

COVID-19: Threat of a second wave very real

ZEHRA AFTAB, FAREENA N MALHI

While Pakistanis are rejoicing the onset of the downward trend in percentage of positive tests of COVID-19 infection, the threat of a second wave is very real, especially with Eid-ul-Azha just round the corner.

A small miscalculation at this point can revert the apparent success into a complete disaster. United States is a case in point where, despite the initial downward trend, since July the infection rate has again surged; in fact, this time round it has surpassed the initial peak experienced in April.

An early opening of the lockdown and premature easing of restrictions in many states is thought to have played a significant role in this reversal of the trend.

Similarly, the second wave can be observed in Iran where the death rate has already surpassed the initial peak witnessed during the first wave. Pakistan is a nation heavily immersed in 'Optimism Bias' i.e. we display unrealistic optimism about our vulnerability to a wide set of negative life outcomes.

Formally, optimism bias refers to our tendency to estimate the probability of positive future outcomes as greater than average and the probability of facing negative life events (such as cancer) as less than average. We are therefore inherently predisposed to thinking that we are less likely to contract the Covid-19 virus than our peers, and this may lead to people unwittingly taking extra risks regarding their health and consequently taking suboptimal decisions – not wearing face-masks and gloves, not washing hands regularly and not abiding by the social distancing recommendations. The over-confidence and optimism bias that followed the opening of shopping malls before Eid-ul-Fitr, and allowing congregational prayers in mosques (while the rest of the Islamic world was in complete lockdown), has already done a lot of damage. Now, after nearly two months, the COVID-19 infection rate has eventually registered a declining trend, its critical that the government continues its firm stance and remain cognizant of the fact that because of optimism bias good news is more likely to change our beliefs more rapidly than bad news. In such an environment this article recommends a two-pronged approach to ensure compliance of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

First, the government needs to work on risk perception: maintain the strict stance on implementation of SOPs and continue with lockdown of hotspots, clear messaging from the top combined with transfer of accurate information.

Based on the lessons we learnt a few months ago with regard to ease of restrictions pre- and during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, it is imperative to remind the public that non-economic gatherings such as family and friends' get-togethers are extremely harmful and need to be curtailed during this pandemic. A study based on simulations by Harvard University and University of California researchers suggests that non-economic interventions – reducing interactions in personal spaces is expected to be

more effective in deterring the spread of the virus and of course has a lower economic impact.

Therefore, it is critical that the government continues its firm stance without introducing any mixed signals so that behaviour change in terms of taking precautionary measures and following SOPs continues despite the oncoming Eid-ul-Azha and its accompanied tradition of qurbani. This takes us to the second policy recommendation: conduct negotiations with the maulana community by appealing to their other-regarding preferences (such as altruism).

Eid-ul-Azha is a religious festival and needs to be dealt by striking the right chords. Existing experimental literature on Pakistani university/madrassa students suggests that madrassa students are more generous and trusting than their peers and contribute more to the public good as compared to elite and middle-income university students. Here public good is defined as a non-excludable, non-rival good that will benefit the entire community, such as the construction of a road or a bridge. Contributing towards such a good suggests the presence of other-regarding preferences. Based on this evidence, today we plead negotiating SOPs for the Eid-ul-Azha congregational prayers and the accompanied qurbani with the mulana community/leadership by appealing to these other-regarding preferences. Pakistan is a predominantly collective society where an individual's behavior not only reflects on the individual herself, but on the entire family.

In such an environment explaining to the maulvis that insisting on congregational prayers is selfish and may lead to not only the individual himself contracting the virus but passing it on to one's family (including vulnerable elderly parents and young children) and even putting our respective community in danger. The government can therefore insist on online qurbani and perhaps even suggest that in such an environment perhaps it will be better to give money in charity than to physically slaughter livestock and risk the spread of the disease. Similarly, its not sacrilegious to limit congregational prayers if it is explained to our people that even Allah Subhan-a-Tallah prioritised rights of people (Haqooq-ul-Ibad) over His own rights (Haqooq-ul-Allah).

The government needs to be firm in its negotiations with the religious community and avoid sending mixed signals softening its stance at this time if it wants to avoid another spike in corona cases after this Eid. Evidence confirms that second wave of Covid-19 tends to be worse in severity. Hence, the government must tread sensibly and realize its duty to its people and not succumb to the whims of a small community, no matter how influential. Given that infact risk preferences are malleable and can change over time policy prescriptions need to be strict and objective to ensure adequate risk perception and compliance into taking precautionary measures even though the complete lockdown has eased.

