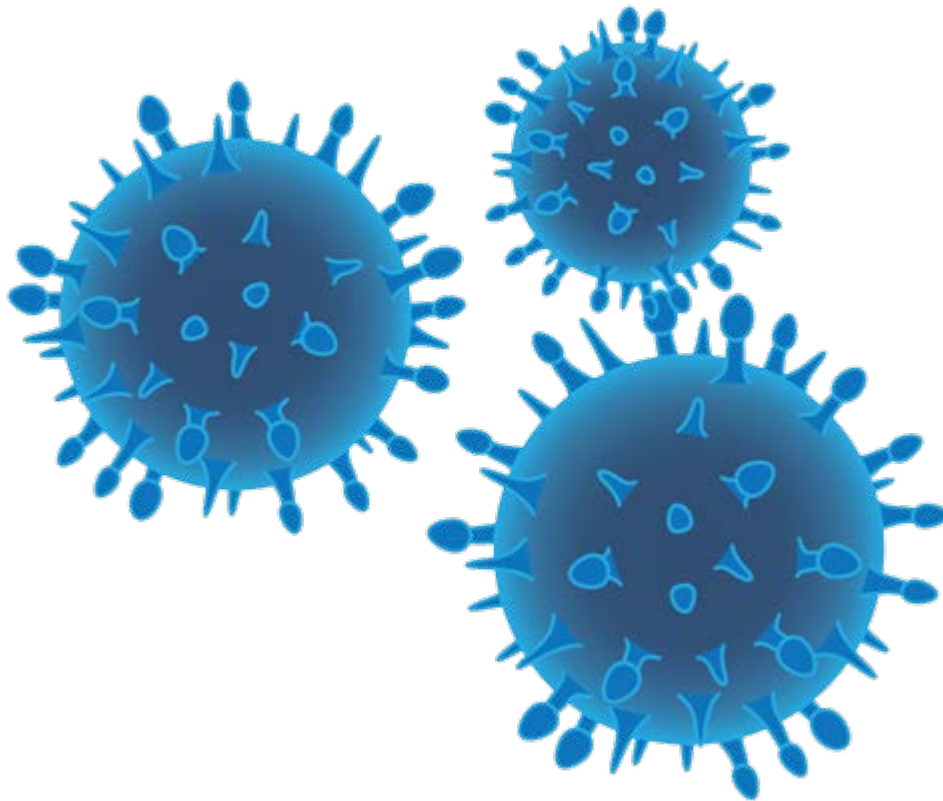


# NEWSCLIPPINGS

*JULY TO DECEMBER 2020*

## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



### Urban Resource Centre

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### 34 die, 2655 test positive for coronavirus in Sindh

The coronavirus has claimed 34 more lives and infected another 2,655 persons overnight, lifting the death toll to 1,377 and tally of the cases to 84,656.

This was stated by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Tuesday in a statement issued here.

He said that 9,435 samples were tested, which detected 2,655 new cases that constituted 28 per cent detection rate.

He added that so far 453,386 tests had been conducted against which 84,656 patients were diagnosed, of them 46,824, including 1,208 overnight, recovered and returned to normal life.

"The recovery rate in Sindh comes to 55 per cent," the CM said.

*Governor inaugurates lab set up by Al-Khidmat in Nazimabad to conduct coronavirus tests*

He said that 34 more patients died lifting the death toll to 1,377 that constituted 1.6pc death ratio.

"We are trying to control the death rate by diagnosing patients in time and [starting] their treatment," he said.

Currently, 36,455 patients are under treatment, of them 34,785 in home isolation, 166 at isolation centres and 1,504 at different hospitals of the province, the CM said, adding that currently 708 patients were in critical condition, of them 102 had been shifted to ventilators.

The CM said that out of 2,655 cases Karachi had 686 new cases, of them 252 in East, 175 in South, 107 in Central, 62 in Malir, 49 in West and 44 cases in Korangi.

He said that Hyderabad had 93 new cases, Ghotki 76, Sukkur 74, Jamshoro 45, Mirpurkhas 34, Khairpur 34, Tando Allahyar 32, Jacobabad 28, Sanghar 23, Shaheed Benazirabad 23, Larkana 22, Shikarpur 19, Qambar 19, Umerkot 12, Dadu 13, Badin and Naushahro Feroze nine each, Sujawal six, Tando Mohammad Khan five, Thatta four and Kashmore and Matiari had one case each.

The chief minister urged the people of Sindh to stay safe by observing safety guidelines issued by the government.

#### **Governor opens testing facility in Nazimabad**

Sindh Governor Imran Ismail on Tuesday inaugurated a Covid-19 testing laboratory in Nazimabad.

The lab, which was set up by Al-Khidmat, the welfare wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami, would conduct tests at nominal charges.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Governor Ismail said that Al-Khidmat was not only a welfare institute but also an honourable and honest organisation, which had set up such a centre that would cater to the needs of underprivileged as well as common citizens.

Al-Khidmat diagnostic project director Prof Naila Tariq briefed the Sindh governor on the initiative and informed him that philanthropists and corporate sector of the country had offered their assistance to establish the laboratory and in the next phase a research academy would also be set up.

She further said that it is a Level-3 laboratory and its tests could be verified by any certified centre. The organisation, she said, would build research data laboratory in order to help the government.

The test reports would be given in 24 hours, she added.

Founder Corporate Group Azfar Ahsan requested the governor to come forward and provide assistance to this institute.

The chairman of the diagnostic complex governing body, Haroon Qasim, expressed gratitude to the Corporate Group for Rs30 million funding and said a research and development project was also under consideration.  
(By Dawn Reporter 13, 01/07/2020)

### 'Lockdown' extended by two weeks in Sindh

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, the Sindh Home Department issued on Wednesday an official notification extending the ongoing lockdown imposed by the provincial government until July 15.

As many as 2,139 new coronavirus cases were reported with a worrying 28 per cent positivity ratio on the day, pushing Sindh's tally to over 86,000 cases. Meanwhile, 29 more patients succumbed to the deadly disease, bringing the provincial death toll to 1,406.

Reiterating that the threat of the virus had increased rather than subsiding, the government notification stated that Covid-19 hotspots may see all activity restricted on the orders of the Sindh government or district administration, if deemed necessary.

Apart from that, all educational and training institutes, marriage halls, business centres and beauty salons are to remain closed and all social, religious and public gatherings banned until the extended date. Moreover, the restrictions on cinema halls, amusement parks, picnic spots, sports clubs, gyms and interprovincial public transport are also to remain in place.

Working hours for shops and trade centres, excepting pharmacies and essential goods providers, are to remain 6am to 7pm from Monday to Friday, while eateries may offer takeaway services from 6am to 7pm and home delivery till 11pm throughout the week.

The notification also urges people to practice precautionary measures, such as using hand sanitisers and face masks and maintaining social distancing, and implement standard operating procedures to prevent the spread of the virus.

#### **Infectious diseases hospital**

Meanwhile, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah announced on Wednesday that the infectious diseases hospital set up for treating Covid-19 patients at University Road would become functional tomorrow (Friday) onwards.

Visiting the 50-bed hospital, which has a six-bed intensive care unit and a high dependency unit, he directed the health department to post well-trained staff at the hospital. "This will be of great help for Covid-19 patients, even if they need oxygen support or ventilators," he said, adding that the radiology facilities would also help save the lives of seriously ill patients by diagnosing chest complications.

The CM further said that a 200-bed hospital for coronavirus patients would be made functional at NIPA in the next few weeks. In a video statement, Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho added that the new infectious diseases hospital was equipped with ventilators, high-flow oxygen and a pharmacy and radiology units for carrying out ultrasound and x-rays, in addition to a semi-private ward.

The facility was disinfected on Wednesday, was to remain close for a day and would be made functional from Friday, the health minister explained.

She added that following the beginning of operations at the NIPA facility, the area's residents would have access to three coronavirus treatment facilities, including the one established at Dow University of Health Sciences' Ojha campus.

#### **Virus tally**

The CM also raised concern over the high positive testing rate for the virus, pointing out that 28 per cent of the 8,201 samples tested for Covid-19 in the last day had been positive - one of the highest rates so far and much higher than the overall detection rate of 19 per cent in Sindh.

On a positive note, however, he said that 1,703 more coronavirus patients had regained health, bringing the total number of recovered patients to 48,527, around 56 per cent of those infected in total.

Furthermore, he disclosed that out of 36,803 patients under treatment, 35,131 were in home isolation, 158 were in isolation centres and 1,514 admitted to different hospitals. He added that 707 patients were in critical condition, with 104 on ventilators.

