeline for firms hit by coronavirus' (15 percent of GDP) that includes "loan guarantees and provide a further 20 billion pounds in tax cuts, grants and other help for businesses facing the risk of collapse from the spread of coronavirus." France has announced a \$320 billion corona war-chest (15 percent of GDP) that includes \$48 billion for the more than 3.5 million small business and other hard-hit sectors of the economy. There's \$9 billion linked to forced part-time employment and \$2 billion for the self-employed and shopkeepers.

The SBP must save Pakistan's corporate citizens and Pakistani families from corona-induced economic disaster. The SBP must do two things: bailout affected industries and boost household demand (some of these measures — guaranteeing business loans, for instance — do not require any upfront funding). We must not expect other countries to help us out because they all have their own problems to deal with.

Do we know our enemy? We would need to overwhelm the enemy with speed. Do we have a strategy to fight this war? Mitigation? Suppression? Lockdown? The Italian Army is enforcing the lockdown. The British Army is set to be on streets for up to six months. The National Guard is being activated in the United States. The German Army has been called in. The Malaysian Army is being deployed.

Yes, we are in a state of war. Question: Do we have a war-chest? Answer: None so far. Fighting a war without a war-chest and expecting to win!

Imran's Hamletian dilemma

GHAZI SALAHUDDIN

What is the use of charisma if it does not serve to inspire people and bring them together at a moment of grave national crisis? After all, one justification for resorting to charismatic leadership in a country of low political culture like Pakistan would be that a charismatic leader is believed to be capable of working miracles.

And there is always a strong popular yearning for magical solutions of problems that have festered for ages. Besides, it is the charismatic leader who can get away with promises that are not meant to be kept. Still, it is the leader's charisma that sustains a people's dreams for change makes them feel protected. Ah, but Imran Khan's charisma seems to have suddenly lost its shine against the onslaught of a contagion that has wreaked havoc on the world. Pakistan, to be sure, is facing a greater challenge because its public health system is all but broken and the economic deprivations of a large section of the population are monumental in their magnitude. Enter the monster of coronavirus. We have been watching in disbelief the story of how this pandemic first attacked China and then descended menacingly on Europe. Italy's unending tragedy has acquired mythical proportions. Actually, the virus has infiltrated across almost the entire world. We are familiar with the pattern of how it comes creeping and then steadily rises to become a twister to engulf the entire

population.

Since the virus has already landed in Pakistan, the leadership is now saddled with the task of managing its outbreak. One had expected Prime Minister Imran Khan to forge national unity to confront a situation that has aptly been described as a war. The first thing he had to do, when the momentum was beginning to pick up nearly two weeks ago, was to take the people into confidence about his strategy to defeat the contagion. Sadly, he wasted precious time and when he did address the nation on Tuesday this week, his message was not at all reassuring for the people who are under tremendous stress. His words did not bring us together. Instead, he used the occasion to play politics — and he was blatantly playing foul.

For instance, he praised Balochistan to seemingly gloss over the inadequacies of the quarantine camps of Taftaan and did not have even one word for Sindh where the provincial government had excelled in its response to the spread of the virus. Indeed, Murad Ali Shah has stood out as a chief minister. Punjab must have missed an administrator of the competence and passion of Shabbaz Sharif.

In any case, Imran Khan's address to the nation was an opportunity that was lost. It did not portray a leader who would command authority and determination to rise to an occasion. What we had were the rambling thoughts of a prime minister who is in office and perhaps not in power.

Let me explain why I think that Imran

Khan has lost an opportunity. Any leader with a great potential and high ambition would wish for a big crisis that he or she would take charge of and then seek to resolve it with courage and confidence. History would certify that only great challenges produce great leaders.

Incidentally, we had a glimpse of what leadership is all about in the press conference addressed on Thursday by PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari. The young leader appealed for national unity and made no criticism of the prime minister. He termed the situation a national challenge. But it was his maternal grandfather who invested his charismatic authority in that heart-lifting response to an exceptional challenge in December 1971. At that darkest hour in our history, he spoke to the nation at a late hour and launched his mission to "pick up the pieces". This is another difficult moment for Pakistan. Irrespective of how anyone would judge Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as a leader, it appears that every aspiring leader in Pakistan secretly wishes to become another Bhutto. Imran Khan, too, has expressed his admiration for the founder of the PPP. But all leaders have their own limitations and though Imran certainly has charisma and a dedicated following, his performance this week was clearly underwhelming.

One measure of his present leadership is his Hamletian dilemma: to lockdown or not lockdown. There is also the question of timing. There is the Chinese example, the only success story we have

so far. Yes, the implications of a lockdown that Imran Khan had brought up in his television address are critical. We have to have a proper plan to provide relief to those who are bound to be deeply hurt. There is no doubt that the sufferings of the underprivileged are becoming unbearable even without a severe and extensive lockdown. It is early to think about it but some lessons that will emerge from this crisis are very much on the surface. We always knew that this nation will have to bear the cost of a policy in which social justice and welfare of the people are sacrificed on the altar of national security.

The irony here is that this is not the first crisis or disaster that necessitates a radical shift in our sense of direction, in terms of social development and national priorities. Our addition to business-as-usual is as difficult to cure as it is to check the spread of Covid-19. At this time, however, we are on the edge of something that we are not able to fully comprehend. Some scientific assessments are very scary, if higher temperatures do not help. Our heart sinks when, for instance, we look at Italy. There is also the economic fallout to take into account. It is in itself a calamity that we are not equipped to deal with an emergency of this magnitude. Our system is not designed for the welfare of common citizens.

We now have to protect their lives when we do not even protect their fundamental human rights. Will our rulers be able to make better choices when all this is over?