The writer is Faculty Fellow, American University and can be reached at aftab.zehra@gmail.com. + Other writer is Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of the Punjab and PhD Candidate at American University. She can be

Can Pakistan ever become Riyasat e Madinah?

Hafiza Ayesha Saadia

Our last Prophet (PBUH) laid the foundation of the first Islamic State in which Allah's orders were being implemented. Holy Prophet (PBUH) establish brotherhood among immigrants and Ansaar which remained forever. Allah's orders were disclosed and executed with time. There was not a single follower, who can imagine denying the orders of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), except non-believers.

After the demise of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the Caliphs maintained the foundation of Islam and did never let anyone shake it. If somehow anybody stood against Islam, all the Caliphs were united to end up the sedition.

Hazrat Abu Bakar R.A the first Caliph of Islam left his own business and fixed allowance for himself equal to a labourer. Even, he was presented before Qazi but he never refused. He said, if this income would be insufficient for me I would increase the wages of a labourer.

Hazrat Umar R.A the second Caliph of Islam had ruled over 22 lakh sq. Miles but he had never imagined to collect more than one curry at a time. He said, "If a dog dies hungry on the bank of river Euphrates, Umar will be held responsible for dereliction of duty".

Justice is another major foundation in the Islamic state. The Caliphs did never spare their children for the orders of Allah and the Holy Prophet (PBUH). He said, "The state who has no mercy on criminals, their innocent people dies brutally".

Hazrat Usman R.A was a rich merchant and he devoted his wealth to Islam. During his reign, Islam expanded to the world.

Hazrat Ali R.A the fourth Caliph of Islam took part in many battles for the sake of Islam. He followed his mentors for the progress and betterment of his people so that no change would hit the base of an ideal Islamic state.

Those Caliphs served the religion radically and were the true companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). They have the aim to serve Islam in a better and more appropriate way.

Our Prime Minister Imran Khan has used the term 'Riyasat e Madinah' for Pakistan to make it an ideal Islamic state which is a good step so far. It creates a wave of enthusiasm in public that would be able to have an eyebeam of true Islamic State. But, it's been two years and there is no specifiable progress.

In 'Riyasat e Madinah', the ruler presents himself for audit and feels no shame while on the other hand, our leaders feel shame in visiting courts for justice. They consider themselves superior beings over the public. The leaders of 'Riyasat e Madinah' had wages equal to the wages of labour. Can our leaders fix their salary? Can they live within a specific income?

In the present times, Pakistan is surrounded by a lot of social evils which includes corruption, bribery, nepotism, adultery, child-labour, robbery, theft, price-hike, terrorism, and many more. In an Islamic state, the ruler strives to shoulder the affairs of the state while in our country, there are two standards of jus-

tice. Rich has relaxation for their deeds while the law for the poor is worst. People are given licenses for wine and casinos. All these circumstances are proceeding under government supervision.

Corruption and the rule of traitors is the main hurdle which is knocking back Pakistan from becoming an ideal state. Syed Atta Ullah Shah Bukhari said: 'This is out of my mind that those who cannot enforce Islamic orders on their body how will they implement Islam throughout the country?' (1946)

In our country, the majority of children are facing malnutrition, underweight, pneumonia, polio, and many more infectious diseases. Rotten meat is being served in the market without any hesitation. Shopkeepers are dishonest. People are just pointing fingers over Imran Khan while it needs cooperation on both ends. They think that Prime Minister will cast a spell and all the state matters will end up immediately but the fact is that it takes more effort and hard work to run a state but without cooperation that cannot be done. They need to do some introspection.

The citizens of our country are committing suicide due to unemployment and hunger. Are they worse than the dog dying at the bank of River Euphrates? Those caliphs were pious and worked hard for Islam. They were entitled to 'Jannati'. Despite this, they have fear of Allah Almighty. Do our leaders have such good news? Do our leaders fear Allah Almighty? To much extent, we can enforce the laws of 'Riyasat e Madinah' in our country? Only Azaan ensures it an Islamic state otherwise citizens possess all the social crimes.

Outside the court, stamp papers are sold costly. Staff members of court demand bribe openly. How can our courts neglect such issues? Doesn't they know: 'The Messenger of Allah, Holy Prophet (PBUH) cursed the one who gives a bribe and the one who takes it'.