According to the CM, 1,038 of the new cases were from Karachi, while Hyderabad had 129 new cases, Sukkur 86, Shikarpur 70, Sanghar 66, Larkana 58, Shaheed Benazirabad 50, Mirpurkhas 36, Ghotki 31, Badin 29, Dadu 24, Jacobabad 24, Jamshoro 12, Naushero Feroze 10, Khairpur nine, Matiari eight, Sujawal five, Kashmore three, and Tando Allahyar, Tando Mohammad Khan and Thatta one each.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 02/07/2020)

### **Centre suggests extension of 'smart lockdown' in Karachi**

As the Sindh government extended province-wide lockdown for another 15 days, it remains undecided so far about whether to extend or lift the "smart lockdown" enforced for a fortnight in Covid-19 hotspots in the city that ends at midnight today (the night between Thursday and Friday).

But federal authorities believe the provincial government should continue the same policy as unlike other parts of the country Sindh has not yet shown any stability and it needs to follow the same strategy to achieve desired results.

The suggestion came from the top when a key figure of the federal government, who is responsible for policymaking and executing the strategy in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, while referring to the recent data and numbers saw the Covid-19 situation in the country stabilising, but warned any "mistake" or "relaxation" showed by the people and the administration could cause major damage.

"We have seen positive trend and received positive feedback from three provinces — Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan — as well as Gilgit-Baltistan," Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar told [Dawn](#) on Wednesday when asked about his suggestion and findings about the strategy of the smart lockdown.

*Asad Umar says Covid-19 situation in Sindh 'not so encouraging'*

"But unfortunately, we have not seen such a trend in Sindh. Whether it's number of patients or ratio of positive cases among the tests being held daily, the trend is not so encouraging," he said.

“So I think and suggest that the smart lockdown should continue. But let me make it very clear. We at the centre only identify the areas and suggest the guidelines for better results. The decision regarding any policy and then its execution is totally up to the provincial governments,” Mr Umar said.

The Sindh government on June 18 imposed a lockdown in several parts of Karachi following many such measures in other districts of Sindh after the federal government identified 20 potential Covid-19 hotspots where restrictive measures were needed to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The move came after the local administration moved into action to place same restrictions in several areas of different districts of Sindh including Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Umerkot, Ghotki and Khairpur.

Though the lockdowns were lifted after completing two-week cycle in a number of areas of different Sindh districts, the fate of policy is not known yet.

#### **Commissioner says decision expected today**

When contacted, Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani told [Dawn](#) that any decision taken by the authorities would be made public by the evening today (Thursday).

Meanwhile, Mr Umar, who's also the coordinator of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) which consists of senior civil and military officials, believed it's time to show more responsibility in view of the recent change in behaviour of the society and successful efforts from the respective administrations.

“We have reached this stable condition due to a positive change in the people's lives, which they have brought due to awareness, government campaign and learning about the precautions every day,” he said. “The efforts of the administration have also played a key role in implementing the guidelines. But let me request everyone that please make no mistake — the virus and threat is still here. We need to keep this going and should not get relaxed.”

He was referring to a new spike in the United States where with the reopening of the economy and businesses, the people returned to daily life with a thought that the virus threat was over. They showed carelessness and gave up all precautions, which brought another wave of positive cases, he said and added: “But we have to be cautious and never make this mistake here. We have to prove ourselves a responsible nation.”

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 02/07/2020)

### **SEPA issues guidelines for Covid-19 waste disposal**

The Sindh Environmental Protection Agency issued on Wednesday guidelines for healthcare facilities on the handling and disposal of Covid-19 patients' waste.

As per the instructions issued by SEPA, on the directives of the Sindh chief minister's adviser on environment Murtaza Wahab, the guidelines are to be adopted by facilities treating Covid-19 patients across the province.

The guidelines, issued under Section 6 of the Sindh Environmental Protection Act, 2014, state that facilities' owners and management will be responsible for ensuring the proper handling and disposal of the waste.

#### **Waste collection, transfer and disposal**

The waste is to be first shifted to a storage room at the facility from the place of production, before being transported to a waste disposal site, also located on the facility's premise. It may then either be treated at the facility's disposal site or be prepared for transportation to another location for treatment.

It is to be packed in at least two thick plastic bags tied properly, which in turn are to be put in hard containers labelled 'Covid-19', with each bag not weighing more than 10 kilogrammes.

All facilities are required to maintain a record of the number of bags disposed of, waste containers transported to disposal sites in dedicated vehicles, the number of trips made to waste disposal sites and the quantity of waste disposed of during each trip. Besides, the guidelines state, the incinerators being employed for the purpose must comprise two chambers with suitable temperatures and ideally work on the mechanism of plasma gasification.

#### **Disinfection**

In addition, the guidelines outline the method for disinfecting the containers and vehicles used for carrying and storing the waste.

The inner and outer surfaces of the containers are to be disinfected at least three times a day, and vehicles after each trip.

#### **Instructions for staff**

The guidelines require each facility to constitute a dedicated team to collect and handle Covid-19 patients' waste. This staff, as well as those transporting and incinerating it, is to wear PPE and make use of appropriate gadgets.

Besides, staff handling and disposing of the waste are to be tested for the coronavirus every alternate day, while workers having cough, fever or any other illness are not to transport the waste and must use sanitisers before entering healthcare facilities, especially after transporting the waste to disposal sites.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 04, 02/07/2020)

## Covid waste disposal

In view of the highly contagious nature of the coronavirus disease, the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency has issued guidelines for safe disposal of Covid-19 waste. All facilities treating the disease have been told to strictly adhere to the guidelines to protect those involved in the treatment and allied activities from the disease. The guidelines are part of the overall preventive measures. They make it mandatory for facilities' management to ensure proper handling and disposal of the waste.

First, the waste will be shifted to a storage room before being transferred to a waste disposal site, either located on the premises of the hospitals, or to be transported to another location for treatment. It is to be packed in two thick plastic bags, which are to be tightly tied. It is then to be put in hard containers labelled Covid-19. Each bag should not contain more than 10kgs of the waste. All facilities will have to maintain the record of the number of bags disposed of, waste containers transported to disposal sites in vehicles marked for the purpose, the number of trips made to the waste disposal site and the amount of waste disposed during each trip. The incinerators must consist of two chambers with suitable temperature and work on the mechanism of plasma gasification.

The guidelines mention the methods to be adopted for disinfecting the containers used for transporting and storing the waste. The inner and outer surfaces of the containers are to be disinfected at least thrice a day and the vehicles after each trip. All facilities treating coronavirus should constitute dedicated teams to collect and handle Covid-19 patients' waste. All those involved in the handling and disposal of such waste should wear personal protection equipment and use the necessary gadgets. All workers involved in collecting and disposing of such waste should undergo tests for coronavirus every alternate day. Those having fever, cough or any other illness should not transport the waste.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 03/07/2020)

## 'Smart lockdown' extended in some areas

The Sindh government on Friday extended the "smart lockdown" in parts of South and West districts of Karachi for another 15 days to contain the spread of coronavirus.

A statement issued by the office of the Karachi commissioner said that several neighbourhoods in West and South districts would remain under the smart lockdown till July 16 in line with the advice of the provincial health department.

The areas in West district included Gadap's UC-5 Songal (Gulshan-i-Maymar Blocks X, Y and Z), Keamari's UC-3 (Docks and Majeed Colony), Baldia UC-5 Saeedabad (Block 5G, 5J and A3), SITE UC-4 Metroville (Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), Orangi Town's UC-11 Data Nagar (Area A/B), Orangi Town's UC-12 Mujahid Colony (Millatabad and Ghulamabad Aligarh Colony).

In South district, the lockdown was extended in Civil Lines (Khayaban-i-Rahat, Clifton Block 4, 5 and Bath Island localities), Arambagh (Khorri Garden and Machi Miyani Market in Kharadar), Garden (Jillani Masjid Road, Hari Masjid Road, Shoe Market and Doli Khata), Lyari (Madni Road Moosa Lane), Saddar (Bizerta Line).

During the smart lockdown, movement would remain restricted. All sorts of public transport including ride-hailing services will also remain suspended. Only grocery stores and pharmacies will be allowed to remain open and only one person per household can leave to buy food or medicine," said the notification issued by the respective deputy commissioner office.

## 22 more die of Covid-19

As many as 1,496 new cases emerged when 10,027 samples were tested raising the tally to 90,721 while 22 more patients lost their lives overnight lifting the death toll to 1,437.

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah disclosed this in a statement issued here from CM House on Friday.

According to the CM, 10,027 samples were tested, which detected 1,496 cases constituting 15 per cent result.

He said that the government had tested 481,050 samples which detected 90,721 cases all over Sindh, of them 50,908 recovered, including 982 overnight.

"The recovery rate of coronavirus patients in Sindh stands at 56pc," Mr Shah said. The statement added that 22 more patients of Covid-19 died lifting the death toll to 1,459 that constituted 1.6pc death rate.

