

Evolving World Scenario

*Khalid Rahman**

The epidemic that broke out in the last days of 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan was perceived by the world as a local health hazard for many days. But it was not long before the epidemic turned into a pandemic, spreading over nearly to the whole world within a matter of few weeks.

The pandemic has created an atmosphere of fear, mainly due to its excessive coverage in media and inappropriate and unregulated altercations on social media. So, regardless of the comparative difference between the fatality rates caused by coronavirus and other prevalent diseases in the world population of over 7.5 billion, the fear of the pandemic has immediately prompted major changes in human behaviors and activities.

Learning from the experiences of China to mitigate the dreaded effects of Covid-19, a large number of countries have enforced lockdown. Consequently, most of the production and trading activities, with the exception of food and medicine-related items, have been put on hold.

What will follow in the coming days is difficult to predict at this point, as in spite of the revealing patterns for the spread and effects of the pandemic by now, the process is still evolving. Nevertheless, in any such situation, it is imperative for the policymaking elite and leadership to understand the dynamics of the emerging scenario and review their vision, priorities and narratives accordingly.

Healthcare Struggles to Stay Afloat

Seen in light of the developments thus far, the following trends are evident:

When will the pandemic finally come to an end? All estimates being made over this, which range from a period of few weeks to 18 months, rely on the hopes that its vaccine will be available in the given period. Else, any definite solution does not exist within human capability to avert the pandemic, at least, for now.

Meanwhile, the psychological effects of the fear of this pandemic as well as measures like social distancing and uncertainty about future are very deep and worsening further. Even when the pandemic is over,

* Executive President, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, Pakistan.

the psychological effects due to its fear, uncertainty, uneasiness and isolation may continue looming for a long time.

Seen optimistically, the lockdown caused by the pandemic is reaffirming the importance of a 'caring society', particularly in areas where the family system is sustainable and the members of the family tend to live together. Another aspect is that pandemic victims include all kinds of people. Even those who are 'well-off' materialistically, people from developed and progressive societies, as well as those who are influential and resourceful are falling victim to this pandemic. Therefore, this will also bring changes in future behaviors about the materialistic approaches in human life. How durable will this change be, depends on a number of factors and better be left for another debate.

On the other hand, it will also be challenging for the allopathic form of medicine, which has established its monopoly in medications and means of treatments. The increasing realization as well as concerns over this form of treatment especially it being a cause of weakening immunity will yield many changes in lifestyles. Consequently, the focus will move to organic food and traditional form of medication alongside healthy diet, exercise and preventive measures, providing an opportunity to employ the traditional means of treatment opt for healthy lifestyle.

Covid-19 has also raised questions over the capacity of even the richest and most developed of the countries to combat health emergencies. This will naturally increase pressure to increase the budgets of the social sector, especially in the public health domain.

Massive Economic Fallout

The other area that the pandemic and the consequent lockdown has greatly affected is economy. Due to halts and delays in the production and supply chain, every form of trade with the exception of food, medicine or medical equipment has been hampered considerably. According to an estimate by the World Trade Organization (WTO) shared on April 8, all of this will result in a decline of about one-third (32 percent) of the global trade. While this will lead to a wave of inflation, the number of people getting unemployed is already on the rise.

The extent of the deterioration of the situation can be gaged by the fact that about 1.25 billion people are working in the departments or the areas where there are significant dangers to their livelihood, according to a study released by International Labour Organization (ILO) on April 7. In case of Pakistan, there could be a big wave of unemployment due to the steps which might be taken by the Gulf

countries. It may be mentioned that the estimated number of Pakistani expatriates in the Gulf countries is approximately 4 million, and thus even a return of a few percent of them can lead to a severe crisis.

If the global trade since 1950s is brought into the perspective, efforts had been made to ease the transportation of humans as well as goods through General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and WTO initiatives, which aimed at facilitating the process of globalization. These efforts were further boosted in 1990s and 2000s with the availability of fast transportation means as well as the developments in information technology. But the way the restrictions on mobility, transportation and trade have been placed in the last few weeks, and the fact that they are expected to stay intact for some time, the process of globalization will now enter a new phase. This new phase may see a rise in technology-driven activities, but will also see a rise in questions pertaining to the restoration of human movement, transportation and mobility.

New Political Balance and Alliances

The impact of recession, unemployment and inflation leading to crises oriented changes will also be felt in the domestic and global politics. In today's world, the economic strength of any country forms a major part of its soft power, and thus of its relative political strength. This way the pandemic has also opened the doors of chaos in political spheres. Now, the efforts being made by the governments to control the pandemic as well as to mitigate its losses, their role at the global level, governance in their own respective domains, and thus the impressions of leadership capabilities of various countries are also affecting their global image.

What will be the soft power of different countries, as well as the consequent balance of their political power in the world? The pandemic has made it an important topic. There would be fluctuations in the already existing relations and alliances.

There are also many speculations circulating around over whether the causes of the virus were natural or man-made. The significance of these speculations so far is limited, merely enough to enable activists belonging to different religious and political spheres find material to suit their narratives. But as soon as any concrete evidence is raised in favor of any theory, it will gain extra-ordinary importance in today's fast-paced world. On the other hand, in case this pandemic is a result of any conspiracy, its makers must not have planned for a single event, but devised steps for a series of events, which will be revealed slowly. At the global level, this situation will form the basis of a new political balance as well as of new alliances between the countries.

More People Turning towards Religion

Another immediate impact is related to the views about religion and its role in life. Even those denying the very existence of any superior being are now realizing that humans are not in control of everything.

There exist numerous kinds of divides in the world in the name of religion. However, it is also in human nature that the people facing similar difficulties tend to get close to each other; this will bring opportunities especially in the western world for common people following different religions to increase their harmony as well as cooperation with each other.

Presently, as part of the strategy to ensure social distancing, restrictions are being placed on religious gatherings. A number of people have accepted this in spite of reservations, but there is uneasiness in religious sections which can raise problems for the governments, as well as for the religious leaderships around the globe. However, there is another aspect that is gaining prominence in these circumstances: in view of evolving circumstances, there exists flexibility and a room of change even in the apparently established matters of religion. This will also make a difference to religious, economic and social behaviors of Muslim societies especially due to the absence of large-scale religious activities like Hajj and Umrah in the coming days.

The questions relating to the universe, the reality of life and the role of humans in this world, which were either forgotten or had gradually become meaningless, will revive in the academic, philosophical and civilizational discourses and will be debated more often at a larger scale.

Technology Emerges Victorious

With the rapid advancement of information technology, the virtual world was already expanding swiftly. The prevalent lockdown in different areas of the world has boosted its pace and already increasing usage manifolds. Whether it is education, health, sociopolitical connections, sports and entertainment, or even the economic activities, people will start getting adept with the online world. The use of robots and artificial intelligence (AI) will also increase in all sectors of human activity. The push for gaining ability and capacity in technology will become even more important in the given context. Whether it is the development of hardware or the software, the innovation and invention, as well as education and training activities will increase both in terms of speed and volume. This will pave way for many new forms of livelihoods whereas

many old forms will eventually phase out. Hence this will become an important career choice for the youth to make.

This development will also pave way for application of new means of connections between the producers and consumers. The role of middlemen will be minimized and it will also become difficult for small businesses to survive unless they come up with innovative ideas. The use of online means will especially augment in the services sector, just as it is seen in Pakistan where within few days, academic institutions and teachers, as well as medical facilitators have started providing their classes or services online.

A New Global System?

The present global system, and in line with it, the foundation of the United Nations (UN) and other international institutions came into being in the post-World War II environment. The factors behind these developments were prevention of war and overcoming the challenges to rehabilitate the destructions caused by the war. In the given context, the triumphant countries were given special role in the systems and institutions. The poor performance of international institutions is expected to come into the light once again in the wake of present pandemic.

The focus over security issues aimed at preventing wars will continue to persist, but the global attention on the unconventional threats to human safety and security, as well as on the social sector will increase further. The Social Development Goals (SDGs) will have to be adjusted in the emerging scenario. The role of such countries, institutions and people will also increase manifold who will be able to adopt better narrative and display better performance in this domain.

The focus on military hotspots has naturally decreased during these days and is expected to change further if the pandemic persists. Also, the focus on conventional weapons will also reduce in the longer run. In comparison, the importance, techniques and use of hybrid warfare will increase. Consequently, the importance of media as well as social media and its control, and the significance of related institutions will also become prominent. [In terms of military conflicts however, Pakistan needs to be vigilant towards India, which may attempt to take advantage of world's diverted attention toward corona, and try to undertake some adventure].

Need for Greater International Cooperation

Countries across the world should abandon differences at this critical moment so as to enhance international cooperation and coordination to deal with the formidable threat. The virus has made people realize that all human beings are one despite their differences in color, race, nationality and language. Their challenges can only be dealt with if they have a common and coordinated strategy.

The world leaders should devise a fresh strategy and system based on concrete multilateral coordination and cooperation to handle the possible impacts. With joint efforts, some major countries should utilize the UN as a platform for discussions and coordination to form new cooperative mechanism that can benefit all countries equally.

Planning for the Future

It is rightly said about change that it is a never-ending process. So the changes were bound to happen in the world even if Covid-19 had not existed. The pandemic however has created circumstances that will expedite the process of change in certain areas. In some cases, it might divert the past trends, whereas in other cases, it will facilitate new opportunities, possibilities (and/or) hurdles. The aforementioned discussion points at such aspects without any division.

On the other hand, as discussed in the beginning, world scenario is evolving; the situation formed in the wake of corona pandemic will take time to assume any certain position. Hence, the validity or invalidity of the points presented in the review depends on how the matter proceeds and takes a final shape. Also, the nature and amount of losses the pandemic will cause before it settles down in different parts of the world, remains to be seen.

Human behaviors and the systems and institutions based on those behaviors do not change quickly. They take time to change and human efforts, alongside the natural causes, play their role in fostering that change. On the other hand, despite all the scientific knowledge and development, the future remains unpredictable as the Covid-19 pandemic has proven once again. Hence, the points discussed above and in the following pages should be seen as an initial exercise.

