

Coronavirus Pandemic: A Perspective from Bangladesh

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Pandemic had always been part of the human history. The recent spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) had proven an unprecedented challenge worldwide. At the time of writing this commentary, the half of humanity is in the lockdown in every major city across the world. According to Johns Hopkins University, approximately there are 1 million confirmed coronavirus infections. People from different occupations now forced to live quarantined life that has affected almost every aspects of life, regardless of geographical locations, nationality, political ideology or cast and creed.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), falls among the viruses that are defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus, later to be known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV). The first case of the virus first identified on an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was on late January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. What makes this virus so deadly is its ability to change continuously its characteristics through mutation process, which ensured its survival in different weather patterns and geographic locations. At present, the virus is also known as Coronavirus and responsible of thousands of deaths across the continents. The last time a pandemic occurred was in 2009 with swine flu, which experts think killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Never before seen such a pandemic of this magnitude, as the virus infected humanity across the continents. The high number of infection occurred and still the research institutes across the world are yet to come up with a vaccine that can effectively cure patients with this deadly ordeal. The virus made its way to Bangladesh with infected diaspora population living abroad. A large number of people had migrated to European countries such as Italy and Spain – greatest concentration of the Coronavirus in Europe through infected from personnel coming from Far East. Some of the first cases of infection in Bangladesh identified with the Bangladeshi nationals returning from countries such as Italy and Germany. Many of the Bangladeshi citizens came from Italy and Germany, had already reached at their villages, putting the local population at risk.

Countries all over the world are struggling to manage this global crisis. Bangladesh is no different. Bangladesh is a country with a huge population and very limited resources. The capital Dhaka is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) is currently the only facility with the capacity to run the coronavirus test for a country of more than 164 million. The pandemic has proven to be a great challenge in Bangladesh, as the infectious nature of the virus can rapidly infect a large number of people in any given time or place. Bangladesh government has taken measures to contain this unprecedented ordeal. The government of Bangladesh with

the regulatory bodies involved in the disease control and prevention along with the international community has taken steps to prevent mass infection among the population. Aligned with the rest of the world, Bangladesh had follow the suit of lockdown process and quarantined the people suspected of Coronavirus; there are a number of issues must be addressed in the policy of the stakeholders. Such issues such as the collapse of the social order are a critical one and its implication as well as the consequences in the following months and days.

Because of the isolation, with the possible decline the social order, the extremists could use their narrative for their recruitment purpose. In the isolation in order to maintain the social distance, most of the city dwellers are resorting to the internet. The extremist groups could use to opportunity to spread rumours, disinformation and promote their narratives for the recruitment purpose. Extremist groups worldwide had similar approaches in the past, whether it was radicalisation of inmates in isolation in Iraq or disgruntle bored youth searching for identity on the internet and enticed by the promise of a utopia.

Bangladesh is already has a huge number of Rohingya population residing in different camps. Because of the fast infectious nature of the virus, the infection in the one of the camps can be disastrous. Bangladesh is currently suffering from the availability of the testing kits essential for the detection of the virus. It is very difficult to have a social isolation in the densely packed camps, where a number of people are residing in a small space and have to rely on the collective effort for their collective survival. Any form of mass infection can be alarming for the rest of the countries.

Like the rest of the world, Bangladesh is coping with unprecedented number of people for testing Coronavirus. The health facilities are at a dire state as the doctors and the sheer number of people they have to deal with overwhelms health workers. Most of the hospitals do not have the Coronavirus specific medical emergency equipment. In many cases, the doctors lacked protective gears not only protect themselves but also to protect the incoming patients with clear COVID-19 syndrome. The COVID-19 virus has proven to be a very deadly disease. Even with a perfect doctor-patient ratio and perfect staffing, many of patients had died in the previous month indifferent countries, most notably in China and Italy. There are problems related with oversight and lack of expertise, which is something the doctors and health care professionals are drastically lacking worldwide.

Global supply chains are set for a major reshuffle as the coronavirus pandemic exposes the vulnerability of countries and companies that rely heavily on a limited number of trading partners. Although the outreach of global supply chain is visible more in businesses, it is inter-connectedness over the years driven the most countries as well as the companies for decades. In fact, given the multilateral framework of global trade and commerce as enunciated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), it became increasingly difficult for countries to get their businesses and manufacturing integrated into the global chain. The global trade is driven by the competitiveness and strategic value addition when comes to a particular product or service. The outbreak of COVID-19 has drastically halted the supply chain process due to social distancing and travel ban. In Bangladesh, millions of dollars' worth of RMG products at the stake as many international apparel brands had withdrawn

their orders from Bangladeshi companies. This is creating a knock-on effect in the Bangladeshi economy.

A growing number of unemployment coupled with a lack of foreign currency reserves would put enormous pressure on the economy. This could trigger the loss of social order such as social discontent and violence on the streets. Like rest of the world, we lack the preparedness and contingency planning. It is clear that in post Coronavirus world, a lot of investment would go in the research of virology, immunology and disease control. Not to be left behind, Bangladesh should follow the suit in terms of updating the policies that would help the stakeholders to take up primary and secondary measures.

A rapid identification and detection system should be there for the doctors and healthcare professionals. In terms of a lockdown or quarantine, there should be clear guidance about the degree and scope of the process. Because of the lack of a reliable drug, availability of equipment and medical facilities should be ensured to the hospitals and health care centres. The movement of the people must be controlled by the authorities, especially of the migrant workers both in Bangladesh and beyond. We should be Adopting policies that increase access to childcare, healthcare and humane, sanitary living conditions to at-risk, vulnerable populations. For Bangladesh, the threat of Coronavirus is real and appropriate measures should be taken before it can claim the lives of the innocent.

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