The chief minister said that at present 38,354 patients were under treatment, of them 36,452 in home isolation, 298 at isolation centres and 1,604 at different hospitals.

He added that out of 1,604 hospitalised patients, 653 were in critical condition, 104 were on ventilators while 847 were stated to be stable.

The CM said that out of 1,496 new cases of coronavirus, Karachi had 750 cases, including East 217, South 182, Central 129, Malir 82, Korangi 79 and West 61.

He added that Sukkur had 44 new cases, Sanghar 44, Badin 41, Ghotki 40, Khairpur 29, Thatta 26, Qambar 22, Shaheed Benazirabad 17, Jamshoro and Shikarpur 11 each, Kashmore seven, Larkana six, Dadu and Naushahro Feroze five each, Jacobabad four, Umerkot three, Tando Allahyar two, Tando Mohammad Khan and Mirpurkhas have one each.

(By Dawn Report 13, 04/07/2020)

## Another set of virus hotspots sealed in Karachi

Lifting the 'smart lockdown' from 41 union councils (UCs) of the metropolis, the city administration sealed another set of coronavirus hotspots in Karachi on Friday.

The move comes as Federal Planning and Development Minister told the media in Islamabad that Karachi had yet to see improvements with regard to implementing Covid-19 standard operating procedures.

The Karachi commissioner's office issued a notification on the day locking down localities for up to two weeks. The deputy commissioners (DCs) of East, South, West and Malir districts further identified the areas to be sealed, which had been highlighted as having coronavirus clusters by district health officers.

In West district, the areas to be sealed include Gulshan-e-Maymar Blocks X, Y and Z in Gadap UC-5 Songal, Docks and Majeed Colony in Keamari UC-3, Saeedabad Block 5G, 5J and A3 in Baldia Town UC-5, Metroville Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in SITE's UC-4, and Data Nagar's Area A/B as well as Millatabad, Gulfamabad and Aligarh Colony in Orangi Town UC-11 and UC-12.

These areas have been sealed for two weeks, from July 3 till July 17, according to the West DC's notification.

Meanwhile, in South district, the locked down localities include Khori Garden Market and Machi Miyani Market in Arambagh, Khayaban-e-Rahat, Clifton Blocks 4 and 5 and Bath Island in Civil Lines, Doli Khata, Shoe Market and all commercial areas of Jeelani Masjid Road and Hari Masjid Road in Garden, Madni Road and Moosa Lane in Lyari, and Bizerta Line in Saddar. These areas are to remain sealed until July 16.

Separately, the Malir DC's office imposed a complete lockdown on Gulshan-e-Hadeed Phase I and II in Bin Qasim UC-6 until Tuesday. Only essential services are to operate here while the Rangers' services have been sought to ensure the restrictions on movement and adherence to the standard operating procedures.

The East DC followed suit, announcing several areas to be locked down in the district from Saturday until July 18. These include Gulshan-e-Iqbal Blocks 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 13-A, 13-B, 13-C and 13-D/1, as well as Gulistan-e-Jauhar Block 13, PECHS Block 2 and Tariq Road.

A complete lockdown is to be implemented in the earmarked areas, whereby movement will be restricted and business activity suspended. Only grocery and pharmacy stores will be permitted to operate, Monday through Friday, from 6am to 7pm.

All persons entering and exiting the sealed areas will be required to wear masks. Directives issued earlier will be in place once again, with only one member of a household, carrying their CNIC, allowed to leave the house to purchase groceries, medicines and other essential items.

Home delivery or takeaway from eateries will also not be permitted in the sealed areas, nor will gatherings be allowed in private residences. Public transport and private ride-hailing services have also been barred in these localities.

The notifications state that efforts will be made to provide rations to the needy in these areas, via philanthropic organisations and government resources, while authorities will strive to provide mobile dispensaries and mobile utility stores.

### Reopening UCs

Meanwhile, the city's localities that were sealed in the previous iteration of the smart lockdown returned to normal on Friday.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Karachi commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani said that a 15-day lockdown had been imposed earlier in the UCs worst affected by the virus, according to a health department report. "The smart lockdown will not be extended in these UCs and trade and other activities have been normalised," he said.

### Restrictions remain

On Wednesday, the Sindh government had extended measures in place to control the spread of the coronavirus till July 15. Reiterating that the threat of the virus had increased rather than subsiding, a government notification stated that Covid-19 hotspots could see all activity restricted on the orders of the Sindh government or district administration.

Apart from that, all educational and training institutes, marriage halls, business centres and beauty salons are to remain closed and all social, religious and public gatherings banned until the extended date. Moreover, the restrictions on cinema halls, amusement parks, picnic spots, sports clubs, gyms and interprovincial public transport are also to remain in place.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 04/07/2020)

## Covid-19 and the working class

The Covid-19 pandemic has directly hit the pockets of over half of the country's working population, according to a worrying new survey. The survey by Dun & Bradstreet Pakistan and Gallup Pakistan found that 54% of the respondents had either lost their jobs or accepted pay-cuts due to the pandemic. Even more worried that they could be sacked in the near future. The only 'bright spot' in the survey would appear to be the sample size — only 1,291 respondents.

Still, given that 18% of respondents had lost their jobs and 59% were worried about job security, we can safely assume that even if this is the gloomiest possible picture, the rosier one would not be very heartening either. Then there is the fact that job



losses were higher among lower-income workers — people who have little to no savings and could lose everything without steady cash flow. The economic uncertainty has also hit consumer spending, with apparel and footwear sales down almost 40%, and cleaning supply sales booming, up 32%. Even the wealthier respondents saw nonessential spending such as apparel and entertainment crash by over 50% each. This is concerning, because even if the crisis ends in six months, as many believe, the fallout will last for many years after.

There is also the issue of the government's failure to make something good come out of all this madness. Earlier, we noted that the pandemic presented a golden opportunity to encourage a transition to digital payments. Unfortunately, only 15% of respondents said they had tried using digital payments for the first time, with the number being highest in Sindh, at 21%. It is disappointing that people would still rather risk their health by using ATMs and other contact-based services rather than the safer touchless options that have become widely available. While lack of education is a factor, which banks and other providers should have focused more energy on, the fact is that such transactions also presented significant health benefits. This makes the failure to promote such solutions a failure for the government, especially since it also presented an opportunity to quietly improve documentation of the economy.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 07/07/2020)

### **Survey of coronavirus-tested people launched across Pakistan to build 'confirmative database'**

The fraternity of medical scientists, key public health institutions and leading healthcare professionals on Wednesday launched a national survey of people tested for the coronavirus in Pakistan that the experts said would build "confirmative database" of the pandemic in the country, leading to immediate and drastic measures while helping the decision-makers to devise their strategy in line with trends and numbers.

The announcement of the launch came during a press conference, which was addressed by leading health professionals and senior medical scientists who said the survey was being initiated across the country by the Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA) in collaboration with the Health Research Advisory Board (HealthRab) and the National Institute of Health (NIH). They jointly addressed the conference through video link from different cities of the country.

They said the survey of Covid-19 tested people would help understand symptomology of the viral disease in relation to age, gender, and comorbidities. It would also bring the course of the disease with its implications into the knowledge of healthcare professionals while highlighting the psychological impact of the disease on various age groups.

*Medical scientists, leading healthcare professionals say the study will help understand symptomology of the viral disease*

"More importantly it would help in determining ultimate outcomes of the disease," said Dr Zakiuddin Ahmed of HealthRab. "Around the world and mostly in the developed countries, we have seen that the numbers, data and consistent research on the virus helped them in devising their strategy which proved successful. We are making the same effort here to gather the numbers, build the strong and authentic database and then help our policymakers to go for the decision in line with the existing trend."

Dr Mumtaz Ali Khan from the NIH said the number of coronavirus cases in the country had started dropping during the last couple of weeks but at the same time he mentioned that the figure of testing across Pakistan had also declined during the same period. However, he said the situation would become stable because the number of hospitalisations had decreased over the past few days while the availability of beds and crucial support for serious patients at the health facilities had increased during the same period.

#### **'Don't repeat mistakes'**

"But we don't have to repeat mistakes during the upcoming Eidul Azha which we did during Eidul Fitr," said Dr Khan. "We have to be very cautious and never repeat the mistakes here. We have to prove ourselves a responsible nation. There is no evidence to foresee that when we can witness another wave but around the world we have seen outbreaks one after another. So we have to live with it and stay vigilant, alert and cautious."

Prof Afzal Mian, the PIMA president, said that his organisation from day one had been assisting the government functionaries and also helping the health facilities both from private and public sectors in terms of supplies of personal protective equipment, capacity building and providing human resource in such challenging times.