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Devising National Response

*Syed Muhammad Ali**

The pandemics act as catalysts of social transformation. Human society is based on three fundamental structures, family, work place and nation-state. Covid-19 presents an unparalleled challenge to all these three fundamental social structures of human species, irrespective of their ideological, geographical, ethnic or economic identities and boundaries. In terms of level and scale, the threat to human lives, global economic system and contemporary way of life that Covid-19 poses is second only in recent history to the global impact of the World War II. Eighty emerging world economies are already seeking help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which indicates an imminent global economic crisis worse than the 2008 economic recession. The pandemic will have deep and lasting effects for the world order and the current distribution of power, wealth and values. It has already exposed the lack of readiness and the absence of adequate policy planning by some of the most powerful and wealthy Western powers, which have dominated the world for the past five centuries.

Pakistan has received a relatively delayed penetration of this global threat. Therefore, it presents a fleeting opportunity to quickly learn from the experiences as well as policy mistakes of other states and timely evolve innovative policy options that are tailored to our own culture, resources and environment. It is a national security imperative that will not only affect Pakistan's traditional and non-traditional security but also influence the nature of social contract between the state and society. This paper analyzes the global significance of Covid-19, identifies challenges, recommends a few policy options and proposes way forward for Pakistan.

Global Significance

Covid-19 is expected by IMF to slide the world into the worst economic crisis in 90 years since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The World War II lasted almost six years but did not immediately threaten the global economic or political system, which continued to be dominated by the Western powers. However, subsequently the experience of the Second World War weakened the British control over its global colonial system that later yielded a US-led post-World War II world order. This new world order was erected on five main pillars. These included the UN (global political/diplomatic pillar), World Bank and IMF (economic pillar), military

* Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, Pakistan.

alliances (strategic pillar), World Health Organization (WHO) (health pillar) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Hollywood (cultural pillar). The Covid-19 pandemic presents the swiftest and biggest challenge to this US- led world order and above pillars.

This global crisis is a litmus test for the world leadership. It represents an unprecedented opportunity for the US, the status quo power, to preserve the contemporary international system by leading the world out of this crisis through timely leveraging its influence in the global financial institutions to provide the world necessary economic relief. However, the anti-status quo powers like China and Russia can also use this crisis to gradually alter the world order by reshaping its political and economic pillars and circumventing the huge US hard power, which seems redundant and irrelevant in the face of the global Covid-19 threat. This represents an unprecedented threat to the capitalist global economic system, based on demand and supply, both of which have now shrunk enormously.

The WHO has failed to lead, organize and build a global health response mechanism against the worst worldwide health challenge in its entire history. Moreover, the trillions of dollars' investment by the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in unprecedented hard power has proven irrelevant in addressing this global security challenge. The Covid-19 crisis also poses a grave threat to the globalization process by retarding global inter-connectedness in economic, social, diplomatic and political realms. Therefore, it could eventually build greater social, political and economic pressures to shrink defense budgets for greater resource allocation towards health and social welfare by all states. This could make sustaining the most advanced and expensive land, air and sea based conventional weapon systems, their current development programs and future research quite difficult, at least till the time the world recovers from the economic impact of Covid-19.

The pandemic presents the most critical challenge to the monopoly of the Western capitalist system, liberal lifestyle and democratic political system because it has tested the US ability to save American lives, provide global leadership in addressing a global human security crisis and ensuring that its allies benefit by cooperating with Washington. The effects of the slowing down of the world economic system could be exacerbated by the rise in nationalism, stronger border controls, reduced travel and revival of religious sentiments.

Interestingly, besides successfully managing the Covid-19 at the domestic level, China has rapidly emerged as the global leader spearheading the worldwide medical effort against Covid-19 by sharing its knowledge, medical equipment and technology with more than 80 states, WHO and African Union (AU). This has also enabled Beijing to globally exude its soft power in order to gradually emerge as a superpower with a soft face. China has also demonstrated that it has the political will, the social discipline and the industrial capacity to not only deal with a national crisis but also help the rest of the world in timely dealing with a global challenge, affecting international security, human security and economic security.

China has timely and effectively used this global crisis to dent the US-hard power based alliance system by swiftly providing medical supplies to key US allies in Western Europe and East Asia. However, the Chinese economy will also suffer because its export revenues and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will decline due to rapidly shrinking demand in the large US, Western European and Middle Eastern export markets for Chinese consumer goods.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has warned that the Covid-19 outbreak will significantly contract the global economy. Whereas according to the IMF, over 180 countries will experience decline in their per capita incomes. It could stress global value chains, disrupt demand and supply, finance and manufacturing sectors. This could also increase unemployment, lead to large scale business insolvencies, invoke loan default from developing countries and significantly reduce Foreign Direct Investment. The travel, hotel, automobile, airline and oil industries are already heavily affected. However, the share prices of pharmaceutical industry, IT industry, gold and real estate sectors could rise further as more people opt to hedge their savings rather than invest in risky and more volatile sectors.

Challenges for Pakistan

Pakistan's situation is precarious on eight accounts. First, Pakistan got independence after the World War II and its political, economic and social system as well as public sector has no prior experience of planning or dealing with a global crisis that affects all walks of life, both internally and externally.

Second, the largest segment of our society is mostly based on closely knit family system, which is highly sociable and interdependent. This makes reducing social interactions or isolating a patient, particularly

a breadwinner, a major cultural taboo, especially in the rural and less developed areas.

Third, our entire health and economic system is highly dependent on external resources. Although this structural external dependence is the norm in most developing countries but it also enhances our vulnerability during a global crisis because most developed nations are also looking inwards and reluctant to share their technology and valuable resources due to their own domestic priorities.

Fourth, internally, the modest political and financial commitment towards public health and human security, coupled with the elite-oriented bureaucratic culture will constrain Pakistan's ability to timely and effectively take any drastic, and substantive measures.

Fifth, Pakistan's continued external economic dependence over the Western export markets, loans/aid/economic assistance and Middle Eastern remittances will also aggravate the great challenges to our economic survival. Moreover, the reduced international exports orders for our industry will also translate into lower tax revenues for the Federal budget 2020-21 and increase the unemployment level.

Sixth, the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution has made public health a provincial subject. This constrains the Federal Government's ability to effectively steer and manage the allocation of international assistance and critical resources towards where they are most needed, above and beyond inter-provincial politics or center-provincial dynamics.

Seventh, our provinces are mutually inter-dependent for most of their individual needs and 18th Amendment creates a greater challenge for the federal government to attract resources from one province and divert these towards other provinces, particularly during crises.

Eighth, the limited resources and very modest capacity of the public health sector in the provinces will get saturated within the next few weeks, if patient numbers rapidly rise. If not addressed timely, this scenario could rapidly evolve into a serious nationwide law and order situation and political instability that could even test the political survival of the government. This will also increase the threat on our Eastern borders due to our military forces' greater internal security responsibilities and significant commitments in the aid of the civil administration.

Available Policy Options

Three scenario-based sets of strategic options have been considered to address this global crisis at the national level.

Complete Lockdown

This option is based on the idea that federal government declares national emergency, acquires complete control over critical national resources and imposes total restriction on all social activities. The government can allow one person from each family or household to buy/procure/receive essential items in sufficient quantities that could last up to three weeks, based on NADRA/ID card/B Form records and respective family size, within a 48-72 hour window and announce that no social activity will be allowed, except for inevitable and identified needs.

This approach will save most lives in the short-term by allowing 'state-enforced social distancing' rather than the 'voluntary or recommended social distancing' through a curfew like situation. This approach will cost our economy and social system very heavily in the short-term but eventually the economy can gradually recover, once global crisis subsides in a year or even longer. This policy approach would draw huge pressure from the trading and business communities against the government in the short-term, which could increase political challenges for the government in the foreseeable future.

Graduated, Sector-Specific State Intervention

This is a pragmatic compromise option not an extreme or ideal solution. It can save many rather most lives but also the vital pillars of the political and socio-economic system. This option is based on the core assumption that the government and state institutions have the ability to absorb large scale casualties in the medium term (3-6 months) and perhaps temporarily declaring a 'national crisis government' that allows the federal government to use its emergency powers to take direct control of critical resources such as food, health, energy and banking, restricting large social processes and directly managing critical supply chain/distribution process. Social activity can be gradually revived, emergency lifted and civil liberties can be fully restored once the crisis is over.

Survival of the Fittest

In this option the federal government completely controls the media narrative through direct and indirect intervention to prevent psycho-

social chaos but does not directly intervene in operational crisis management through a 'centralized/assertive model' but merely acts through 'delegative policy model.' This policy approach will imply that the federal government mainly focuses on internationally attracting and procuring the vital medical equipment, relevant technologies and critical supplies and leaves its distribution to the provincial governments. This approach will reduce the political cost of crisis management for the federal government.

This approach will allow the law of nature to take its course and merely manage the socio-political status quo by offering the general food and health services to the general public, based on the current bureaucratic system, capacity, culture and resources. It will also imply that the federal government accords priority to the survival of the institutional and public sector structures rather over human security and public interest. This scenario would allow the government to absorb the initial pressure but eventually it could lead to huge chaos in the society, particularly once the scale of the crisis expands. This situation could eventually lead to a large-scale break down of the law and order situation, weaken Federation-provinces relationship, damage economy much more in the long run.

Eventually, it will leave the state no other option than to declare emergency and impose curfew in various parts of the country to prevent complete breakdown of law and order. This will also exacerbate national and regional security threats because India and anti-state elements can use this situation to their advantage. Pakistan cannot afford it when the situation on its eastern borders is hostile and on the western border remains tense and uncertain.

In this adverse and anarchic scenario, 'Survival of the Fittest' principle will come into play. This implies that amidst the deepening chaos, the healthiest, most intelligent, influential and most resourceful segments of society will survive while most of the remaining could face an existential and grave danger.

Eventual outcome, according to this scenario could be a more efficient, careful, smart, internet-based elite minority that relies more on efficient and reliable machines, automated/mechanized production processes and internet-based service sectors rather than expensive, numerous, unskilled and human labor which constitutes the majority of our population.

