

COVID-19: A Crisis Requiring Immediate Attention

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Introduction

Impacting almost all of the world today, the 21st century plague, COVID-19, has disrupted nearly all activities surrounding the core functioning around the globe. It has impacted 800,000 people, in over 150 states, since it was first encountered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Economic stagnation, political distress, societal disaggregation are just some of the few issues that have arisen due to the outbreak of the virus. Fear and anxiety about COVID-19 can cause people to avoid or reject others even though they are not at risk for spreading the virus. As a result, people have been instructed to avoid aggregations and public places, and put into home quarantines by state governments to stop the contamination. With billions more quarantined, the severe global health security threat, the world is currently in lockdown.

With almost 120 cases, South Asia as a region has had considerable low rates of death due to COVID-19. Home to almost 20% of the world's total population, the states in the region are faced with the drawbacks of inadequate healthcare systems, the absence of proper health infrastructure and a lack of hygiene—all of which pose a major risk in the region at the time of precarious health hazard.

Precautions and National Must-Do Measures

Bangladesh has truly fallen under the shadow of COVID-19. So far, an accumulated 17 have fallen victim to the virus, with one death, at the time of writing. Additionally, a total of 16 people have been kept in isolation while 42 have been kept in institutionalized quarantine. The country has also been projected to lose \$3 billion as added negative externality, besides socio-political confusion and misinformation going raft. With the situation as such, this commentary will propose possible recommendations for the tackling the continuing degrading situation with COVID-19 in the developing country.

Mathematical Modelling and Comprehensive Risk and Threat Assessment

According to CDC, the US could see 160 million to 214 million getting infected throughout the epidemic, with death rates that could climb as high as 200,000 to 1.7 million. Other than that, from the lens of an economic perspective, the level of disruption to contain the virus is possibly greater than the number of

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cases. Projected global economic growth increase percentage has dropped from 2.9% to 2.4%, as key economies, such as that of the Asian Tigers, China, US, UK and the EU slows down.

As a country of over 165 million, with a population density of approximately 1,115.62 people per square kilometer, it is paramount for Bangladesh to have proper risk assessment and threat analysis beforehand in order to be able to take precautionary measures required for the intervention before COVID-19 spirals into a health havoc in the country. The government must use a mathematical modelling to predict a possible human casualties and deaths to the virus, as well as other produce threat assessment of other core fields, such as the economy, the socio-political status, cultural aspects and so on.

Allocation of Specialized COVID-19 Funds

The United States has responded to the health hazard by allocating significant funds to tackle the impact of Coronavirus in three phases. The fields of allocation include research for vaccine, funds to federal states to fight the spread of the diseases, as well as overseas, free testing, provision for more paid sick leaves for infected patients, greater unemployment benefits and more. The Government of Canada has invested US\$ 25.8 million to research of medical countermeasures against COVID-19, while South Korea has introduced a US\$ 9.8 billion economic stimulus to help the economy besides investment in research to counter the pandemic. Likewise, it is important that Bangladesh, too, allocates special funds and stimulus packages to counter the impact of COVID-19, including funds for research, cost-effective, as well as free of cost testing, paid-leave provisions, economic subsidies to small and medium businesses, lastly, cost-free treatment of patients infected by the virus.

Medical Institutional Capacity

It is important that the government takes stock of the medical capacity and supplies at the country's disposal in order to assess the standing of Bangladesh on treating the COVID-19 patients. While it has been recorded that the country's stock of COVID-19 testing kits are abnormally low, the new, more time-efficient testing kits developed in Bangladesh are projected to produce faster and more accurate results, as well as cheaper costs. The aptitude of nurses and paramedics must also be taken into account, as they will play a central role in taking care of infected patients. Hence, prompt special training may be required. Other than that, it should also be noted that besides public medical services, private hospitals should also be on stand-by, in order for effective treatment of infected patients should the numbers rise further. The treatment should be made cheap and within the grasps of majority of the population.

National Task-Force and Mobilization of Bangladesh Army

Bangladesh should take examples from its neighbor India and establish special national task force to tackle the spread of COVID 19. There is need for deployment of army and defense forces to help establish field hospitals to increase the medical capacity of the state. The duty of the task force should be door-to-door check-ups, provision of symmetrical information and awareness, and containment of movement of people

at the time of the health hazard. Besides the establishment of field hospitals, the army mobilization must also be aimed to limit the movement of people to only for bare essentials, and hence, contain the risk of further spread of coronavirus.

Limit Socialization

Like in Italy and China, Bangladesh should enforce travel bans and enforced quarantines. It is paramount that the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) restrains all forms of social and cultural events, as well as prevent public gatherings. In order to limit people from travelling, the government should either minimize public transport services, or extensively sterilize all forms of public utility services. It should also provide the population with detailed legislation of enforced distancing, as in countries like the United States and Japan. Education institutions should also be in closure as long as the health hazard is not neutralized and hence, normalized.

Looking Beyond Urban Hubs

Rural areas beyond the urban hubs like Dhaka and Chattagram must be ensured. As majority of the population of the country reside in rural areas, greater resources must be invested in those areas to tackle COVID-19, including greater medical services, strengthened special laws directed at the prevention of spread of the virus, as well as greater mobilization of special national task force.

Another important area to look at beyond urban hubs is the implication of coronavirus on the current and future prospects of the world's highest-profile and fastest growing humanitarian crisis, the Rohingya refugee crisis. The 2017 Myanmar military crackdown on the Muslim minority drove around 700,000 across the border to Bangladesh, resulting into the accumulation of 1.1 million Rohingya refugees in the country. Spread of COVID-19 to the crammed and over-crowded refugee camps can bring about deaths of thousands, and produce a resultant not so much different from the death traps of the Tatmadaw that the survivors escaped back home.

Securitization of COVID-19

Political securitization of the issue is paramount for a country like Bangladesh. With its massive population and high population density, the people of this country are more likely to easily contract the virus from people-to-people interactions. Hence, it is important that the government views the spread of COVID 19 from a view of an issue requiring immediate attention, rather than a 'politicized' one. Securitization would also involve the molding of the general population's belief that coronavirus is a health hazard that endangers the lives of all, and their loved ones, in order to encourage them to take steps to de-securitize the issue. Apart from that, the government should also enforce the prior mentioned recommendations to contain the spread of the virus, and tackle it should it spread among the mass population.

Conclusion

While South Asia remains reasonably less affected by the pandemic, the rapid spread of the virus has scarred the region. Bangladesh, like its other neighbours, does not remain untouched by this 21st century plague. The GoB must take immediate steps to reduce the spread of the disease within the heavily populated country, as should the pandemic start to disperse within the country at a rapid rate, it is likely that it will experience an internal 'domino effect', recovery from which will be rather a difficult task.

Even though the number of people infected remain low, it must take necessary precautions to be prepared to tackle the mass spread of the disease in Bangladesh. The country is already playing the role of an important role globally, by developing new time-efficient COVID-19 test kits; it must play a greater role in safeguarding its people in the face of this non-traditional security threat that is threatening the world.