"We believe that we should make some scientific contribution and this survey actually would be the first of its kind in the country which would help in assessing this pandemic trend in Pakistan. Once it's done we would be launching more such studies in collaboration with the local and international bodies," he said.

Prof Dr Abdul Basit, vice chairman of HealthRab, said the outbreak of Covid-19 in the country brought several speculations and a storm of information, which over the past few months proved wrong and some was gathered to be authentic.

"For instance there was a general misconception that Covid-19 badly affects diabetes patients and people with respiratory issues,"

said Prof Basit, who is also a member of the International Diabetes Federation, Diabetes Atlas Committee in Pakistan. "But now it's a proven fact that there's fewer than 10 per cent Covid-19 patients who are diabetics and there are one to two per cent people having respiratory issues who have been hit by the coronavirus. People of over 90 years have recovered from the disease. A majority of the patients of this disease don't even need treatment."

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 09/07/2020)

## Educationists discuss challenges of teaching rural students amid pandemic

'Is access to education during the Covid-19 pandemic a privilege or a right?' This was the topic of an online session organised by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) through Zoom on Thursday.



The speakers were Sadiqa Salahuddin, founder and executive director of the Indus Resource Centre, and Rahila Fatima, head of strategic development, The Citizens Foundation (TCF), with Kausar S. Khan, adviser, community engagement with the Indus Health Network, as the moderator.

"These days we find people talk of theory while being behind on practice. So we thought of listening to our two educationists today to understand their way of practice in continuing with the education of students during the Covid-19 situation to develop theory from there," said Kausar Khan.

Talking about their method of teaching before the pandemic and how they are continuing with their work under the present circumstances, Ms Salahuddin said that with most of their schools, including those which they are running in partnership with the government, located in Sindh's interior, they could not really run them sitting in Karachi without getting the people there involved.

"For this, we have village education committees where our teachers, who are also local, keep in touch with the students in their localities in order to keep them engaged in their education. Having local teachers is an advantage that way," she said.

*'We have village education committees where our teachers keep in touch with the students'*

She also explained about their project where there are certain people already looking after the affairs of their teachers and staff while monitoring their progress. "Teachers are encouraged to focus on an education that doesn't overlook co-curricular activities and local culture."

Coming to the Covid-19 period, she said there is no need to feel inferiority complex when looking at online classes being organised by elite schools. "We have equipment issues, budget issues, so we can't be like them," she said.

She continued that the lockdown happened in late February when their school students were preparing for their final exams that were to take place in March. "When we realised that the students were going to miss their exams, we got in touch with our project staff to connect with their head teachers and prepare and deliver worksheets to students for them to be able to solve at home. But it was not easy when we realised that photocopying 20 sheets each for 3,000 children cost a lot. Still, the students who were being given the work happily did it. Their enthusiasm made us prepare more worksheets for them," she said.

She pointed out that even though only 13 per cent of the students had access to smartphones in villages, their teachers had them and they all remained in touch regarding their students' progress. It formed useful clusters of teacher networks. Some teachers also recorded teaching videos and uploaded them on YouTube for their students. They were teaching in Sindhi, English and they were also holding mathematics classes. And in doing all this, their own confidence was also building as was capacity among them.

"The village children were kept involved in their studies this way. But they have also been asking when the schools will reopen because the five hours they spend in school allows them to enjoy their childhood, as the rest of the time they are involved in doing domestic chores," she said.

Rahila Fatima then explained how they kept the students in their over 1,600 schools all over the country, not lose touch with their education. "During the initial days of Covid-19 we were confused ourselves as we thought that things would normalise soon," she said.

"But when that didn't happen, we initiated desk research to look at how other countries were able to carry out the schooling of their students during other pandemics such as Ebola or SARS. In doing so we also reached out to organisations in those countries to understand how they went about things.

"One thing was clear. We needed to keep the children motivated so that they come back to school when schools reopen," she said. "We did this through airing our programme *Ilm ka Angan* on PTV's *Taaleem Ghar* channel along with other channels. For older students of classes five to eight, we came out with an educational and entertainment magazine with several stories and activities for which they could also send in stuff. The magazine, which first came out in May as a pilot publication is now fortnightly and our students can lay their hands on it during the brief two-hour weekly sessions with their local teachers that focus on revision, recall and practice," she said.

For older students of classes nine and 10, she said the TCF set timetables to connect with students through smartphones. "We found someone in their family or neighbourhood with a smartphone that they could borrow for two to three hours three or four times a week for studying purposes," she said.

Finally, Kaleem Durrani, regional coordinator for the HRCP, thanked the participants and those who joined them for their valuable input.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 10/07/2020)



## Education and Covid

I HAD just delivered two lectures to my history of economic thought class at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics when the universities were closed because of Covid-19. The only guideline from the PIDE was to continue online, if I could. For the next two weeks, I tried using a digital link, only to give up after two attempts for three reasons.

First, students from remote areas — Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK, KP's merged districts and Balochistan — had poor connectivity. Second, poorer students had no access to smart devices. Third, others lacked a corner of their own to participate undisturbed. The pandemic is no equaliser: there is a great digital divide across regions as well as income groups. The divide across the globe is even more glaring. Checking with the two universities abroad that I had attended, University of Colorado [UC] at Boulder and University of Cambridge, I found out that the switchover to distance learning was almost instant.

On March 24, Cambridge moved all face-to-face teaching online. Colleges offered accommodation to health staff and departments offered assistance in testing. Faculty epidemiologists, pathologists, immunologists, mathematicians and veterinary scientists supplemented public services. Other academics advised companies on challenges faced by manufacturing and mapped the virus's genetic evolution. A novel idea was the early graduation of the medical students to join the public health services. The VC messaged that teaching and research online was not the same but it was working. Actually, it worked so well that Cambridge has decided to remain online for the next academic year, whatever the position of the curve.

*The students went home and the universities were closed.*

By moving to remote teaching and working on March 11, UC Boulder was the first public university in the state of Colorado to do so. Students were provided some flexibility by beefing up pass/fail options. Medical faculty and researchers were placed at the disposal of the governor. Researchers began testing antibodies and therapies for Covid-19. Students, faculty, staff, parents, community members were consulted to prioritise health and safety measures and formulate an on-campus academic model to accommodate both in-person and remote learning. The result was A Road Map to Fall 2020 plan. Classes will begin on Aug 24 and finish online after Thanksgiving. The Road Map was billed as “the beginning of a return to campus,” with an iterative implementation process to enable continuous adjustment in the light of new information. The university also started webinars on Covid-19-related issues of public interest.

In the words of the UC president: “Life didn't stop when we moved to remote teaching in mid-March in response to Covid-19, but our campuses became different places almost overnight, with the normal hustle and bustle replaced by a strange quiet. Yet our faculty quickly pivoted to remote teaching and learning.” The university had been working on an Online Learning Project and Transformation and Innovation Programme. Covid-19 provided the opportunity to accelerate them.

Out here, the students just went home and the universities were closed. The latter were not seen to be thinking ahead. Somewhat late for the ongoing semester, the lead had to be taken by the regulator, the Higher Education Commission, more because of its dynamic chairman than any institutional inclination. The chairman laid out his plans in an excellent article in this paper.

Noting the poor starting point and where he would like to go, he wrote: “At this point, only the best universities and the most committed and dynamic vice chancellors will be able to launch a few high-quality online courses. But if preparations are taken in hand right away, others will be able to catch up by June. HEC is assisting universities in a number of ways, including arranging software and connectivity packages, curating online materials and training programmes, building a data repository, providing guidance on quality enhancement, and setting up and adapting monitoring and evaluation systems.”

Coinciding with the closure of the universities by the government on March 26, the HEC's Technology Support Committee issued a working paper on how to transition to virtual instruction. In a series of online conferences with the stakeholders, the chairman attempted to build a consensus on online readiness, assessments, examinations and thesis defence. Remote education leaves remote areas remoter.

The announcement of a special package of Rs285 million for universities of Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, and tripling of Fata University funding, should help. The launch of the Rapid Research and Innovation Fund to support university research on Covid-19 is timely. These are, however, only small steps to help universities help themselves. It remains to be seen which ones would reflect Robert Frost: “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — / I took the one less travelled by,/ And that has made all the difference.” (By Pervez Tahir Dawn, 07, 13/07/2020)

### NDMA to provide 525 beds to Sindh hospitals

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) will be providing 525 beds as well as ventilators to different hospitals in Sindh, announced NDMA chairperson Lieutenant General Muhammad Afzal on Monday.

While visiting various hospitals in Karachi, Lt Gen Afzal revealed that the NDMA would provide 525 beds to six hospitals in Sindh, including Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH) and Sindh Government Qatar Hospital. He further disclosed that ASH in particular would receive 125 beds, 18 ventilators and 29 BiPap ventilators.