A remote possibility would be that this scenario could potentially lead to the evolution of a new and more efficient socio-economic system

that gradually recovers from the traditional dependence over inefficient, cheap and numerous human labor employed by an exploitative economic elite that has enjoyed State protection against free market competition. This could evolve a new lean and mean nation-State structure that rises from the ashes of a labor-intensive and inefficient society. This is the most dangerous scenario for those who have benefitted from the existing socio-political status quo and for those who are neither agile, skilled, resourceful and influential enough to favorably transform their relevance towards a new more efficiency-based social contract.

Way Forward

As compared to the two maximalist and more politically costly policy options, the second policy option of 'Graduated Sector-Specific State Intervention' seems more prudent, least risky and carefully calibrated to manage the crisis in several key domains simultaneously while keeping the socio-cultural environment in mind.

The more specific policy recommendations to timely and effectively manage the crisis are discussed in the following paragraphs.

International Measures

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) should seek global support to call for an emergency session of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for developing a robust, comprehensive, long-term global crisis response mechanism to deal with Covid-19 and its worldwide consequences through multilateral diplomatic initiative.
- Multilateral diplomacy with other developing countries, affected by Covid-19, could possibly lead to a substantive review of international financial commitments and making softer or longer term financial arrangements/aid package/rescheduled repayments etc.
- Pakistani doctors form one of the most influential, rich and knowledgeable part of the US society and British National Health Service. Their knowledge and experiences in medical research regarding diagnostic techniques, treatment, resource optimization, knowledge sharing, waste disposal, doctors' own hygiene practices during resource constraints and telemedicine etc. can be shared with our hospitals and public health experts through regular internet interaction, with local medical community.

Domestic Measures

- Human and economic security of critical structures, institutions and individuals need to be prioritized.
- The parliament and government should continue to function through secure video conferencing. Military services ought to continue closely and regularly monitoring the rapidly evolving situation through human, technical and intelligence sources and regularly share information and hold meetings through secure means at the strategic level and only operational and tactical levels should have a physical dimension.
- Four sectors including basic food, energy, healthcare and banking could be declared as critical sectors and should come in direct control of the government during the current crisis to prevent disproportionate distribution of valuable resources, hoarding and chaos.
- Multi-layered quarantine at three levels—international, national and local—will incrementally reduce the risk of infection from rapidly multiplying through external and internal interactions by creating a three-layered strategic, operational and tactical level threat identification, management and response mechanism.
- For better perception management, close collaboration between state, government institutions and public and private media is critical to ensure that both domestic public perceptions and our international image are managed effectively during all the stages of this global crisis along with daily briefings of accurate facts and figures by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Ministry of Health.
- It is essential to synergize public sector, ministerial, provincial, local level food/distribution mechanism and procedures with the newly raised Tiger volunteer force as well as timely involve local and credible Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and legal and registered charity organizations.
- Effective and fair distribution of food rations in far-flung and remote areas, particularly in the insurgency/terrorism affected areas like former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Balochistan, will be critical to ensure that anti-state elements do not exploit this crisis for their ulterior motives due to bad governance/mismanagement of Covid-19 crisis.

- For legal and transparent fund raising and charity work, it is vital to ensure that no sanctioned entity, proscribed or banned organization should be able to use this or any future crisis to extract or collect money, gain social space or legitimacy on the pretext of charity work under the guise of different or new names.
- In order to save both lives of citizens and national security, the agenda to build a vibrant economy could be the temporary collateral damage. It will be politically costly for the current government but could become a national security imperative, particularly if the crisis deepens.
- Declaring emergency would help the government explain to the general public that the grave international situation has forced Pakistan to choose between saving the lives of millions of its citizens or trying to improve their lives.
- In order to reduce the global impact of this crisis, the government must brief all industrialists about its significance and encourage them to shift their design, assembly, processing and distribution processes towards first meeting the national and later the global needs of most critical medical and hospital items rather than wasting their resources, on producing those products whose markets have already shrunk or will shrink.
- Women in rural areas can be engaged through NGOs and Rural Support Programs to train and encourage them towards finding innovative, local and cost-effective solutions to both treat and care for any victims and exploit the opportunities it is offering.
- 'National strategic medical supplies stockpile' should be created under the Federal Health Ministry along with a comprehensive Artificial Intelligence-based database that could help forecast demand, identify needs and timely and smoothly deliver those essential medical supplies on the basis of most critical need.
- Medical and paramedical staff should be trained in crisis management.
- Public sector and private biomedical research institutions must simultaneously collaborate with each other as well as with the leading international research institutions to accelerate and support advanced biomedical research.

- All service providers, ranging from the pharmaceutical companies to Utility Stores Corporation, grocery stores, meat, poultry and milk shops and bakeries should be encouraged to start offering internet-based order booking in their immediate vicinity, allow electronic payments through debit cards and also offer home delivery.
- Electronic debit/cash card based payments will not only reduce the risk of infection through cash handling, they will also help document economic transfers and transactions via banking channels, facilitate a wider tax net and reduce black and cash-based economy in the long run.

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Pakistan's Economy Amidst Pandemic

*Zafar ul Hassan Almas**

The coronavirus pandemic has hit Pakistan's economy hard like the rest of the world but the post-crisis period during the next fiscal year will be even more painful as the country will face \$19 billion of debt payment including principal and interest, a big drop in remittances and exports, and a worst-case scenario of up to five million job losses.

During the post-coronavirus period, countries would launch policies to protect their interests which would also adversely affect global trade and employment opportunities. Problems of liquidity of banks, fiscal space constraints and resetting of (International Monetary Fund) IMF program targets would also surface.

The biggest problem for Pakistan is lack of fiscal space. Next year the country has to make payment of \$19 billion on account of principal and interest to international creditors. Pakistan will have to arrange the amount from the international market in the form of new loans. However, tightening of financial conditions in the developed world will complicate the refinancing of external debt.

Fortunately, the Group of Twenty (G20) has announced that Pakistan is included in a group of 76 countries eligible for debt relief on all principal and interest payments to official bilateral creditors. The suspension period for debt relief will be from May 1 to December 1, 2020.

* Chief Macroeconomics, Planning Commission of Pakistan.

All debt servicing due in this period will be packaged into a new loan and the payments will start in June 2022 to be paid in the subsequent three years.

Exports and remittances have a greater impact on the economy than imports. The government was expecting exports worth \$24 billion along with the same amount of remittances this year. However, there will be a downward trend in remittances in the last quarter of the fiscal year. The United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are the source of over 90 percent of remittances but now these are suffering due to lockdowns and job losses.

The employment market will not get a boost even in the post-crisis period and thus it would be a huge challenge to accommodate the returning expats.

Pakistan has a labor force of 63 million out of which 46 million people are employed in the informal sector and are at a bigger risk of job loss. Even the most cautious estimates put job losses at 3 million and if the lockdown continues for two months it would be disastrous for Pakistan.

The major loss will be in exports and imports. Pakistan's top export partners – the US, UK, China and UAE – are facing problems and even after the crisis blows over, export demand will continue to face compression.

Fortunately, the country is in a comfortable position regarding the current account deficit. The data for March shows a positive impact due to the low oil prices while imports have gone down substantially. This has had a significant improvement in the current account.

A new research by London School of Economics shows that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) drops by 10 percent of annual output if economic activity drops 50 percent in the first month and 25 percent in the two following months. Pakistan's economy will be impacted in a major way if it is evaluated using the same model.

The major channel for the hit on economy is the drastic fall in domestic demand for energy and goods as consumption has dropped sharply; electricity use has fallen by 30 percent. This is affecting the economy in multifarious ways such as production activity and external

trade. The closure of industries is also resulting in postponement of investment decisions.

The government estimates that if only the food, pharma and retail sectors are allowed to remain open, it will impact the economy greatly. In this situation the GDP could fall to 2 percent. The government was expecting 3.3-3.4 percent GDP growth before the crisis but now the estimate has been cut to 2-2.8 percent.

The financial sector may see an increase in non-performing loans and there could be bankruptcies, all of which would also affect the services sector.

Before the crisis the government was expecting to contain the deficit at 7.4-7.5 percent which now seems rather difficult. It is expected to hit 9 percent in view of increasing expenditure demand and fall in taxes due to lower oil prices and a drop in non-tax revenues.

The economic impact can be made less painful by making some changes in the macro policies. In this regard, the State Bank of Pakistan has cut its policy rate, which was the highest in Asia, by 425 basis points to 9 percent over the last 30 days. Another good State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) initiative is that it has launched borrowing at concessional rates for those who want to take loans to pay salaries of their employees. The prime minister has also announced some facilities in the form of a package for the export sector. Pakistan has also launched a social protection package for 12 million families, which amounts to 30 percent of the population. This is quite a big package compared to other Asian countries such as India.

Every crisis also brings some opportunities. In the coming days such prospects could appear in the IT sector as online meetings, video conferences and other initiatives would help in the creation of new software. In the services sector there is a move towards digitalization and online shopping and delivery management and this trend will further grow as the government is also focusing on delivering services online.

The companies in the US and Europe, which had a China-focused supply chain, would try to change their strategy. Pakistan would be able to supply some new products in the changing global conditions. This will help the country export products that were earlier not on the traditional export list such as health and medical equipment. New global hygiene standards will open new sectors and create export opportunities and Pakistan should capitalize on these openings.

Regarding food security, this year the government expects the biggest ever wheat crop of 27 million tons. The government has announced that it would procure 8 million tons for next year to ensure food security. The country would not be able to afford the level of food inflation next year that was seen this year. So the government will also have to focus on price control.

The development budget was being spent at a rate of PKR12 billion every week before the eruption of this crisis. Now the pace has dropped to PKR1 billion and the resources are being diverted to management of coronavirus. The next budget will focus on restoring the economy and emerging from this crisis as there will be a plethora of challenges regarding growth, fiscal deficit, expenditure and revenue losses.

Most of the CPEC related activities including negotiations are going on as usual. Many of these projects are in far-flung areas and the government assumes that these activities will continue at the same pace.

The IMF, in its recent report, has projected economic recession for Pakistan due lockdown following coronavirus. The fund sees the economy contracting by 1.5 percent during this fiscal year, compared to 3.3 percent growth in 2018-19. However, the IMF and other financial institutions have a different angle and former's projections are normally on the lower side. Pakistan has its own models to measure economic growth.

