

The Business

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Locust attack

It seems everybody including farmers, analysts, even the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is worried about desert locust swarms, currently breeding in over 38 percent of the country, unleashing a second wave of attacks in all four provinces and seriously compromising Pakistan's food supply. Yet, for some reasons, there's little or no action, or even reaction, from Islamabad. The government did declare a state of emergency in February, but then just stood by as the pests multiplied on an unprecedented scale in pockets in Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab. Now, unless something is done immediately, FAO believes the entire country might be under threat of invasion, which could mean potential losses to the tune of Rs353 billion for Rabi crops and Rs464 billion for Kharif crops. Surely, the government would not have needed the FAO to tell it all of this, especially since the threat has assumed extremely severe proportions since last year. Still nothing has been done between then and now to control it, which speaks volumes about just where the government keeps food security on its priority list.

The Sindh government has identified the trend ahead of time once again, and has been crying hoarse for help from Islamabad, but alas to no avail. In March this year, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah wrote to Prime Minister Imran Khan, warning about a large locust attack expected around mid-May. He also sought the PM's attention towards the urgent need for fumigation campaigns against the advancing hordes of the pest, without which this year's carnage would be much worse than last year's. Yet everything, including the province's request for six aircraft for a spraying campaign, seemingly fell on deaf ears. The centre's strategy so far is rather difficult to understand, primarily because it has not been properly explained, but it must shift gears right now if it wants to avoid large-scale damage to this and next year's crops as well as its reputation. It is more shocking that the government decided to deal with the worst locust outbreak in three decades by burying its head in the sand. And, by not listening to provinces in desperate need of help, it is only making matters much worse. It will not just compromise the nation's food supply, but also bankrupt farmers, who are already among the weakest segments of society and must now also, fend off locusts on their own. When there are serious concerns about protecting the country's food supply, the federal government cannot just sit back and do nothing. It must immediately revise its policy and do everything it can to work with the provinces and control these locusts before any more crops are destroyed.

Pandemics and poverty

DR MANZOOR ALI ISRAN

Most pandemics are natural and begin with pathogens leaping from wild or domesticated animals to humans, in what is called a 'zoonotic spark'.

Mostly, such pathogens originate in Central Africa, and South and Southeast Asia as these regions, being home to most of the global poor, are experiencing rapid expansions in human settlements, intensifying agricultural and livestock production, increasing exploitation of natural resources and destruction of natural habitat of animals. This brings wild birds and animals closer to humans and causes epidemics as well as pandemics such as Covid-19.

Notwithstanding where a pandemic starts, it is the poor who bear the burnt in low and middle income countries (LMICs) due to the limited capacity to handle such surges. Even if a vaccine is developed, it won't reach the markets of the LMICs due to vaccine nationalism and as per market logic – the market always responds to demand and that demand always comes from the rich countries first.

It may be recalled that during the Swine Flu Pandemic, rich countries had secured large advance orders for vaccines and, despite the efforts of the World Health Organization, the poorer countries were crowded out. These same distributional inequalities are likely to play out within poor countries in case of a Covid-19 vaccine. The rich will be the first ones to have access to a vaccine and the most vulnerable will be left out with fewer pandemic response resources – fewer health workers, fewer clinics and less medicine.

Pandemics can cause enormous economic damage as a result of lockdowns, closures of markets, workers falling sick, fearful people avoiding markets and public places and quarantines and social distancing, isolation reducing travel and trade. Acute economic disruption carries huge risks for poor

households whose livelihoods have already been jeopardized.

Oxfam's report 'Dignity Not Destitution' presents fresh analysis which suggests that between six and eight percent of the global population could be forced into poverty as governments shut down entire economies to manage the spread of the virus. The report adds "the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic could push half a billion more people into poverty unless urgent action is taken to bail out developing countries".

The UN study titled 'Estimates of the impact of Covid-19 on global poverty' says that Covid-19 poses a real challenge to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty by 2030 because global poverty could increase for the first time since 1990 and, depending on the poverty line, such increase could represent a reversal of approximately a decade in the world's progress in reducing poverty.

The Covid-19 pandemic has done two things: it has made the poor poorer and has created a new strata of poor. The US and the UK are the worst hit countries in terms of unemployment and economic damages. The US is facing the highest number of unemployed. According to new data, unemployment in the US has reached 14.7 percent, higher than the unemployment during the Great Depression. Steven Menuhin, US treasury secretary, has said that it could be close to 25 percent. Almost 20.4 million people have lost jobs.