He also met Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and discussed strategies to control the spread of Covid-19 in the province as well as combat the locust swarms.

According to Lt Gen Afzal, the National Locust Control Centre had played an effective role in dealing with the pests. He added that insects have been eliminated in Punjab while efforts to eliminate them are being taken in Sindh.

Ismail appreciated the NDMA for its efforts to control of the spread of coronavirus and locusts in the province.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 14/07/2020)

### **75% Pakistani adults facing stress during pandemic, reveals study**

Three out of four Pakistani adults are suffering from moderate or high levels of stress during Covid-19 pandemic while nearly one in three are experiencing moderate or severe anxiety, according to the preliminary findings of a mental health study conducted by Aga Khan University (AKU).

Raising alarm over the findings, academics and researchers at AKU called for devising policies to limit the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on mental health.

#### **The survey**

The study is based on conclusions derived from an online survey conducted by researcher from the department of community health sciences (CHS) at AKU. It included responses from 373 individuals, more than 90 per cent of whom belonged to Punjab and Sindh.

Respondents participating in the survey ranked the top three causes of anxiety and stress as being fear of contracting the coronavirus, financial losses during the pandemic and losing a loved one to Covid-19.

The study also found a high correlation between exposure to rumours via WhatsApp and anxiety or stress, since more than eight out of ten respondents suffering from the two conditions were using this social media platform.

#### **Pandemic's psychological impact**

Speaking on the matter, Prof Sameen Siddiqi, the chairperson of CHS department at AKU, said, "The pandemic has exposed our social and economic vulnerabilities and created widespread uncertainty in society. If left unchecked, stress associated with Covid-19 can lead to distress, and the distress can lead to disease."

The study's principal investigator Maryam Lakhdir said, "The findings suggest that we are at risk of a mental health crisis during a pandemic. Policymakers must prioritise psycho-social interventions to limit the chances of long-lasting scars on our mental health," she said.

Speaking in relevance to misinformation regarding the pandemic, Dr Romaina Iqbal, the head of CHS's non-communicable diseases and mental health section, pointed out that "Misinformation, conspiracy theories, and rumour mongering are likely to lead to mental health issues during the pandemic.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 15, 15/07/2020)

### **Covid-19 puts Pakistan at risk of mental health crisis, study suggests**

Seventy-five per cent Pakistani adults are experiencing stress and anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic, preliminary findings of a recent Aga Khan University (AKU) study show, suggesting that the country is at risk of a mental health crisis.

High levels of stress and anxiety, the research found, were borne out of fears of contracting the life-threatening virus, losing a loved one to the virus or financial losses during the pandemic.

The study was conducted by AKU's department of community health sciences (CHS) through an online survey of 373 respondents between April and May — the first phase of the study.

It used validated screening tools to determine if people had generalised anxiety disorder, perceived stress or both conditions. More than 90 per cent of the participants were from Sindh and Punjab.

According to the study, three out of four Pakistani adults are suffering from moderate or high levels of stress during the Covid-19 pandemic while nearly one in three were experiencing moderate or severe anxiety.

Respondents ranked the top three causes of anxiety and stress as being fear of contracting the virus, financial losses during the pandemic and losing a loved one to Covid-19.

#### **Mental health crisis**

Survey participants were much more concerned about their loved ones catching the disease with nearly eight out of 10 respondents, or 76pc, feeling a lot of fear or extreme fear of those close to them falling ill.

In contrast, four of 10 respondents, or 36pc, reported a lot of fear or extreme fear about catching the virus themselves.

"The pandemic has exposed our social and economic vulnerabilities and created widespread uncertainty in society," said Prof Sameen Siddiqi, the CHS department chair.

"If left unchecked, stress associated with Covid-19 can lead to distress and the distress can lead to disease."

Those already suffering from anxiety and stress are especially vulnerable to advanced illnesses such as depression and other mental health disorders, added Maryam Lakhdar, the study's principal investigator and senior instructor at the CHS department.

"The findings suggest that we are at risk of a mental health crisis during the pandemic. Policymakers must prioritise psychosocial interventions to limit the chances of long-lasting scars on our mental health," she said.

#### **Role of social media**

The study also found a high correlation between exposure to rumours via WhatsApp and anxiety or stress, since more than eight out of 10 respondents suffering from the two conditions were using this social media platform. Respondents who reported frequently checking the news also had more anxiety and stress.

"Misinformation, conspiracy theories, and rumour mongering are likely to lead to mental health issues during the pandemic," said Dr Romaina Iqbal, the lead of CHS's non-communicable diseases and mental health section.

The study will continue to enrol participants until the end of August and findings will continue to be released to monitor changes in the population's mental health.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 16/07/2020)

### **US Covid-19 response**

CONFIRMED Covid-19 cases in the US are reaching record levels, exposing the poor leadership amidst a horrific global pandemic. On July 15, a new peak of 67,400 cases was reported, which followed a week of over 62,000 cases per day — a figure triple the average number of cases from just a month ago. To the apprehension of doctors and scientists, US President Donald Trump remains casual and continues to attribute the increase in cases to 'ramped-up testing'. Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Anthony Fauci has contradicted Mr Trump's claim, and said the recent surge in cases is a sign of an expanding outbreak and not increased testing. Unfortunately, not only is Mr Trump's laid-back outlook on the pandemic in sharp contrast to Dr Fauci's concerns, the White House has even engaged in bizarre attempts to discredit the respected health expert.

That the US president is taking the outbreak of this potentially fatal virus lightly is a sad indictment of America's present-day position as the so-called leader of the free world. From the very start, Mr Trump's messaging on Covid-19 has been lackadaisical and starkly opposed to the ominous warnings being issued by top American experts who predict that the virus is taking on an even more dangerous trajectory. After indulging in a racist blame game with China over the source of the infection, Mr Trump is still not making responsible decisions. Not only is he rarely seen wearing a mask in public, his energy and time in recent weeks have been devoted to attacking the media and downplaying the Covid-19 threat. In fact, Mr Trump and his administration have called into question the decisions of the WHO, and pressured the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. The president's reckless and irresponsible attitude towards the pandemic is a major reason behind the high number of daily cases and death rates in the country. Poor political leadership and weak messaging have resulted in American citizens paying a heavy price.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 17/07/2020)

### **'Smart lockdown' in parts of Sindh extended for another month**

The Sindh government on Thursday extended for another month the 'smart lockdown' in different districts of the province, including a number of areas in Karachi, warning that the curbs could stay in place until the spread of the coronavirus was "completely" contained.

The fresh announcement came through a notification issued by the Sindh home department, which referred to detailed discussions with the National Command and Operation Centre that led to the extension of the smart lockdown.

The provincial government used its powers under the Sindh Epidemic Diseases Act 2014 to extend the lockdown. The Pakistan Peoples Party government again warned that it could not allow reopening economy at the cost of human lives.

"The extension of lockdown period in the province has been done in view of the situation," said Information Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah in a statement.

"Given the current situation in the country, any kind of adventure would be detrimental. The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc all over the world and its obvious effects could be felt in all countries. In all these periods, the comprehensive and integrated policy implemented by the Sindh government from day one has yielded very encouraging and positive results."

He said there was an atmosphere of uncertainty in the country at the moment in which everyone seemed to be business-minded. There was no doubt that it was very important to keep the wheel of the country's economy moving.

"But if business is at the cost of human lives, the Sindh government cannot allow it. We have conditionally allowed business and social activities under the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court and the federal government, but we hope that this concession will not be taken advantage of," said Mr Shah.

He said that until the epidemic was "completely" eradicated from the country, the people needed to be extremely careful. In the coming days, he said, it would be decided which departments could be made fully operational.

"But before that any kind of haste or rumour should be avoided. Let me make it very clear that public gatherings, including weddings in marriage halls [and] hotelling are banned across the province and strict action would be taken against those found violating the defined rules," added the minister.

### **34 more coronavirus patients die**

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said on Thursday that 34 more coronavirus patients died and 1,155 cases emerged during the past 24 hours.

In a statement issued regularly from the CM House, he said that 10,574 samples were tested against which 1,155 new cases emerged, constituting an 11 per cent detection rate.

The chief minister said that so far 615,302 tests had been conducted which detected 110,068 cases all over Sindh that came to an 18pc detection ratio.

He said that 34 more patients died, lifting the death toll to 1,922 that constituted 1.7pc death rate in Sindh.

The CM added that currently 34,070 patients were under treatment; of them 33,094 in home isolation, 53 at isolation centres and 923 at different hospitals. "The condition of 738 patients is stated to be critical. Of them, 105 have been shifted to ventilators," he said.

The chief minister said that 3,775 more patients recovered. "The number of patients recovered so far has reached 74,076 that constitutes a 67 per cent recovery rate," he added.