The next budget is an ongoing process and currently the officials are focusing on relief packages for the coronavirus crisis. If the pandemic situation becomes somewhat clear by the end of April and it starts to climb down from the peak than the focus will shift towards the budget exercise. However, it would be difficult to impose or increase taxes in the current situation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have to be seen in pre- and post- Covid-19 context. The pandemic is going to change everything, including the context of SDGs, how we conduct businesses, and interact socially. New standards will have to be defined. The post-coronavirus world would see a big and positive impact on climate, education, and technology.

(April 15, 2020)

Global Oil Crisis and its Impact on Shipping Sector of Pakistan

*Cdre. (r) Syed Muhammad Obaidullah**

The coronavirus has had an impact around the globe like never before. Last time during 2007-08 global financial crisis the whole financial system based on debt collapsed and the economy fell into recession. The impact of the crisis was felt in every sector in Pakistan as well, particularly the shipping industry. This can be understood by an example. Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) bought a ship in July 2008 for \$72 million. In September 2008 the price of a Capesize ship (largest dry cargo ship) went down to \$50 million from around \$150 million. Similarly, freight rates came down substantially and Baltic Dry Index (reported around the world as a proxy for dry bulk shipping stocks as well as a general shipping market bellwether) which was at an all-time high at 10,500 points in July 2008, dropped below 1,000 points in a matter of days and has not recovered even after 12 years; nowadays it hovers around 600 points (433 points on May 12).

The global oil turmoil started with discord on volume of output between Saudi Arabia and Russia that later got resolved due to intervention of the US president. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic made this resolution insignificant and the US and Canadian oil markets dived into negative prices.

In the context of coronavirus pandemic and focus on fuel, there is no demand for oil due to suspension of air operations, transport and rail services and lowest industrial production activity. This situation has impacted global oil markets but more so the US oil market West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and Canadian oil market, which turned negative due to storage issues both for suppliers and buyers and cost concerns for suppliers in shutting down their drilling units even though there was no demand. Prices plummeted when buyers refused future contracts for May due to the aforementioned reasons. Consequently, oil prices of these markets turned negative. On January 1, 2018, the price of one barrel of oil was \$61 and the graph was declining while the outbreak of Covid-19 intensified the misery. The situation became so bad that WTI crude oil futures plummeted to minus \$37 per barrel on April 20 because oil extractors face more costs by shutting down their drilling sites than to trade future sales in negative.

* Former Director, National Maritime Policy Research Center (NCMPR); Former Executive Director, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC).

Pakistan buys Brent and Dubai crude which stands at around \$20 per barrel, therefore, the negative prices of US and Canadian markets may not benefit Pakistan at all. Pakistan may not gain much benefit even from the low prices of Brent and Dubai crude due to very low oil demand in the country because of the pandemic. Two of the country's five oil refineries were shut down due to exhaustion of storage capacities and not a single barrel of crude was imported by the refineries in April. Another aspect is the new regulations from International Maritime Organization (IMO) in January 2020 that mandate diesel to have sulfur content of 0.5 percent rather than 3.5 percent. This hindered export of processed oil of Pakistani refineries.

Pakistan imports three types of petroleum products: crude oil (11 million tons annually), processed oil (12.5 million tons annually) and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) (3-4 million tons annually). Now this equation is changing slightly as most of the independent power producers have shifted to LNG from diesel. Another important aspect is the government's positive initiation of almost completely banning the import of crude oil. This is because import of processed oil and supplying it to end user costs less to the government than crude oil.

The PNSC is the national flag carrier and a state-owned corporation under the administrative control of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MOFA). Its current fleet comprises 11 vessels with a total deadweight capacity of 831,711 metric tons and contributes significantly to Pakistan's import and export volumes and earns foreign exchange for the government exchequer.

The PNSC, for the last 20 years, has been earning more than PKR 2.5 billion as net profit annually. It was like other wilting state-owned enterprises till 2000 and its share price was only PKR 1.50 which jumped to PKR 150 per share in just one year due to bold decisions of the management. The international trade volume of Pakistan is around 100 million tons annually and only 15 percent of it is carried by PNSC while the rest 85 percent of cargo is moved by international flag carriers. In the context of oil and energy shipping, 100 percent of the country's trade is done through international carriers which costs Pakistan \$5-\$6 billion annually as freight charges. Pakistan can save this large amount (equivalent to the latest International Monetary Fund (IMF) Extended Fund Facility (EFF) that Pakistan would receive over 39 months) by assigning trade carrying to PNSC and allowing it to buy more crude and processed oil tankers.

The times ahead will be tough on the economic side due to the pandemic since the major chunk of foreign reserves of Pakistan is

contributed by remittances and exports. Exports fell around 9 percent in March as compared to the previous month and due to reduction in global economic activity remittances fell too, which makes the reduced oil prices less of an opportunity for Pakistan.

(April 30, 2020)

Sociopolitical Repercussions

*Murtaza Shibli**

In the wake of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, many ideologies of the world appear to be under threat. Capitalism, for instance, which has been a main driving force behind everything from development to democracy, and even international global institutions like the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO), and many others, all these systems now appear to be failing. Ironically, today even those institutions that were holding the foundations of capitalism are seeking the help of socialism to counter the crisis.

The banking industry, aviation industry, tourism industry, supply-chain management, everything is failing, whereas the response they are seeking is from the socialist model where the government needs to bail out these industries. Capitalism, which had been taught for long as being the best mechanism to run the world and being a solution to all global problems, is today on its knees exhibiting how fragile it actually was. Not only its ideology, but also its whole infrastructure and mechanism has been severely compromised, which itself is raising a big question mark on the ideology's future.

On the other hand, many countries such as Japan have already started announcing that they want to revive their manufacturing industry, fearing the closure of international boundaries will restrict everyone to localism. Already the world seems to be changing, where people are spending most of the time in their homes, then in their locality, or commuting within the city, whereas international borders are entirely closed.

Internationally speaking, the Euro bloc, which was seen as the most prominent success story of regionalism in recent past, too has faltered in the current crisis. When Italy was struck hard by the pandemic, no European country came to its rescue. The compact of

* Senior British-Kashmiri Journalist; Development Communication Professional.

European Union (EU) countries to help each other in any crisis totally failed. Instead of being on the same page in this crisis, every country of the bloc, including Germany, Spain, Italy, etc., came up with a different response, most prominent of which was the response from the United Kingdom (UK) which raised the slogan of 'Herd Immunity.' Later, Prime Minister Boris Johnson had to backtrack from his original position firstly due the advises of experts, and secondly because of French President Emmanuel Macron, who threatened the UK with closing the Channel, according to media reports.

The local responses of the Western countries from the United States (US) to Europe exposed capitalism on a state level as well where none of these countries had any potent mechanism to deal with pandemics. The Covid-19 was, in fact, underestimated by everyone including Europe and the US, except Israel which was ahead of the curve because of their intelligence agency. There have been some pandemics in the West in the past as well but during each of these, their focus had remained on profit generation. If we take a look at the past 50 years, the defense industry has developed overwhelmingly but the health industry did not enjoy much attention except for pharma industry. And today, we see that the health infrastructure in whole of the West has been completely exposed. This provides another proof that capitalism has failed in its duty towards its citizens as it has only been taking care of its shareholders, which form a very small part of the population.

It is evident that the whole system of capitalism was profit-driven. Take the aviation industry for example. It has enjoyed massive profits in the past decades, but did not keep any backup for the time of crisis; instead it used up those profits for buybacks. This shows that the mechanisms and check and balances of a capitalist society were lapsing which has played a part in escalating this crisis.

In this situation the global media industry, which itself is basically run by corporate business houses most of the time, has shown a lot of sympathy in bailing out all these failed institutions. Though its own existence appears to be at risk at times given the deteriorated economic conditions, it has, however, at least found a way to use digital platforms optimally and keep generating revenues. Though the positioning of this media has generally been tilted in favor of capitalism, it has duly supported their respective governments in this time of crisis to prevent anarchy from spreading.

The media in Pakistan, on the contrary, was generally seen playing a very different, rather negative role. When the Wuhan crisis started and the city got locked down, there was a lot of undue pressure

built up on the government by some media channels and newspapers to bring back Pakistani students from Wuhan. Many humanitarian sob stories were presented, and the government was made to look like a villain. The government, however, withstood the pressure, and ultimately it was proven right as it was not right to bring the students back home at that time.

On the other hand, the government messed up the return of *za'ireen* (pilgrims returning from Iran). Also, it is being alleged that Iran in this case did not cooperate with Pakistan. Although it was not a matter of choice for Pakistan not to abandon its people who were in the middle of nowhere. The mistake the federal and provincial authorities made was not to make a proper quarantine facility in Taftan, which eventually became one of the reasons to communalize the virus in the country.

Soon after, the focus of media shifted from *za'ireen* to the *Tableeghi Jamaat (Muslim missionaries)*, where such a media campaign was launched against it which was not even in line with the empirical evidence. All of this has exposed the cracks and divisions in the Pakistani society in this time of crisis.

The religious parties in Pakistan claim that they were victimized unduly. The fact however is that religious parties, not only in Pakistan but around the world, whether they were Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, etc., are very much motivated in this crisis because of their religion and their members are playing a frontline role in the relief and charity efforts. These relief workers should have been encouraged and seen as the helping hands in this situation, but this discrimination by media instead is creating more unnecessary divisions in the society.

Unfortunately, the Indian media has also shown an anti-Muslim sentiment and bias in this situation calling the efforts of Muslim aid workers as 'Corona Jihad'. This virus of hatred has spread in India so much that even a senior Indian Army General recently claimed that Pakistan is planning to send people with corona to spread the virus in India from Kashmir border. This also explains the external challenge we are faced with where one cannot expect any rational response from the neighbor even in this crisis situation.

On the other hand, the pandemic has also exposed the existential crisis in Pakistan badly. The divisions in the country have come to the fore once again where the nation cannot develop consensus over anything. The politics being played out between the central government and Sindh is a proof of the rift. Moreover, the political class in the country has also exposed itself, where even the senior politicians are only seeking

opportunities of point scoring instead of giving any mature, solid or informed response.