The data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), shows that black people are hospitalized at a higher rate than white people. The data from the US coronavirus pandemic exposes how systemic racism and inequality put minority groups at risk. In New York, the epicenter of the pandemic in the US, the coronavirus is killing African Americans and Hispanics at twice the rate of white people, according to preliminary state data. Pakistan, being a developing country

with less resources, has also been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Its economy has been sent into a tailspin. According to the IMF's forecast, its GDP growth will be around 1.4 percent. With a rising number of infections and deaths amid the relaxation of lockdown by the federal government, the virus has affected the poor the most.

Lockdown, no lockdown or smart lockdown, there will be more deaths but we have to see whether economic hunger and starvation will cause more deaths or the Covid-19 pandemic. I think the spread of the virus will cause more deaths as the WHO in its study on Pakistan has warned that if care is not taken then infection cases can spike to 200,000 by mid-July. So, we have to be very prudent in choosing our options. As I have already written in these pages, our policy is guided more by the sweet wishes of our rulers than any rationality. Poverty in Pakistan is multidimensional. Usually, economists define poverty as material deprivation or lack of basic human needs such as education, healthcare, housing, food, shelter and clothing. Those that do not have access to these inputs won't be able to protect themselves against deadly pandemics like Covid-19. Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate economist, has contributed significantly towards defining poverty. To him, poverty is the lack of ability to survive and grow. In this regard, he, along with Dr Mahboobul Haq, presented a concept of human development that focuses mainly on the creation of human capital through investment in health and education as these two factors enable a person to live with dignity and respect.

Unfortunately, the record of Pakistan with regard to investment in human development is very dismal. We hardly spend 2 percent of our GDP on education and 0.52 percent on health, though health has now been transferred to provinces under the 18th Amendment. Yet, the federal government bears the constitutional responsibility to support provinces in case of pandemics. There

are multiple causes of poverty in Pakistan that range from uneven distribution of resources, an unjust taxation system to an uneducated population. The poor have been abandoned by both state and market, which are unwilling to invest in the poor to raise their capacity so that they become productive agents of society. Most of the time, our economy has remained under IMF tutelage that not only favours the rich and neglects the poor, due to which the poor are invisible on development agendas, but also promotes inequalities in society. Overall, the Pakistani system favours the rich to be richer because there is a misconception that it is the rich who have the ability to tackle the problems of the poor. But we have seen not only in Pakistan but throughout the world that this approach has caused more poverty.

In a scathing criticism of the Pakistani elite, former director of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for Pakistan Marc-André Franche said that the only way a critical change could happen in the country was when the influential, the politicians and the wealthy, would sacrifice short-term, individual and family interests for the benefit of the nation. "You cannot have an elite that takes advantage of very cheap and uneducated labour when it comes to making money, and when it is time to party it is found in London, and when it's time to buy things it is in Dubai, and when it's time to buy property it invests in Dubai or Europe or New York.

The elite needs to decide do they want a country or not," says Marc with the world hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need for global solidarity among both developed and developing nations to focus more on cooperation and sharing of resources to work for global commons such as challenging the destruction of the ecosystem, and poverty and inequalities so that the poor can survive such pandemics.

The grave humanitarian crisis in IOJ&K

MARIA KHALID

As countries across the globe scramble to deal with the large-scale civil emergency, COVID-19 pandemic, governments have called on their armed forces to provide all the necessary support. While this has been the case for most countries, our eastern neighbor seems bent on aggravating the situation to further its designs, putting its people, human rights and the region at risk.

If we look at India's policies, they are actively using their forces for Kashmir (IOJ&K) lockdown since August 5, 2019, making it the most densely militarized zone. Indian government's policies of hate and aggression against the Kashmiris don't seem to have an end and there has been a renewed escalation in the ceasefire violations (CFVs) and use of heavy artillery against the civilian population. This year alone, India has committed 850 violations, and since February 26, when the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Pakistan, India has committed 456 violations that resulted in death and injuries to 31 individuals.

These continued Indian CFVs do not only violate the ceasefire agreement and put innocent lives at risk but also ignore the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire during the current pandemic.

The recent Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Order-2020 is another illegal and unconstitutional move by India to settle non-Kashmiris in IOJ&K by introducing changes in the domicile laws — an agenda that aims to change the population ratio of Muslims against the wishes and aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Earlier, by stripping IOJ&K of its autonomy and forcibly annexing it through the revocation of Article 35A [along with Article 370] in August 2019, India had removed the restriction for Indians to buy and own property in IOJ&K.