Murad Ali Shah said that out of 1,155 new cases, 407 were detected in Karachi. They include 120 in district East, 104 in South, 64 in Central, 49 in Malir, 45 in Korangi and 25 cases in district West.

He said Shaheed Benazirabad had 53, Khairpur 49, Larkana 40, Ghotki 41, Sukkur 38, Naushahro Feroze 37, Hyderabad 33, Jacobabad 29, Thatta 21, Badin 19 cases, Sanghar 18, Matiari 18, Qambar 17, Shikarpur 16, Jamshoro 15, Kashmore 14, Mirpurkhas 13, Dadu 14, Sujawal 10, Umerkot five and Tando Mohammad Khan had one case.

(By Dawn Reporter 13, 17/07/2020)

## **2,580 police officials infected with Covid-19 in Sindh**

At least 16 out of 2,580 police officials infected with coronavirus in Sindh had died since the pandemic broke out in the country, whereas 960 had recovered and 1,604 were under treatment, revealed Sindh IGP Mushtaq Mahar on Saturday.

Addressing a meeting of the Sindh Public Safety and Police Complaints Commission (SPSC) at the Chief Minister House, he told the forum that police officials were being trained about necessary precautionary measures so they could safely perform their duties safely.

As Mahar added that the police were performing their duties selflessly during the ongoing pandemic, SPSC secretary Saifullah Abro praised the law enforcers' efforts.

Abro also told the meeting that public complaints filed against police officials had been disposed of by the relevant committees, including complaints pertaining to exerting pressure to usurp land adjacent to a water park in Sukkur. The meeting's participants were told that after investigation, an FIR was registered and the case sent to the court of law.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MPA Mohammad Ali Aziz voiced concerns about growing street crime in the port city. At this, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said the Karachi police chief would be invited to the next meeting to brief the commission about street crime in the metropolis and the measures taken by the police to curb the menace.

The issue of providing vehicles to SPSC officials was also raised in the meeting, with the CM informing the participants that purchasing vehicles had presently been banned by the Supreme Court. "We will purchase vehicles when the court grants permission," he said.

SPSC members also lauded the Khairpur police for arresting the retired teacher and tutor accused of sexually assaulting his students. They expressed the hope that the case would be investigated properly so that everyone involved could be brought to justice.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 19/07/2020)

## **16 of 2580 policemen infected by Covid-19 died, meeting told**

Covid-19 has infected 2,580 policemen; 16 of them have died and 1,604 are under treatment while 960 have recovered. Therefore, the policemen being front-line workers have been given necessary training so that they could perform their duty safely.

This was stated on Saturday in a meeting of the Public Safety and Police Complaints Commission here at CM House under the chairmanship of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah.

The meeting was attended by Adviser on Law Murtaza Wahab, MPAs Sharjeel Memon, Imdad Pitafi, Mohammad Ali Aziz, Husnain Mirza, Shamim Mumtaz, Dr Shajila Leghari, Karamat Ali, Nazim Haji, Barrister Haya Eman, Rubina Brohi, Jhamat Mal, Qurban Malano, Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, Inspector General of Police Mushtaq Mahar and others.

IG Mahar said that the policemen being front-line workers were performing duties selflessly during the ongoing pandemic. He said Covid-19 infected 2,580 policemen, and 16 of them died; 1,604 were under treatment and 960 had recovered.

The public safety commission appreciated the Sindh police for performing duties during the ongoing pandemic.

Secretary of the commission Saifullah Abro told the meeting that the public complaints filed against the police officers had been disposed of by the committees concerned.

The meeting was told that after a complaint filed against a former police officer for exerting pressure to usurp land adjacent to a water park in Sukkur, an FIR was registered and the case was in court.

MPA Mohammad Ali Aziz raised the issue of growing street crime in Karachi.

At this, the chief minister said that in the next meeting the additional inspector general of Karachi would be asked to brief the members on the street crime activities and the measures taken by the police.

The members took up the issue of providing vehicles to the public safety commission officers.

The chief minister said that because of a ban by the Supreme Court, the purchase of vehicles was stopped. "We will purchase vehicles when the court grants permission," he said.

The members of the commission appreciated the Khairpur police for arresting the suspects involved in immoral activities against children. The members said they hoped a proper investigation would be conducted into the case so that the entire gang could be brought to book.

The chief minister said the next meeting of the commission would be convened in August, adding that meetings of the commission could not be held due to the coronavirus, but now they would be convened on time.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 19/07/2020)

**Two studies offer hope for Covid-19 vaccine**

Two studies offered new hope of a potential vaccine for the novel coronavirus on Monday, seven months after the disease was first identified in China and spread rapidly across the globe.

**COVID-19: Total deaths vs deaths per million**

As of July 20

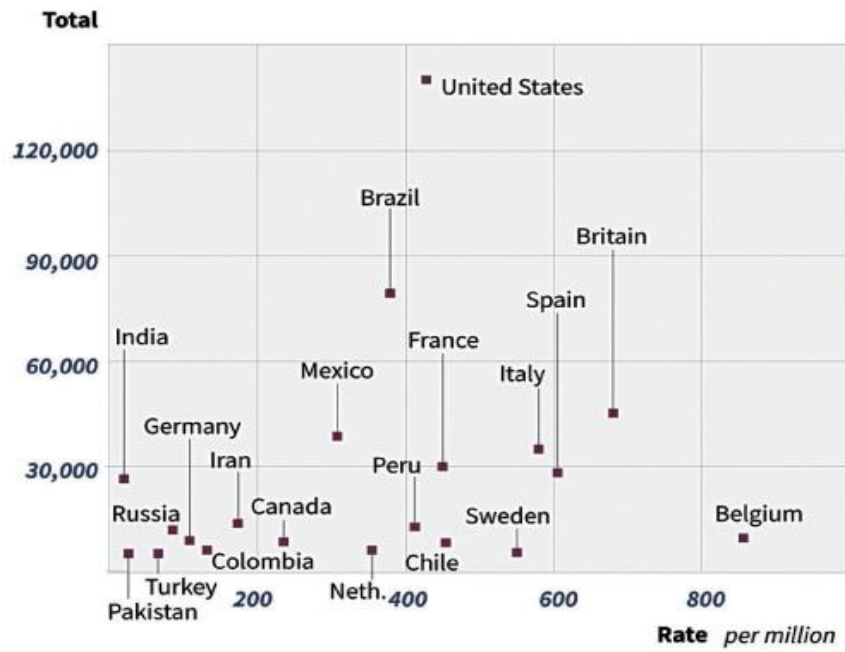
**Highest number  
Total deaths**

US	140,300+
Brazil	79,400+
Britain	45,300+
Mexico	38,800+
Italy	35,000+
France	30,100+
Spain	28,400+
India	26,800+
Iran	14,100+
Peru	13,100+

**Highest rates  
Among top 20, per million**

Belgium	855
Britain	680
Spain	605
Italy	581
Sweden	549
Chile	454
France	450
United States	428
Peru	412
Brazil	366
Ireland	357

Source: AFP database





The positive news came as alarm grows over fresh outbreaks of the disease that has killed more than 600,000 people worldwide and battered economies with months of shutdowns meant to stop its spread.

Divided EU leaders struggled at a summit on Monday to salvage a 750-billion-euro coronavirus aid package for their region, even as countries from Australia to France tightened restrictions to curb new outbreaks.

In a promising step towards a Covid-19 vaccine, one trial among more than 1,000 adults in Britain found that a vaccine induced “strong antibody and T cell immune responses” against the coronavirus.

*One study in UK and the other in China show progress towards a vaccine that is safe for widespread use*

A separate trial in China involving more than 500 people showed most had developed widespread antibody immune response. Both studies, published in *The Lancet* medical journal, appear to show progress towards a vaccine that is effective and safe for widespread use.

“If our vaccine is effective it is a promising option as these types of vaccine can be manufactured at large scale,” said co-author Sarah Gilbert from the University of Oxford.

British biotech firm Synairgen also said on Monday a randomised trial of an aerosol-based treatment shows it could drastically reduce the number of new coronavirus patients dying of the disease or requiring intensive care.

Europe has been the worst-hit continent by the pandemic with more than 200,000 deaths, but European Union leaders remained bitterly split on Monday on how to help its worst-hit — and most indebted — members such as Italy and Spain.

Arriving for the EU summit in Brussels, France’s President Emmanuel Macron said he saw “the possible hopes of a compromise”. “Nothing has been agreed yet, so I will remain extremely cautious,” he said.

A handful of EU countries led by the Netherlands are reluctant to hand over such vast sums — 750 billion euros (\$860 billion) — to nations they regard as profligate, particularly Spain and Italy.

Many countries in the continent had largely brought their outbreaks under control and were considering further easing of restrictions before fresh clusters were detected.