The role of media in Pakistan has also left much to be desired. They have been criticizing even good steps taken by the government such as giving relief to the people and asking for debt relief, which by the way was done by a host of developing countries around the world. There is a need for Pakistan to make massive reforms in the media industry by training and bringing those journalists to the fore who could understand what is health crisis, what is economic crisis, and what are the interventions made by the governments, etc.

On a larger scale, the international corporate media has created a great global scare. Fear is the best tool to create any behavioral change and the whole world was closed down after creating an international phenomenon of fear. Whether it is deliberate or not, the generated fear does seem to be driving a massive behavioral change worldwide. A monoculture is being developed in the world following this crisis, in which we are being restrained into a certain shell. There is also the fear that this behavior could become a new normal. For example, following technological advancements, becoming a cashless society and basing all transactions, and in turn activities on technology, will translate into giving up control and curtailing personal autonomy. This should not be allowed to become the norm in the post-pandemic world.

(April 19, 2020)

Emerging Trends in Diplomacy, International Relations and Pakistan

*Ambassador (r) Syed Abrar Hussain**

The Covid-19 pandemic has not just affected health but economy, society and politics as well. Moreover, it has transformed diplomacy and affected international relations. There are various aspects of this transformation which need discussion. Firstly, the changes in diplomatic format; secondly, its role in international relations; thirdly, dynamics of international politics in the post-Covid-19 world; fourthly challenges for Pakistan in this new world.

* Pakistan's Former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Nepal and Kuwait; Senior IPS Associate.

The world of diplomacy, where meetings and conferences are considered essential, has opted for online communication. Almost all scheduled meetings have to be done through video conferencing following the virus outbreak. The European Council was the first to hold a video conference summit about this pandemic. The UN Security Council (UNSC) voted via email for the first time in history. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Group of Twenty (G-20) leaders are conducting online sessions. Lately, Pakistan also hosted a video conference of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member states to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic.

The trend of physical contact has ended and so have the centuries' old rules of protocol. The level of reception at the airport, the guard of honor presented, the meetings granted and the banquets hosted for visiting dignitaries were all social cues indicating the relationship between any two nations. Consequently, Covid-19 has considerably lightened the load on government treasuries worldwide, however the above mentioned protocols were also tools to sway political opinion and garner positive sentiment.

Similarly, Covid-19 is affecting the international relations. The rapid spread of the disease and the global economic effects call for a united effort. The World Health Organization (WHO) should be strengthened, and joint efforts made to counter the disease and reduce the speed of its spread. There is also a need to fight the expected global economic recession together at the international level. But unfortunately, two major world powers—United States (US) and China—are busy in accusing each other to be the cause of this crisis based on conspiracy theories. The US was insistent in the UNSC meeting of April 9 that the latter should mention the Covid-19 spread from China. On the other hand, according to China, this is irrelevant and not covered by the UNSC mandate. In May this year, US President Donald Trump labeled Covid-19 as the 'Chinese virus.' He also blamed WHO for not providing timely warnings and spreading misinformation and suspended funding to the organization for two to three months—the US is the biggest donor to WHO and provided \$400 million out of its \$6 billion budget last year.

Some Western analysts believe that a number of third world governments will fall as a result of rising inflation, unemployment and poverty following the outbreak of Covid-19. However, the same could be true for the first world countries. Their current leaders and their entire political systems depend on whether their governments can efficiently handle their current circumstances and stabilize the economic situation.

In the short term, pandemic has led to a cessation of hostilities in most war zones such as the ceasefire announced in Yemen.

However, the Kashmiris in India have gained no relief. Conversely, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi no longer has to face countrywide protests against his policies and anti-Muslim strategies and practices of his government persist. A systematic campaign is underway to demonize Muslims and extremist Hindus are maligning Muslims for spread of Covid-19. This has brought reactions from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and some Arabs at individual level.

Alongside the political and social effects of Covid-19, the world faces crippling economic consequences of global recession. In only three weeks, 15 million Americans became unemployed. Europe and the rest of the world are not far behind. The question is will the world emerge as a better place by default after this pandemic. Will the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coalition be forced to draw down their troops under economic pressure? Will there be peace in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine and Kashmir? Can the US and the rest of the world learn to let go of weapons of mass destruction including biological weapons? Only time will answer these questions.

In the post Covid-19 world, China is expected to emerge victorious in international politics and the US may lose its hold in the global affairs as a superpower. However, some analysts believe that Europe could become an opponent instead of a trade partner of China. New centers of power could emerge to fulfill the vacuum. This could shatter old alliances and create new ones, establishing a new world order all together.

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) has been fighting on multiple fronts to contain the Covid-19 crisis faced by Pakistanis across the globe. It is responsible for economic diplomacy, it must take care of Pakistanis living abroad, it has to gain aid and cooperation from friendly nations and also enlighten the world about the difficulties of people in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

On April 12, Prime Minister Imran Khan appealed for a global initiative for Pakistan's debt relief. Following up on the appeal, the foreign and finance ministers called their counterparts in various countries. Subsequently, a meeting of the G-20 finance ministers and governors of central banks on April 15 extended support to a time-bound suspension of debt service payments for the developing countries.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Pakistani missions abroad are working tirelessly to arrange the repatriation of thousands of Pakistanis from a number of countries alongside helping Pakistani communities, providing them with relief and assistance wherever required. Two officers – Junaid and Salman – from the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing went to Wuhan at the beginning of the outbreak to take care of Pakistani students stuck there, knowing well that they would not be allowed to return until the lockdown is lifted. It was 76 days before they could leave Wuhan. Pakistan's president and foreign minister also visited China on March 16, as a gesture of solidarity.

The foreign minister wrote letters to the UN secretary general and to the president of the UN Security Council bringing to their attention the threat to the health of the people of Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K), and urged that India lift all restrictions to ensure Kashmiris could survive the disease. Meanwhile the OIC has expressed deep concern over rising anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia in India where the Muslim minority is being blamed for spread of the coronavirus. The OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) has also condemned the unrelenting vicious Islamophobic campaign in India.

Generally, MOFA was able to deal with the Covid-19 crisis to the best of its ability. However, it failed to convince Iran to keep returning Pakistani pilgrims in quarantine. The government also failed to make alternate arrangements to contain them in quarantine on Pakistani soil, leading to the spread of the disease. However, after that learning curve Pakistani authorities were careful to check and quarantine all incoming traffic.

The FO, in coordination with the Prime Minister's Secretariat and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), is helped in repatriation of thousands of nationals from abroad. However, the operation deserves more attention and its speed should be accelerated for the benefit of the stranded Pakistanis and their families.

(April 20, 2020)

New Stratagems in the Strategic Arena and Pakistan

*Brig. (r) Said Nazeer Mohmand**

The Covid-19 crisis will out of necessity give rise to a new world order based on review of policies and strategies, and reorientation of survival concepts and doctrines. Pakistan cannot afford to remain oblivious to this transformation and will have to align itself with the altering world and swiftly change the business as usual model to business for the future.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought about significant changes in various segments of the society and the strategic arena is no exception. The global village has been reduced to a global prison. This is affecting all spheres of life and relationships between all partners. The technologically intensive dependence strategies are at a loss to address and keep pace with the damage being inflicted by the pandemic. Global economic activism, trading and supply chain management, transportation, tourism and industry dependent economy have been put on a halt or blocked to such an extent that interdependency is becoming irrelevant.

In this regard, described below is the undoing of some established narratives and phenomenon on which the world was relying before the outbreak.

War as a strategic tool: The aggressive pursuit of war objectives and gains as a strategic outreach has been either frozen or relegated to not being a serious business at present.

Fallacy of developed and underdeveloped: Europe, the United States (US) and Japan—the icons of developed nations—are crumbling in despair along with the underdeveloped nations. The vast separating lines between the two have become topsy-turvy.

Tangible is turning into intangible and vice versa: The uncertainty and unpredictability has erased the myth of empirical science and strategic response potentials. Threat is vibrant, more visible and responses untenable.

* Senior Associate, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, Pakistan.

Amenity versus immunity: There are more amenities and less immunity. The comfort of life is no more disease resistant but rather more prone to infection.

Rural versus urban: Rural societies, being closer to nature, are more compartmented whereas urbanized societies have social distancing by default and design and provide food for thought for strategic planning how to maintain a balance between the two.

From exploration to exploitation: The use of nature's resources for the benefit of mankind is acceptable but its exploitation beyond abuse is even refused by nature. Now nature is determined to teach human beings how to retain their humanity.

Energy crisis to energy prices: Oil market is in deep crisis. Oil-based economies are shrinking and industrial growth is crumbling whereas agriculture-based businesses are flourishing.

Physical and food security: Physical security tools and their deployment strategies cannot ensure a nation's survival in present crisis. But food security can guarantee such survival. The dynamic change in the strategic paradigm is visible.

Creature versus Creator: Even if the creature surpasses all limits and breaks all codes and chains and becomes a diabolical monster the Creator and his endless power prevails.

The question whether coronavirus is a non-state actor incubated in some high-tech and high-security lab or the natural product of pollution, mutation or replication remains unanswered, but we have to be prepared for such threats in the future too. Pakistan has to learn from the experiences and response potential of other countries and formulate strategies according to its own environment and needs.

Pakistan's Response Options and Strategic Plans

Following policy options are proffered:

- The dynamics of security are changing from physical and ideological to the subtler, soft and porous frontiers of hybrid, microbiological and human chain reactions. Human chain reactions are now the epidemic hotbeds. As such Pakistan's strategic direction should be its unconventional deterrence for avoiding war. Conventional deterrence should be forward poised and anchored on broader obstacles rather than men and tools of war.