That, coupled with the promulgation of a new law to relax the domicile rules and eligibility criteria for employment, is meant to change to demographic status of the occupied territory. Despite the global crisis where entire nations are united in trying to counter and overcome the common adversity, India is adamant on promoting the RSS agenda in the region.

To divert internal and international attention from its failures and its own policy blunders within the country, and to divert world's attention from the atrocities being committed in Kashmir, India, with the help of its media, is maligning Pakistan through false propaganda. Addressing such remarks during a press conference, DG ISPR has said, "The allegations are a reflection of India's internal

failures, increasing frustration and demoralisation. The fire of oppression, hatred and race that India had lit in Kashmir has now spread to the rest of the country."

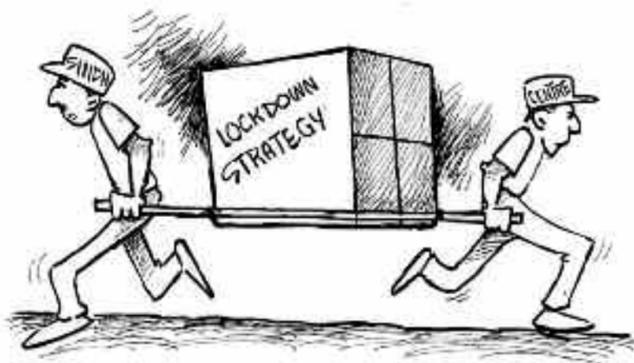
He further added, "The saffronisation of the Indian military and polity is a sad spectre that the world can ill afford in the present circumstances. The reality of the fake news that India tried to spread regarding Azad Kashmir is now in front of the world. The least number of COVID-19 cases across the country have been reported in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and no deaths have been reported so far."

The world is gradually realizing RSS' propagation of militant form of Hindu nationalism and its agenda against the Muslims. It must realize that this will exact a humanitarian toll and the cost would indeed be heavy as Hindutva is an aggressive form of militant nationalism that aims to impose a totalistic agenda to achieve paramount power.

This agenda aims to forge one nation, one history, one culture, one religion and one language where there's no tolerance for other faiths; an ideology that seeks to establish Hindu hegemony. After Muslims, there is evidence that Indian Christians will be the next target of extermination, as cases of mass violence against Christians are on the rise since BJP took power in 2014. Pakistan has repeatedly called for lifting the lockdown and ease restrictions in IOJ&K to alleviate the suffering of Kashmiris during the pandemic but India has turned a deaf ear despite confirmed cases and deaths.

Apart from the reports of arbitrary killings, rape, brutality and enforced disappearances, the real extent of tragedy, misery and pain being inflicted on the Kashmiris is currently unknown to the world due to the lack of communication means and their complete isolation from the rest of the world. Isolated, silenced and ill-equipped to handle this new danger thrust upon them, the people in IOJ&K have been left to their own devices by India. There should be an immediate end to the brutalities against the people of IOJ&K, protection of human rights, urgent lifting of communications restrictions, provision of unfettered access to medical and other essential supplies, and access of human rights organizations and international media to the occupied territory.

The United Nations and the global community must come forward and put a stop to India's continuing violation of UNSC resolutions, fourth Geneva Convention that prohibits demographic change of occupied regions, international humanitarian law and international law. —*Courtesy Hilal*



Esso Peas

NAEEM SADIQ

Pakistanis and peas go back a long way. Earliest archaeological finds confirm that peas were popular with the people of the Harappan civilization some 4500 years ago. Harappans grew numerous varieties of peas – garden peas, field peas, snap peas, sweet peas, snow peas, dry peas and black-eyed peas, to name a few. Continuing with this ancient organic tradition, in March 2020, Pakistan became the first country in the world to develop a unique variety of peas, patented as 'Esso Peas'.

What exactly are the 'Esso Peas'. They are an indigenously developed multi-purpose, broad spectrum, long-acting, papyrus-based cure for the world's most dreaded virus called Covid-19. In simple words, a superior equivalent of the vaccine that the rest of the world is frantically spending billions of dollars to develop. The primary ingredient of an 'Esso Pea' is a 99 percent pure sheet of an A4-size paper that is

laced with a number of stamps, signatures, and statements conspicuous for their typos and grammar mistakes. Scientists (read politicians) claim that the 'Esso Peas' exhibit effectiveness over a wide range of pathogenic viral and bacterial organisms. In fact, they insist that the same 'Esso Pea', with very slight changes can be reused as an equally potent cure for any other kind of virus or bacteria.