Governments are struggling to balance public health concerns over spreading infections against the need to open up economies crippled by months of virus lockdowns.

France has made face masks compulsory in public indoor spaces, Spain asked millions to stay at home again, while the German state of Bavaria said it would soon offer free virus tests at airports.  
(By AFP Dawn, 01, 21/07/2020)

## Population and pandemic

The world today has a total of 7.8 billion inhabitants, and Asia is its most populous region with 4.6 billion souls, according to the 2020 World Population Data Sheet released by the US Population Reference Bureau, Washington. The Asian population is projected to increase by 15% till 2050 to reach 5.3 billion. The data sheet places South Asia among the fastest growing regions in the world and marks Afghanistan as having the highest annual fertility rate of 4.5% per couple, followed by Pakistan at 3.6%. In comparison, all other countries in the region have a lower rate — China 1.5%, India 2.2% and Bangladesh 2.3%.

Increasing at a fertility rate of 3.6%, Pakistan’s population — estimated at 220.9 million today — would double in 19.4 years, evaluates the report by the US Population Reference Bureau as it focuses on the various population-related aspects and their correlation with the reigning coronavirus pandemic. The report warns that “population density in urban areas, household size, and population aging contribute to our vulnerability to pandemics”. As the report says that the mentioned factors affect our resilience in the face of future crises, it carries lessons for Pakistan — a developing country already faced with serious public health security threats.

Pakistan needs to adopt a serious integrated approach meant to cut down on the population growth rate. Apart from poverty and illiteracy, major factors that are responsible for high population growth in the country include: high unmet need of family planning, low contraceptive prevalence rate, lack of women empowerment, early marriages, preference for son, lack of recreational activities, religious beliefs and traditional practices. The governments over the years have formulated policies aimed at controlling population growth, but none of them has succeeded in translating these policies into practice.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 21/07/2020)

## MSF launches masks, soaps mass distribution drive in Machhar Colony

A five-day mass distribution drive of reusable masks and soaps was launched the other day in Machhar Colony by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) — an international medical humanitarian non-governmental organisation also known as Doctors Without Borders. Under the door-to-door initiative being conducted with the support of the health department, 218,000 reusable cloth masks and 75,000 soaps would be distributed by a team of over 100 community healthcare workers.

The drive aims to provide the community with tools to help prevent the spread of Covid-19 from infected and asymptomatic patients to the general population.

Every individual above 12 years of age is receiving two masks while three bars of soap are being provided to every household in Machhar Colony with an estimated population of 120,000.

The organisation would complete the distribution of masks before the Eid holidays in order to reduce the risk of high transmission due to possible noncompliance with social distancing and other safety measures during the celebrations.

“The use of masks and regular hand washing with soap and water are proven measures to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 virus,” said MSF medical coordinator in Pakistan Anna Cilliers at a gathering held to launch the drive.

In an informal urban community like Machhar Colony where social distancing was hard to maintain due to crowded housing and high-density population, the availability of tools to implement face covering and hand hygiene were important for every household, she added.

On behalf of her organisation, she acknowledged the support of the community health workers participating in the initiative.

“Our health promotion team is using a local cable TV network, social media and face-to-face sessions to promote protective measures, including mask wearing. International researches have confirmed that mask wearing alone contributed significantly to reduce transmission of Covid-19.”

Speakers appreciated the MSF for its timely initiative and said the distribution of masks and soaps especially before Eid would greatly benefit the general population.

Pakistan, it was pointed out, had seen a rapid increase in the number of Covid-19 cases in June after Eidul Fitr. As Eidul Azha was another occasion for gathering and celebration, medical experts had warned about another spike in coronavirus cases after the religious festival.

Currently, Karachi was the most affected city in the province with over 113,000 confirmed Covid-19 cases.

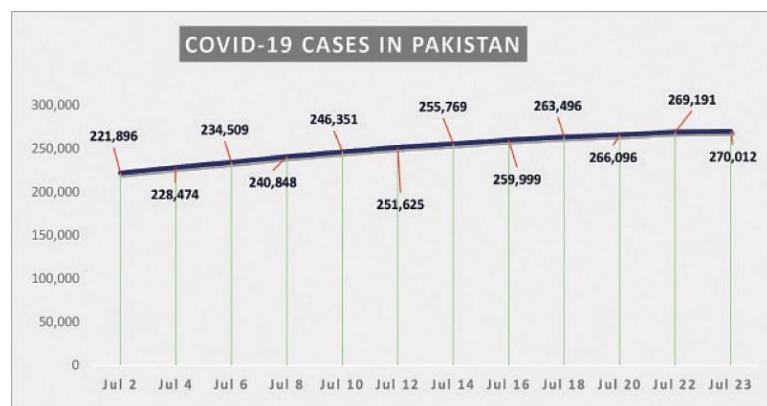
Dr Atiq Rehman Qureshi, additional district health officer, district West, said the government was with the MSF and its drive would not only provide people with protective tools against Covid-19, but would also help create awareness of the virus.

Abdul Hameed associated with the polio programme as a communication support officer said Machhar Colony was perhaps the first union council in the country where the entire population of the locality would receive masks and soaps.

The locality has been the focus of MSF health programme since 2012. It saw the launch of a hepatitis C care programme in 2015 under which diagnostics, consultation, treatment, health education and patient support services are being provided at a primary healthcare level under one roof.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 24/07/2020)

### SITUATIONER: Virus may have peaked, but danger still lurks



In the ferocious battle against Covid-19, Pakistan finally has the upper hand. The last four weeks have witnessed a clear trend: cases are down, deaths are down and fear is down.

So what really happened? Here’s the story of what we know, and what we do not.

“One day in the first week of June it seemed the entire system had lost control,” says Asad Umar, the federal planning minister who heads the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) mandated to lead the fight against the virus. He was referring to the huge spike in positive cases in the post-Eidul Fitr weeks. This surge was caused by the [opening of bazaars](#) just prior to Eid across the country. “This was not an NCOC decision,” Umar maintains.

According to NCOC officials, Covid-19 may have peaked in Pakistan between June 15 and June 20. Statistics paint a vivid picture. At this peak, the positivity rate was hovering around 23 per cent. This means that for every hundred people tested, 23 were positive. This week the rate is 7pc. There are other data that show mid-June as the worst point since the first patient was diagnosed on Feb 26.

On June 20 — which is considered the maximum occupancy day in hospitals across the country — the number of patients on Low Flow oxygen was 1,749 and on High Flow oxygen 1,217. (This definition was created to get a sense of those less sick and those

more so. Low Flow is up to 5 litres of oxygen per minute. High Flow is from 5 to 15 litres.) Compare this with the data a month later on July 21: patients on Low Flow oxygen were 458, on High Flow oxygen 762.

Here's another data comparison to show how much the situation has improved since the mid-June peak: On June 20, patients on ventilator beds were 549. On July 21, the figure had come down to 261.

### Fatality rate

The key data of course is the death rate. As per official NCOC figures, the average death rate per day from Covid-19 for the period June 17-25 was 118. In the current week, the average is 46 deaths per day.

"This was the primary data metrics (about) what was happening in hospitals," says Umar. "By the end of June we started getting evidence that disease spread was getting controlled."

Even the critical figure of R0 (R-Naught) tells a heartening story. R0 is the number that indicates how contagious a disease is and how fast it spreads from person to person. If R-Naught is 1, it means every infected person will infect one more person. If it is more than 1, it suggests the disease is spreading. Conversely, if R0 is less than 1, it means one infected person is infecting less than one person which implies that the spread of the virus is shrinking.

Just before Eid in May, R0 in Pakistan was 1.5. Today it stands at 0.74.

Too good to be true? Many people are sceptical of official data. One of the most frequently asked questions is why the rate of testing per day has gone down.

### Rate of testing

There can be a legitimate debate on this but at least one argument finds traction: the positivity rate does not have a direct correlation with the number of tests conducted. What does this mean? Simply put, positivity rate is a proportion of the people infected with the virus among the total number tested, and therefore lower testing could end up producing a higher positivity ratio while a higher number of tests could mean a lower ratio.

Hospital data is also hard to fudge. Anecdotal evidence supports data that the load on medical facilities has reduced considerably since the last week of June. Could then the death rate be under-reported?

In recent weeks some media reports have given data comparison of burials in some large graveyards. This data has compared the registered number of burials in a particular month for the last two to three years. The results have shown a spike this year. This could very well mean that many citizens may have opted not to report the cause of death of a family member due to Covid-19 for various reasons, including the social stigma attached to the virus.

Senior officials in Islamabad admit this could be the case. But would the unreported deaths increase the reported rate by a huge margin? Even if the actual death rate were double the reported one, it would still be far less than the projections that spoke of multiple thousands of deaths per day.