- Strategies and doctrines will be reshaped to fight short, intense and multi-directional limited wars. Along with that the model of a high-tech, agile and small standing army with skill-based reserves for fighting calamities such as coronavirus should be incorporated.
- The barren lands of Balochistan, coastal belt and deserts of Sindh should be exploited for agriculture growth and the agro-based industry should be expanded for food security processing and preservation. Agriculture production should be more organic than hybrid and farming should be naturalized rather than going for the mutation process.
- A nation-wide survey and mapping of the population and broad census covering multiple demographic aspects should be carried out to determine strategies for the social sectors, urban and rural planning, administrative arrangements and crisis management both at the micro and macro levels.
- A national database should be set up for identification of calamity prone areas, vulnerable communities, and threat profiling in order to devise strategies for a targeted approach, disaster management and resource allocation.
- All social, business and educational activities should be synchronized with natural time zone. Strategies based on this time zone activity should be prepared and implemented.
- Care and cure of human life and its preservation should be prioritized by carving out new health strategies with intense budget allocations. Research centers, indigenization of medicines and electro-medical equipment, and medical facilities should be strategic health undertakings.
- Currently, lifestyle has become limited or confined while life must go on and survive. There is food for thought that how we transform our lifestyles in view of potential diseases.
- Pakistan's demographic complexion shows that almost 70 percent is agro-based or rural and there are 45,000 to 50,000 villages. Future planning of urban centers should be such that there is a natural compartmentation for better management. Migration from villages and occupation of agro-based land by real estate developments is a phenomenon that should be checked and balanced so that there is no ingress.

- There has been a huge growth of think tanks after 9/11 and a lot of studies and research is being conducted. But these are not finding their way to the power corridors and the decision makers. The government should provide opportunities to the think tanks so that their researches are collated and policy parameters and guidelines could be formulated.
- The industrial base will also have to be reoriented. Some industries should serve a dual or triple purpose. These should be technically viable to switch from one production to another according to the need of the time. This is a necessity as the current pandemic has shown.
- For this to happen the National Disaster Management Authority has to be more potent and broad-based to detect threats like this pandemic.
- We have also seen that in such crises big administrative units like the provinces are not very viable, active or responsive. Small units or administrative pockets are more practical and have a more targeted approach. That is another aspect how to redo this; more provinces or divisional management in a future setup should be considered.
- There should be a mixture of technocrats and experts versus politicians and bureaucrats in the decision-making elite. Unless there is a complete blend, a single community or decision-making body would prevail in such crises which would not be able to come up with innovative strategies.
- As far as wars, defense spending, ties, tools or trade are concerned, these are going to face recession and the big platforms are going to be reduced or become obsolete. In future there will be smart, agile and small armies. Both Pakistan and India have large populations and they have a large defense orientation. Future wars will be of limited duration instead of all out wars. For these, huge logistics stamina will not be required and as such defense spending will automatically be reduced.
- Pakistan can opt for an obstacle orientation to secure its border with India. This way it would not have to deploy a huge army at the border. On the other hand, India will have to hike its spending to counter the obstacle-based and multiple defensive lines. A part of the army should be kept in reserve and it should be trained in various fields so that it can participate as a potent force in efforts during

natural calamities. Pakistan's orientation should now move towards a welfare instead of a security state. This is because the facets of war have changed a lot in the form of cyber, hybrid and propaganda wars.

- During the present crisis, India might engage in some misadventure because a limited war is an option for the country. The biggest human rights violations and tragedy is happening in India and Israel. Pakistan should develop a proper narrative to highlight the lockdown in Kashmir by India and show its various facets, including health issues due to coronavirus, to the world.
- The media should also become part of the pandemic campaign instead of conducting debates on politics and non-issues. Media has a major role to play in changing people's mindset. They should do a reshaping of the environment so that the nation's aspirations are for development, welfare, education and health instead of trivial issues.
- Currently, the world is heading towards global networking where decisions will be made based on information. This will open new vistas of research, curriculum, etc. In future every aspect of life would be digitalized, even the armed forces, as it is key to responding to threats.
- Wars will continue to be fought over material resources such as oil and minerals for some time in the future. Even hybrid wars will be over these resources, however, soft measures will be used more than hard measures. In the future, resources will be in the form of technology and this will be used to forge alliances. Hybrid, cyber and space wars have added new dimensions to the mix. As such the country which is dominant in space will also be the prevailing force on Earth.
- In the future world, matrix and Nano chips will play an important role in turning people's minds. These could be ingested with food or drinks, could read a person's mind and faculties and could also be used for mind control. It would be deliberate folly if we do not prepare ourselves for attacks from this dimension because some such technologies are already in place.

Conclusion

After the World War II, Covid-19 pandemic has affected every country in the world without any distinction. Every country is ready to invest more in research, protective measures, tools and expertise against the

coronavirus. The country which is able to take the lead in this matter will be able to survive any future crisis compared to the countries that lag behind in these aspects. A global regime under the auspices of the UN should be launched to effectively and forcefully counter the pandemic instead of countries making individual efforts in this regard.

(April 21, 2020)

Brighter Side of the Global Threat

*Mirza Hamid Hasan**

The world is currently gripped by a massive crisis of a nature and gravity that it finds difficult to tackle for a number of reasons. Firstly, the source and nature of the pandemic is yet to be identified with certainty. The most severely affected areas of course are the quantum of economic growth and functioning of the industries, businesses and trade that contribute to economic growth, employment and provision of livelihoods. Without getting into the detailed review and analysis of these factors this article will focus on highlighting the benefits resulting from both the reduced demand for energy due to lockdown as well as from falling energy prices in the world market. This leads to lowering the country's import bill and reducing corresponding pressure on foreign currency reserves. This study will also identify some small employment opportunities created by Covid-19. The other areas covered are environment, education, health, social and sociological benefits.

Employment Opportunities

While the rest of the world is in the process of rebooting their economies, China has shown a way for utilizing the opportunity offered by the global demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical equipment to counter Covid-19 by producing large quantities of face masks including N-95, test kits and ventilators. In Pakistan also, in a short time, a major hand sanitizer manufacturing plant has come up in Karachi and a face mask cottage industry has sprouted up in the country. There is also news of development of an indigenous low-cost ventilator, though it is still at the prototype stage. The government has also given certain incentives and allowed the reopening of construction industry in the country. These developments have created some employment opportunities.

* Former Federal Secretary, Ministry of Water and Power (MOWP), Government of Pakistan; Member National Advisory Council, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Islamabad, Pakistan.

Energy

Our main users of energy are industry, power sector, transport and agriculture along with the commercial, institutional and household sectors. Except for agriculture and household all other sectors have suffered large-scale closure due to lockdown and thus resulted in substantially reducing demand for energy. Educational institutions and business establishments have largely been closed whereas transport has been operating at a much smaller scale. Just to give a rough idea of reduction in demand, our petroleum imports fell by more than 37 percent from PKR 170 billion in February to PKR 106 billion in March. This reduced the burden on our foreign exchange reserves as well as the government's budgetary expenditure. Logistical problems in international trade and shipping caused by Covid-19 disruption pose a considerable risk to our energy supply line in an emergency situation. This should act as a motivating factor to expedite development of domestic sources of renewable energy and oil/gas.

Environment

Prolonged lockdown and large-scale closures of industry and transport have already brought about a decrease in emissions of greenhouse gases worldwide and resulted in visible environmental improvement and logically an improvement in global temperatures. Reports from various sources are already indicating a return of aquatic and atmospheric wildlife to their natural habitats due to lower pollution levels and improved marine and atmospheric ecology. This environmental improvement would likely reduce our projected expenditure on mitigation and adaptation measures. It may also reduce our dependence on international environmental funding for adaptation which was already in jeopardy due to United States' (US) withdrawal from its commitments to Conference of the Parties (COP-21) made in November 2015. Hopefully humanity would learn a lesson for future from this episode and reduce the level of anthropogenic activities damaging our planet. They should also plan short, periodical lockdowns for repairing the damage already caused.

Education

The educational system and teaching methodology have already undergone a fundamental change during the lockdown and closure of educational institutions. All educational activities are now being conducted online. This change would now be long term and perhaps permanent for a number of reasons. These include cost reduction, time saving, flexibility, and convenience for both students and teachers. This

should also make quality education affordable for a large section of students who are unable to afford it presently. It would also allow greater parental supervision and control over children resulting in better grooming and character building, the opportunities for which are very limited in the existing schooling environment.

Health

Diseases of the modern age like hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and various psychological problems are largely the result of stress caused by economic rat-race, unhealthy lifestyles, overwork and lack of rest and sleep, etc. The Covid-19 pandemic will likely bring about a major change in work systems by promoting work from home and flexible timings. This would not only reduce stress and give relief from stress-related ailments, it would also provide more time for family, friends and leisure. This change will bring about an improvement in the working population's health and reduce their own and their employers' health bills.

Family and Social Life

The modern lifestyle has badly affected the family structure and social norms and values. Mobile phones and internet, while providing valuable tools for acquiring knowledge, information and communication, have also made people self-centered and unsocial, creating many problems within the families and the society at large. Hopefully huddling together with the family during long lockdown periods will lead to a re-bonding of the family, restoring stronger family structure and better social etiquette and courtesies, thus leaving a positive impact on the family members' temperaments and behavior with each other as well as the outside world.

Sociological Benefits

A large part of humanity has drifted away from spirituality, God and religion, thus creating a myriad of problems in society. Extreme fear generated by natural calamities beyond human control inevitably prompts people to turn to religion and God to seek help and protection. Covid-19 has also caused people of almost all faiths to turn toward God and seek forgiveness and deliverance from the calamity. A sort of large-scale spiritual revival has been witnessed on social media as well as places of worship. A general revival of higher levels of spirituality in life should logically result in the society adopting higher moral values. This should also bring down crime levels in the society.

(April 24, 2020)

Some Questions and Speculations

*Ambassador (r) Tajammul Altaf**

The exponential spread of Covid-19 has raised several questions and speculations on the origin, breakout, statistics, preparedness of various countries, choking of healthcare systems, and handling (or mishandling) of the pandemic. This article intends to present and document some of the key questions being raised in this regard. It does not seek to analyze the questions and validate or invalidate any of the thesis. It is rather an attempt to understand this dimension of the discourse due to the level of confusion and mistrust in today's world that shapes and influences the human perceptions and consequently their actions and interactions at all levels of governance.