While the invention of 'Esso Peas' is a milestone of the 21st century, their manufacturing process dates back to the 17th century colonial era. The 'Esso Peas' production involves seven machines, of which only one actually adds value, while the other six machines only 'countersign', 'hold', 'forward' and 'put up' the file to the next work (read idle) station. The machine that actually thinks and writes the 'Esso Pea' is called an 'assistant' to a section officer. The other six machines (or hurdles) are: section officer, under secretary, joint secretary, additional secretary, secretary and chief secre-

tary. Although the people of Pakistan had never heard of 'Esso Peas' before March 2020, it took only seven days for the new invention to go viral. Vulnerable to readily parting with common sense, every citizen, politician and bureaucrat got readily convinced of the efficacy of 'Esso Peas'. They were hailed as a brilliant, free and effective alternate to the unaffordable vaccines or blood plasma treatments. All that is required to create an 'Esso Pea' is one functional and six redundant machines, coming together to place, tag, flag, sign, stamp and staple an A4 size paper in a folder. A nation that historically abhorred anything written was suddenly working overtime to mass produce 'Esso Peas'.

Once an 'Esso Pea' is prepared, it can be simultaneously administered to millions. This task, typically performed in televised press conferences, is allocated to smooth-talking government ministers, of whom there is never a shortage. All they have to do is appear on TV and utter a few standard one-fit-all platitudes.

"We have come to an agreement with the traders' association / religious scholars / hair dressers that they will follow the impossible to follow 14 / 24 / 34 'Esso Peas' prepared by the government." The parties involved in all such 'wishy-washy' agreements fully understand that the virus is blind to the presence or absence of a document called an 'Esso Pea'. They fully understand that the chances of implementing these 'Esso Peas' are no better than an individual getting struck by lightning twice on the same day. Here the 'Esso Peas' act as a brilliant face-saver and an effective 'eye-wash' to keep doing what they always did. Having excelled in the field of epidemiology, it may be prudent for Pakistan to develop two more 'Peas'. The much needed 'Lesso Peas', to focus on having less children through stricter social distancing. Finally, there ought to be a series called 'Restin Peas' – to be administered, just in case, all other 'Peas' fail to deliver on their promised outcomes.

Letters to the Editor

To live or shop?

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the entire world, which has been on a lockdown to prevent more cases in their countries. But as the time passed, the world's economy began to falter and business interests started protesting against the lockdowns and demanded that the government reopen their businesses no matter what. Governments took the step of easing restrictions in the lockdown to reopen some businesses to support the economy of their countries. But will easing the restrictions help people in any way?

Here in Pakistan, traders and businessmen protested that the government should open their businesses since this is Eid season. The government eased the lockdown and reopened the markets to support the economic sector and let the people shop in this situation. But is the Eid celebration that necessary? In a country where people are dying every

single day and Covid-19 cases are reaching a peak level, are people going to protect themselves or just get ready for Eid celebrations? Businesses only want to risk people's lives in the pandemic to earn a living. People's lives are in danger because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the government is easing restriction? Is it about lives or about just businesses and celebration?

Zuhaib Shah
KARACHI

Bring them back

When the novel coronavirus spread from China and slowly began to engulf the whole world, the nations of the world woke up and began to look for ways to curb it. The most effective of these precautions was to stop transportation. Every country stopped travel externally as well as internally. When transport stopped, businesses also began to be affected. When factories closed, workers became un-

employed; and when the construction industry stopped, so did workers, schools, parks and cinemas, all closed. International flights were also canceled. The suspension of international flights has left millions stranded outside their home countries. So every country started trying to bring its people back. Pakistan also started a series of flights and there are daily reports that stranded people are returning home. This is a good move because it gives a sense of responsibility of the state. But there is still a lot of work to be done as the number of Pakistanis stranded abroad is still large. These people are in trouble today, so the government must take every possible step to help and cooperate with them. If you want to increase the number of flights, increase the efforts at the diplomatic level. At the same time, there are many people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa among the stranded people, but unfortunately there are no international flights to Peshawar's Bacha Khan International Airport.

Shaikat Hayat Bumeri
BUNER