Pakistan is the only country in the world that came into existence for Islam. But unfortunately, Islamic laws are not applied in this state which leads to its downfall. The current government is failed in making this 'Riyasat e Madinah' till now. In this Islamic state, people are working against the laws of Islam. There's no justice, nor rule of law. Robbers have no fear even mostly they are mastered by authorities.

'Riyasat e Madinah' demands struggle on every level with the cooperation of citizens. The people of the state lack qualities of an ideal Muslim. The constitution of Pakistan clearly warns that no law shall be enacted against Sunnah and Quran. But the economic system of Pakistan is based on interest. Can Pakistan ever become 'Riyasat e Madinah'? Unfortunately, Islam is always being endangered in Pakistan. An honest person has no scope in this country and is always being discouraged.

Imran Khan has promised the nation that he will never support the corrupt and dishonest people of Pakistan. He assures that he will nominate the right person for the right seat. In 'Riyasat e Madinah' audit is taken publically.

The writer is a student of English Department, The Islamia University Bahawalpur.

Turkey and Greece exchange harsh words over Hagia Sophia prayers

ISTANBUL: Turkey and Greece exchanged harsh words over the conversion of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia into a mosque, a day after Islamic prayers were held at the ancient site for the first time in nine decades.

President Tayyip Erdogan, who attended Friday's ceremony that sealed his ambition to restore Muslim worship at Hagia Sophia, did not name Greece but said critics of the move were simply against Muslims and Turkey.

Greek criticism of the move has been especially scathing, underlining tense ties between Greece and Turkey. Hagia Sophia was previously a museum and most Greeks view it as central to their Orthodox Christian religion; church bells tolled in mourning across Greece on Friday.

"We see that the targets of those countries who have made so much noise in recent days are not Hagia Sophia or the eastern Mediterranean," Erdogan said in a televised speech.

"(Their targets) are the presence itself of the Turkish nation and Muslims in this region," he said.

In a statement earlier on Saturday, the Turkish Foreign Ministry



spokesman said "Greece showed once again its enmity towards Islam and Turkey with the excuse of reacting to Hagia Sophia Mosque being opened to prayers".

He strongly condemned hostile statements by the Greek government and parliament members and Turkish flag-burning in the Greek city of Thessaloniki.

The Greek Foreign Ministry responded with its own statement, saying "the international community

of the 21st century is stunned to observe the religious and nationalist fanatic ramblings of today's Turkey." On Friday, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called Turkey a "troublemaker", and the conversion of the site an "affront to civilisation of the 21st century".

Greece and Turkey disagree on a range of issues from airspace to maritime zones in the eastern Mediterranean and ethnically split Cyprus. —Reuters

Australia suffers deadliest day of COVID-19 pandemic

MELBOURNE: Australia has suffered its deadliest day from COVID-19 since the pandemic began, with authorities reporting ten fatalities and a rise in new infections despite an intensive lockdown effort.

The country's COVID-19 death toll rose to 155 and the southeastern state of Victoria reported more than 450 new infections in the last 24 hours. A clearly concerned Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said ten people aged between their 40s and 80s had died, of which seven deaths were linked to outbreaks in aged care facilities. It is the worst loss of life from the virus in Australia since the disease first emerged, according to a tally compiled by AFP.

Australia has dodged the worst ravages of the pandemic so far, logging just 14,000 cases in total - fewer



than many harder-hit countries see in one day. But a second wave of infections is testing the nation's much-lauded response to the contagion. Police and the military are guarding state borders and visiting homes to

enforce quarantine orders. The number of new cases has remained stubbornly high in recent days despite five million people in greater Melbourne spending the last two weeks in lockdown. —AFP

France expands free COVID-19 testing as infection rates rise

PARIS: French health authorities are making COVID-19 tests available free of charge without prescription as they closely monitor an uptick in infections after the lifting of lockdown measures.

PCR nasal swab tests, which detect COVID-19 infections caused by the novel coronavirus, will be freely available on demand under government orders published. "We wouldn't describe this as a second wave, but what's clear is that for several days now we have seen a noticeable increase in the number of confirmed cases, which had been in decline for 13 weeks," Health Minister Olivier Veran said in an interview published in Le Parisien's Sunday edition. France has recorded 30,192 deaths to the coronavirus, among a total of 180,528 cases of the disease, according to statistics. —AFP

UK to unveil obesity plan after PM Boris Johnson's near-death experience

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to roll out a £10 million (US\$12.8 million) anti-obesity campaign, including junk food advert bans, following his own brush with death that he partly blamed on his weight.