US Military Brought Covid-19 into China

The United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), a military laboratory working on viruses and biological research at Fort Detrick, Maryland, was reportedly closed down in July last year and it stopped the study of biological select agents and toxins (BSATs) due to some leakage. In March 2020, there was a petition on the White House website,¹ demanding clarification of the shutdown of the USAMRIID. To address public concern, the USAMRIID was allowed to resume full operation in April 2020. While the US has several biological laboratories in the country and abroad, the sudden closure and reopening of the USAMRIID has raised several questions including the fundamental query: why does the US remain discreet about the function, use, and safety of these biological laboratories?²

Further questions have been raised about 'Crimson Contagion',³ an exercise by the US Department of Health and Human Services from January to August 2019. It simulated the fictional outbreak involving a group of tourists visiting China and getting infected before flying back to various countries, including the US. Besides, in October 2019, a high-level pandemic exercise named Event 201 simulated a scenario in the US that a fictional virus called Coronavirus Acute Pulmonary Syndrome (CAPS),

* Former Diplomat; Senior Research Associate, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad.

¹ "Ten Questions the US Needs to Offer Clear Answers to the World," *People's Daily*, May 1, 2020, https://peoplesdaily.pdnews.cn/2020/05/01/world/ten-questions-the-us-needs-to-offer-clear-answers-to-the-world-148588.html?fbclid=IwAR2OPo9Xl6XjjBJKzmcBvGyNWCmNP4m8shefl8w_uyUeexD76jjtvqz4x2U.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

which causes more severe symptoms than severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and transmits via the respiratory route like the common flu, had caused a pandemic. Given the fact that the simulated virus CAPS is so much like Covid-19, one is forced to think the latter is just a coincidence or there is more to it.

Meanwhile, the China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) spokesman Zhao Lijian in his tweet on March 12, 2020 said, 'It's possible that the US military brought the virus to Wuhan.'⁴ The tweet resonated with a widely circulated speculation in China that the 'U.S. military personnel had brought the virus to China during their participation in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan last October.'⁵ Zhao's claims have also been referred by several Chinese Embassies and social media users in different parts of the world.

The US National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI) and the US intelligence agencies had repeatedly sent intensive warnings to President Trump from November 2019 to February 2020 on the possible outbreak and spread of a pandemic. This leads to the question, why did the US leadership and authorities did not take timely preventive measures at the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak despite early warnings? And, why did the US government not declare a 'National Emergency' until March 13?⁶

Covid-19 was Originated in China and it Withheld the Information from the World.

The next, in a way a counter argument was that Covid-19 originated from China or more precisely it was engineered in Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). Is it a mere coincidence or otherwise that Wuhan, the epicenter of coronavirus pandemic, also has the WIV where Chinese researchers have been studying bat coronaviruses for a long time?

There were also critical reports that the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) initially handled coronavirus with a degree of censorship, vacillation, blocking information, and not divulging facts fully to the world. Among this group, Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a political science professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, referred to a report by Ai Fen, Director of Wuhan Central Hospital's emergency

⁴ Joyce Huang, "Chinese Diplomat Accuses US of Spreading Coronavirus," *Voice of America*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/chinese-diplomat-accuses-us-spreading-coronavirus>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Ten Questions the US Needs to Offer Clear Answers to the World," *People's Daily*.

department, who along with Dr. Li Wenliang, gave an early warning about the coronavirus outbreak.⁷

Most recently, *ABC News* reported on June 8, 2020,⁸ that in a study carried out by researchers of Harvard Medical School, led by Prof. Dr John Brownstein, it has been assessed and analyzed from 350 satellite images taken from September to December 2019, and compared with the same period in 2018, that there was a dramatic increase in the number of cars inside five major hospitals in Wuhan suggesting that coronavirus may have hit China in September 2019. Prof. Dr Brownstein further claimed that the online traffic increase also 'coincided with' elevated queries on a Chinese internet search engine Baidu for certain symptoms of 'cough' and 'diarrhea' that 'would later be determined as closely associated with the novel coronavirus.'

President Trump and his top officials continued attributing that Covid-19 originated in a lab in Wuhan, in a way, alluding to theories that it spilled accidentally while insinuating the entire pandemic was perpetrated by China with some degree of intent. Such allegations were supported in so many ways by the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. President Trump also called coronavirus 'China Virus' and 'Wuhan Virus' in his tweets. The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a virtual meeting of the Group of Seven (G7) countries' Foreign Ministers, held on March 24-25, 2020, insisted using words 'Wuhan Virus' and 'Chinese virus' in a Joint Declaration. However, due to the differences a joint declaration could not be issued.⁹

Covid-19 Created & Unleashed by Bill Gates

On April 23, 2015, Bill Gates, the Co-Founder of Microsoft and a billionaire philanthropist, in TED Talk warned the world and predicted that 'If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it's most likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than a war.'¹⁰ He urged to invest more in research on epidemics and prepare vaccines. He further

⁷ Huang, "Chinese Diplomat Accuses US of Spreading Coronavirus."

⁸ Kaitlyn Folmer and Josh Margolin, "Satellite Data Suggests Coronavirus may have Hit China Earlier: Researchers," *ABC News*, June 8, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/satellite-data-suggests-coronavirus-hit-china-earlier-researchers/story?id=71123270>.

⁹ David Choi, "G7 Countries Fail to Deliver a Joint Statement because US Insists on Saying 'Wuhan Virus' for the Coronavirus," *Business Insider*, Mar 25, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/g7-failed-to-reach-agreement-because-of-wuhan-virus-2020-3>.

¹⁰ Bill Gates, "The Next Outbreak? We're not Ready," transcript, *TED Talk*, March 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_the_next_outbreak_we_re_not_ready?language=en; and Bill Gates quoted in, M. Balasubramanian, "The Advent of Modern Pandemic," in *Covid 19 - The New Age Pandemic* (Chennai: Notion Press, 2020).

warned that world was not ready for the next epidemic and underlined the need for a global alert and response system to deal with future epidemics. He concluded that normalcy would only return after the entire world population vaccinated. An inference from this 2015 TED Talk has been made and widely circulated that the virus was created by Gates to make a few more billions on the vaccine.

The above thesis about the vaccine has been challenged by a virologist, Dr Judy Mikovits, who argued that coronavirus has been manipulated at Wuhan Labs and the USAMRIID, which funded US\$ 3.7 million to Wuhan labs for research on coronavirus. She added that manipulated virus was experimented on bats and animals and then rapidly transmitted to human beings leading to the exponential outbreak. She claimed that it would have taken 800 years for the pandemic to occur if it had taken place naturally. She has also alleged that the top US medical expert and a leading member of the White House coronavirus taskforce Dr Anthony Fauci is collaborating with Wuhan labs. She added that everyone is to first get infected and then vaccinated primarily to earn millions of dollars. Dr. Mikovits's research has been discredited and the US 'health agencies suppressed her research which attempted to demonstrate how vaccines weaken the immune system, making people more vulnerable to diseases such as COVID-19.¹¹

The Issue of Nano Chips and Control of Human Minds

Anti-vaccination activists, who believe vaccines do not work also speculate that 'Bill Gates wants to use a vaccination program to implant digital microchips that will somehow track and control people' and monitor their activities in the future. They hold that Bill Gates will be using 'a pandemic to wrest control of the global health system.'¹² Moreover, anti-vaccination groups think that Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and some other vaccine companies have been working on a clandestine depopulation program through mandatory immunizations by either motivating or forcing people for vaccination on the pretext to cure them but actually to bring the global population down to a sustainable level. This, of course, has a background.

In 1974, Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, prepared a top-secret document titled 'National Security Study Memorandum or

¹¹ Hyder Abbasi, "Coronavirus: Why do Well-Informed People Subscribe to Conspiracy Theories?" *TRT World*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/coronavirus-why-do-well-informed-people-subscribe-to-conspiracy-theories-36412>.

¹² Mark Lynas, "COVID: Top 10 Current Conspiracy Theories," *Cornell Alliance for Science*, April 20, 2020, <https://allianceforscience.cornell.edu/blog/2020/04/covid-top-10-current-conspiracy-theories/>.

NSSM-200' on the subject 'Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for US Security and Overseas Interests.' The primary purpose of the US government's depopulation program was to maintain access to the mineral resources of less-developed countries (LDCs). The report was made public when it was declassified and transferred to the US National Archives in 1990.¹³

The use of Nano chips or microchips are reported to be implanted in human beings to control their movements, bodies, and minds, and hear and record their conversations through a computer program. The people with these microchips can be brainwashed and used for some specific tasks reducing them to zombies.

Blaming 5G

In continuation to the implantation of Nano chips debate anti-vaccination activists have also opposed the use of 5G technology based on several Russian RT and Sputnik channels programs warning that 5G 'might kill you.' David Icke, a conspiracy theorist, linking 5G to the coronavirus pandemic, has asserted 'that a COVID-19 vaccine would be the means for inserting a nanotechnology chip to track and ostensibly control humans. YouTube banned all such videos perpetuating the false link between 5G networks and coronavirus.'¹⁴ The banning of videos also raised speculations stressing the point that there is something to hide.

In the US, the epicenter of the anti-vaccination movement is Children's Health Defense (CHD), which has launched a legal petition against the US Federal Communications Commission, warning that deployment of 5G will release harmful electromagnetic radiation. Besides, CHD stresses that the pandemic lockdown is being used for the rapid installation of 5G masts on schools. It also published a piece suggesting that the pandemic provides cover for a sinister 'global agenda' trying to make us all 'subjects of a techno-communist global government.'¹⁵

Deep State Manipulating Pandemic

Another speculation is made by the Right-wing extremists and even some public supporters of President Trump, who believe in a conspiracy theory

¹³ Brian Clowes, "Exposing the Global Population Control Agenda" (Front Royal: Human Life International, 2020), <https://www.hli.org/resources/exposing-the-global-population-control/>.

¹⁴ Mark Lynas, "Anti-Vaxxers and Russia Behind Viral 5G COVID Conspiracy Theory," *Cornell Alliance for Science*, April 8, 2020, <https://allianceforscience.cornell.edu/blog/2020/04/anti-vaxxers-and-russia-behind-viral-5g-covid-conspiracy-theory/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

known as QAnon. The followers of QAnon first theorized that Covid-19 was a bioweapon created by Bill Gates. They also believed in the global elite known as 'the Deep State' or 'the Cabal,' who supposedly 'control world governments, the banking system, the Catholic church, the agricultural and pharmaceutical industries, the media, and entertainment industry; all working round the clock to keep the people of the world poor, ignorant and enslaved.'¹⁶ They also alleged that Dr Anthony Fauci was working with the Democrats and Hillary Clinton to undermine Trump and 'suggested that the virus was actually a deep state hoax meant to damage Trump politically.'¹⁷

Meanwhile, an exclusive video by Dr Rashid Buttar, surfaced in which he passionately spins the SARS-CoV-2 bio-weapon yarn. He claimed that the virus was engineered in a US laboratory and Bill Gates and Dr Anthony Fauci form an integral part of this devious scheme. Dr Buttar also said that medical doctors at the frontline are also implicated as they are required to 'doctor' death certificates to falsely record SARS-CoV-2 as the cause of death.¹⁸

Inflated and Skewed Statistics, Data & Death Rates

James Corbett¹⁹ puts across views of scientists and researchers and suggests that statistics, mendacious models and puffed-up projections to dodgy death data, and tainted tests are given to the public to shut down the global economy, enforce the implementation of Police State like draconian measures and rewriting all social norms and rules. He questions: why are alarmist narratives spread? Are these meant to create fears, panic, confusion, uncertainty, and to scare the people? On which study President Trump initially predicted that 2.2 million people would die in the US and then reduced number downward to 200,000 to 100,000 or 60,000 deaths? He concludes that statistics and numbers are 'being fudged, manipulated, cooked and otherwise hyped' causing not only mental distress and breakdowns but also giving a justification to create 'Corona World Order.'²⁰

¹⁶ ADL, "QAnon" (New York: Anti-Defamation League, n.d.), <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/qanon>.

¹⁷ Ryan Broderick, "Right-Wing Influencers Are Convinced Dr. Anthony Fauci Is Working with Hillary Clinton to Undermine Donald Trump," *Buzz Feed News*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanhatesthis/qanon-right-wing-influencers-fauci-deep-state-clinton>.

¹⁸ Faadiel Essop, "The Covid-19 'Infodemic' and Why Conspiracy Theories are Extremely Dangerous," *News 24*, April 23, 2020, <https://www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/opinion-the-covid-19-infodemic-and-why-conspiracy-theories-are-extremely-dangerous-20200423>.

¹⁹ "Lies, Damned Lies and Coronavirus Statistics," *The Corbett Report*, Episode 376, April 17, 2020, <https://www.corbettreport.com/coronastats/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

US Congress Bill 748 Passed in March 2020

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), is a law passed hurriedly to address the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic in the US. The Act was originally introduced on January 24, 2019, in the US Congress as H.R. 748 under title 'Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2019.'; The initial version of the latter was passed by the House of Representatives on July 17, 2019, and did not include any coronavirus-related provisions, which were later added under the CARES Act. The Senate then inserted in March 2020 the negotiated provisions of the CARES Act and removed the previous content of the House-passed bill.

The question in this regard was that if there was any knowledge of a lethal virus in 2019 at the time of introducing the bill in the Senate or was it a mere coincidence that the bill was amended both in title, contents and amount from around US\$ 1 trillion to US\$2 trillion and as a result of bipartisan negotiations, the bill was unanimously, albeit hurriedly, passed by the Senate on March 25, 2020, and the House of Representatives on March 27, 2020, and signed into law by President Donald Trump on the same day?

The Controversies about the Role of WHO

President Trump in a letter to Director General, World Health Organization (WHO),²¹ accused him of having failed to adequately assess the outbreak when it first emerged in the city of Wuhan. The latter was criticized for, ignoring Chinese media reports of the virus spreading in Wuhan in December 2019, not acting on information sent by Taiwanese authorities on January 1, 2020 indicating human-to-human transmission of a new virus in China, and remaining silent on a report of Dr Zhang Yongzhen of the Shanghai Public Health Clinic Center that he had sequenced the genome of the virus and informed the Chinese authorities on January,5,2020.

President Trump also accused that the WHO Director General failed to independently investigate credible reports from Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea that conflicted directly with the Chinese government's official accounts and data on the outbreak of the deadly virus, mismanaged and covered up the spread of the virus after it emerged in China, thus, collaborated with China in not providing the timely information to the US. He maintained that China continues to undermine

²¹ Donald Trump to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, letter, May 18, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Tedros-Letter.pdf>.

the International Health Regulations by refusing to share accurate and timely data, viral samples and isolates by withholding vital information about the virus and its origins, to deny international access to their scientists and relevant facilities.

Was it a way to deflect persistent criticism that President Trump acted too slowly to stop the virus's spread by pointing to his decision in late January 2020 to place restrictions on travel from China or was it sheer negligence and inefficiency on the part of the WHO as it mishandled the crisis and also ignored reports from different countries to treat coronavirus through traditional and herbal medicines already used effectively to treat epidemics in the past? To find answers to all these questions, the WHO member states have adopted a resolution at this year's World Health Assembly calling for an 'impartial, independent, and comprehensive review of how the WHO handled the crisis as well as an investigation into the origins of the virus.'

In relation to WHO role a YouTube video has become viral on social media platforms claiming that Covid-19 is a blood clotting condition caused by bacteria, and not by a virus, and can be treated with Aspirin 100mg.²² The video also claims that Italy did not follow the WHO instructions and performed post-mortems on Covid-19 patients; and found that the disease was caused by a bacteria that causes blood clotting. The fact remains that the WHO did not issue such instructions. Nonetheless, on April 1, 2020, the Ministry of Health of Italy issued a notification recommending against autopsies on patients who had died of Covid-19.

In a press conference held on April 20, 2020, President of Madagascar, Andry Rajoelina, announced 'a breakthrough in the fight against COVID-19' and said that his country's corona patients have seen 'miraculous results' of curing corona by taking herbal tea labeled 'Covid-Organics' or CVO, which was used in the past for treatment of malaria. He added that more than 100 Covid-19 patients in Madagascar had already been successfully treated with CVO. He announced that the first African cure for coronavirus, based on traditional African medicine, will be distributed countrywide, and, eventually exported across the African continent. He stated that Madagascar's government is now in talks with the WHO and the African Union over how to develop a rigorous testing protocol for CVO.

²² Aditi Chattopadhyay, "Fact Check: Research in Italy Finds COVID-19 is Caused by Bacteria and can be Treated with Aspirin," *Logical Indian*, June 12, 2020, <https://thelogicalindian.com/amp/fact-check/italy-covid-19-coronavirus-bacteria-aspirin-21655>.

The establishment that developed CVO, the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (IMRA), is well-respected in Madagascar for its work refining remedies. Some of the research has led to the discovery of internationally recognized pharmaceutical treatments such as Madeglucyl, which can help with diabetes management. It also helped identify the Madagascar periwinkle's potential in cancer treatment; compounds isolated from the flower are now being used in treatments for breast, bladder, and lung cancers.

However, the promotion of an untested cure provoked an unusually sharp rebuke from the WHO, which noted in a statement on May 4 that, 'Caution must be taken against misinformation, especially on social media, about the effectiveness of certain remedies. Many plants and substances are being proposed without the minimum requirements and evidence of quality, safety, and efficacy.'²³ The response from WHO was perceived as part of collaboration between the organization and the Big Pharmaceutical companies.

A Biological Weapon

Some people in the US claimed that Covid-19 was intentionally or accidentally made by the Chinese scientists as a bio warfare weapon and then it may have accidentally leaked from a lab.

According to a survey carried out by Pew Research Center (PRC) conducted from March 10 to 16, 2020, it was divulged that 'While a plurality of Americans (43 percent) say the new coronavirus most likely came about naturally, nearly three-in-ten (29 percent) say it most likely was created in a lab.'

GMOs to be Blamed for the Spread of Covid-19

In an article published in March 2020 in the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto* [the Poster], attorney Francesco Bilotta blamed genetically modified (GM) crops cause genetic pollution that allows viruses to proliferate due to the resulting environmental 'imbalance' and cause for the Covid-19 outbreak. Italian science communicators immediately denounced the article and some researchers called out the claim's 'scientific absurdity.' On the other hand, Cornell Alliance for Science is of the view that Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) 'will almost certainly be part of any vaccine solution. If any of the ongoing 70 vaccine

²³ Aryn Baker, "Could it Work as a Cure? Maybe.' A Herbal Remedy for Coronavirus is a Hit in Africa, But Experts have their Doubts," *Time*, May 22, 2020, <https://time.com/5840148/coronavirus-cure-covid-organic-madagascar/>.

projects work (which is a big if), that would be pretty much the only guaranteed way the world can get out of the COVID mess.²⁴

Conclusion

The above is not an exhaustive account of what is being questioned in the world about the origin of the pandemic, its spread and handling in various countries, possible treatment as well as its impact on various domains of life. There could be and are numerous other questions being raised, this article, however, lists only a few questions to stress some important dynamics of the pandemic related to the global governance and global institutions. As was indicated in the beginning the article did not attempt to validate or invalidate any thesis which in many cases countered each other, while in other cases the vested interests were obvious.

The phenomenon is neither new nor surprising, keeping in view the ever-continuing civilizational and political conflict and battle for supremacy. Nevertheless, it has multiplied as a consequence of an all-time lack of trust in governments and the media as well as global institutions and on the other hand an increasing facility to process and use social media with its enormous outreach.

Sooner or later the pandemic will end. It has, however, once again highlighted the weaknesses of global governance. It is but natural to think of conspiracies in a governance model which is founded on the paradigm of so-called national interest and human conflict rather than cooperation and healthy competition. While the paradigm needs a total shift, the highest level of cooperation and transparency is required in situations when there is a global challenge such as this pandemic.

Covid-19 is a reality and so are the dangers it has produced. Even those who were showing skepticism in the initial days have to accept the reality as soon as they are exposed to a victim around them. However, it is also a fact that in a system where most of the decision-making is motivated by the material considerations, human welfare aspect is overshadowed by the vested interests of the groups or individuals. This is also true for the ways the pandemic is being managed (or mismanaged) and so, some partial truth in the speculations cannot be denied, especially in the age of hybrid warfare.

(June 10, 2020)

²⁴ Lynas, "Anti-Vaxxers and Russia Behind Viral 5G COVID Conspiracy Theory."