Johnson will announce his "Better Health" campaign which is expected to include encouraging doctors to issue "cycling prescriptions" for overweight patients, more segregated cycling lanes and a ban on junk food television ads before 9pm, according to British media reports.

"COVID-19 has given us all a wake-up call of the immediate and long-term risks of being overweight, and the Prime Minister is clear we must use this moment to get healthier, more active and eat better," said a



government spokesman on Sunday.

"We will be urging the public to use this moment to take stock of how they live their lives, and to take simple steps to lose weight, live healthier lives, and reduce pressure on the NHS."

Restaurants will also have to publish the number of calories in the meals they serve, according to a report in the Daily Mail. Johnson, who has fought his own battles to control

his weight, required intensive care treatment in April after catching the virus.

The plan, which the Guardian estimated would cost £10 million, marks a U-turn by the prime minister, who has long railed against the interventionist "nanny state". A Public Health England (PHE) study published on Saturday found that obesity increased the risk of death from coronavirus by 40 per cent. —AFP

Taliban accuse Kabul of re-arresting freed insurgents

KABUL: The Taliban accused Afghan security forces of re-arresting insurgents who had been released as part of a crucial prisoner swap meant to kick-start peace talks.

They said the National Directorate of Security (NDS) had detained an unspecified number of insurgents released under the exchange programme, warning Kabul would "bear responsibility for the consequences".

"They are incessantly raided, detained and put behind the bar by NDS of the Kabul (administration)," Taliban political spokesman Suhail Shaheen said on Twitter.

Javid Faisal, the spokesman for Afghanistan's National Security Council, said the claim was "incorrect".

"It's their way of sabotaging the peace efforts and the peace talks that should start," he told AFP. The prisoner swap has been a major stumbling block in getting Kabul and the Taliban to start peace talks.

Under a deal between the US and the Taliban, the Afghan government is supposed to release 5,000 insurgent prisoners while the Taliban free 1,000 government inmates. —AFP

UK advises against travel to mainland Spain over COVID-19



LONDON: Britain told its citizens to avoid all but essential travel to mainland Spain due to the risk from COVID-19, and said anyone arriving from Spain's mainland or islands would need to self-isolate for 14 days on their return.

"FCO is advising against all but essential travel to mainland Spain - this does not cover the Canary Islands or the Balearic Islands because travel advice is based on the risk to the individual traveller and Covid infection rates are lower there than mainland Spain," Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) said.

British people already in Spain should follow local health rules and return home as normal, then self-isolate on their return, the foreign ministry added.

The reported announcement is heavy blow to Spain, which is trying to recoup its tourism season after the sector took a battering from coronavirus lockdowns and travel restrictions earlier in the year.

A Spanish Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said that Spain was a safe country with localised, isolated and controlled outbreaks of COVID-19.

She added that Spain "respects decisions of the United Kingdom" and was in touch with the authorities there.

Northern Ireland's Department of Health said that all travellers arriving from Spain will need to quarantine for 14 days.

Cases of coronavirus have been on the rise again in recent weeks in Spain, prompting concern in several European countries. —AFP

Hurricane Hanna's winds battering South Texas coast

HOUSTON: Hurricane Hanna strengthened as it made landfall on the Texas coast and threatened an area of the country that has been battered by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent weeks.

Hurricane-force winds punished the southeastern Texas coast, ripping piers out of bays and tearing roofs off homes. The National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that a potentially deadly storm surge was likely across a broad swath of land. Hanna made landfall on Padre Island Saturday afternoon.

Hanna, a Category 1 hurricane on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale, came ashore on Padre Island and later made a second landfall in Eastern Kennedy County, Texas. It is forecast to weaken as it moves inland over south Texas tonight and into northeastern Mexico on Sunday, but it could spawn powerful tornadoes on the coastal plains.

"Any hurricane is an enormous challenge," Texas Governor Greg Abbott said during a Saturday briefing about the storm. "This challenge is complicated and made even more severe, seeing that it's sweeping through an area that is the most challenged area in the state for COVID-19." —AFP