So what did we do right?

This is where the debate veers off into different tangents. Pakistan got off to a rocky start. January and February were wasted in denial and March slipped by in confusion. The twin debacles at Taftan and Raiwind sparked a rapid spread of Covid-19 and forced the governments into action. However, Prime Minister Imran Khan's vacillation in March and April ensured a diluted response from both the official machinery and citizens at large. His underplaying of the threat of Covid-19 — calling it a "flu" and resisting demands for early lockdowns — led to wastage of precious time and may have lost Pakistan the early initiative that could have controlled the spread of the virus.

"From the last week of March till mid-May, we were trying to figure out what our strategy should be," admits Umar.

### Army's contribution

NCOC had been formed in March and the military became the fulcrum for the organisation. Officials say GHQ sent the best officers to NCOC. A three-star general was nominated as the chief coordinator with a two-star general to assist him. Planning Minister Asad Umar — with his corporate management background and gravitas within the federal cabinet — was seen as the best choice to lead the forum.

"The military high command sent War Course-qualified officers to the NCOC," says a senior official. The Armed Forces War Course (AFWC) is a key barometer for promotion beyond the rank of lieutenant colonel. It is a hugely competitive course and a very small percentage of officers qualify for it. "Officers from the MO (Military Operations) Directorate were dispatched to the NCOC," the official says. The MO Directorate is the nerve centre of the GHQ and top officers are usually posted to this directorate. As the NCOC gathered momentum, the initial blunders of the federal government began to give way to clarity. NCOC became a self-sustaining platform drawing information and knowledge from provincial governments, in-house epidemiologists, data-modellers and other relevant officials.

"We were not in the loop on anything regarding Covid-19 policy," admits a cabinet minister. It was as if the federal cabinet had outsourced the entire Covid-19 policy and implementation to the NCOC. Perhaps — given the unsatisfactory performance of the government thus far — this was a smart thing to do.

By mid-May, NCOC had finalised its strategy which comprised two basic aims: 1) Curtailing the spread of the virus while keeping at a minimum the loss to the economy; 2) enhancing health facilities. But by the time these twin objectives took shape, Eid was around the corner. That's when the big decision came: open the bazaars.

#### **'Lowest point'**

The consequences were devastating and the system reeled under the explosive pressure of the infection spike in early June. Everyone was rattled. "That was the lowest point for me," confesses Umar, "when deaths per day hit triple figures."

Since then, something has clearly worked. The government takes credit. Officials say Asad Umar has led the NCOC with single-minded focus with clear objectives rooted in data-reports, and well-defined outcomes measured in timelined delivery. This resulted in significant enhancement of the health infrastructure and effective utilization of the state machinery to enforce SOPs and implement smart lockdowns. According to officials, the key to this success were four measures: (1) Voluntary behaviour change by citizens prompted by aggressive government campaign, and probably genuine fear after the June peak; (2) SOPs' compliance by people and enforcement by local administrations; (3) initiation of smart lockdowns (43pc of the cases were concentrated in 5pc of the population as per official estimates); and (4) closure of 'high-density activity' sectors like restaurants, cinemas and tourism places.

#### **Realm of the unknowns**

This may explain some of the reasons, but clearly there are more factors at play. However, they remain within the realm of 'unknowns'. One expert who has tracked the spread says that in big cities 20-30pc of the population may have been infected and recovered without overt symptoms. He refers to a Punjab health department report that suggested up to 600,000 people may have been infected in Lahore alone. Since then this figure would have multiplied many times. "For high-immunity populations this may constitute early stages of herd immunity," he suggests.

One senior doctor, who was frequently consulted by the government, says much of where we stand now remains unexplained. Is it something to do with our immunity? Has the virus mutated and become less lethal? No one has the answers yet.

For now, however, complacency has already begun to set in. Officials say this is alarming because two "super-spreading events" are approaching: Eid and Muharram. "We could witness a resurgence if we are not careful," says a senior official.

Umar agrees. He says he is less worried about Eid and more about Muharram for the spread of the virus. "But we are in a better position administratively and otherwise than we were in the last Eid," he says.

Pakistan may have an upper hand for now, but the battle against Covid-19 is far from over.  
(By Fahd Husain Dawn, 01, 24/07/2020)

### **Over 81% Covid-19 patients in Pakistan recover**

The coronavirus curve is flattening in Pakistan as more than 81% of Covid-19 patients have recovered in the country. The rate of recovery in Sindh – which also has the greatest number of coronavirus patients – is 86%.

According to the latest data on the pandemic issued by National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Friday, 270,400 people have so far got infected by disease in the country and 219,783 of them have already recovered.

The NCOC statement put the total number of active coronavirus cases in Pakistan at 44,854. Interesting, only 1,209 cases were reported on Thursday. "[There are] 734 hospitals with Covid-19 facilities with 2,241 patients admitted across the country," said the NCOC statement.

"As of today, more than 100,000 patients have recovered from #COVID19 in #Sindh. This is 86% of the total patients in the province," claimed Murtaza Wahab, Sindh chief minister's adviser on law and information, in a post on micro-blogging site Twitter.

On July 23, 22,006 coronavirus tests were conducted all over the country. The NCOC said 9,804 tests were conducted in Sindh; 7,386 in Punjab; 1,977 in K-P; 2,351 in Islamabad; 76 in Balochistan; 71 in the G-B and 341 in the AJK.

On Thursday, 54 people lost their lives due to Covid-19, 49 of which died in hospitals.

So far 5,763 people have died of the disease all over the country. Some 2,096 died in Sindh, 2,105 in Punjab, 1,169 in Khyber Pakhtunkwa (K-P), 136 in Balochistan, 162 in Islamabad, 46 in Gilgit-Baltistan and 49 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

The NCOC holds a meeting every day to take stock of the pandemic and implements decisions of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) on coronavirus.

(By Newspaper's Staff reporter The Express Tribune, 01, 25/07/2020)

### **Improvement seen in Covid-19 detection, death rates**

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Monday said that 219 new cases of coronavirus were detected overnight when 4,484 samples were tested raising the tally to 121,705 while two more patients died lifting the death toll to 2,226.

In a statement issued here from CM House, Mr Shah said that with the latest tests, the current detection rate came to five per cent.

He added that so far 777,468 samples had been tested which diagnosed 121,705 cases, of them 111,249 have recovered, including 243 overnight. "The overall recovery rate has been recorded at 91 per cent," he added.

According to the CM, two more patients lost their lives while struggling against the virus lifting the death toll to 2,226 that constituted 1.8pc death rate.

He said that currently 8,230 patients were under treatment, of them 7,772 in home isolation, nine at isolation centres and 449 in different hospitals.

He said that the condition of 365 patients was stated to be critical while 64 were shifted to ventilators.

The CM said that out of 219 new cases, 95 belonged to Karachi, of them 34 in South, 29 East, 11 Central, 10 Malir, nine Korangi and two in West.

He added that Kashmore had 17 cases, Ghotki 15, Shaheed Benazirabad 12, Shikarpur 10, Umerkot seven, Hyderabad, Larkana and Naushahro Feroze five each, Sukkur and Tando Allahyar four each, Khairpur, Dadu and Mirpurkhas three each, Qambar, Matiari, Sanghar and Sujawal two each and Jacobabad, Tando Mohammad Khan, Thatta and Badin one each.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 04/08/2020)

### **Sindh govt to give Rs20bn cash to pandemic-hit people from next month**

The Sindh government will start cash transfer from next month to people badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic for their economic welfare.

According to a statement issued here on Tuesday, Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah chaired a meeting of the steering committee to oversee the implementation of Pro-poor Social Protection and Economic Sustainability Initiatives.

The meeting was attended by CM's Special Assistant Haris Gazdar, Finance Secretary Syed Hassan Naqvi, Livestock and Fisheries Secretary Aijaz Ahmed Mahesar and other officials

"The Sindh government has earmarked Rs34 billion in the annual budget for fiscal year 2020-21 to help citizens affected by the coronavirus pandemic," the CS told the meeting.

"This budget was made to ensure food security, reduce inflation and unemployment. Some Rs20 billion is proposed for cash transfers to those affected by coronavirus under the Sindh Peoples Support Programme through the Social Protection Strategic Unit (SPSU) and Social welfare department (SWD)," he said.

*CS seeks data from Nadra, BISP for sending money under Sindh Peoples Support Programme*

It said that that Rs5bn was also allocated for a soft loan programme for small and medium enterprises in the province while subsidies of Rs1bn would be provided to purchase rice seeds and another Rs1bn for pesticide.

The chief secretary, the statement said, directed the authorities to collect all relevant data from the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra), Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and the census department.

He also directed officers of the implementation and coordination department to send a letter to the census department for the provision of data pertaining to peoples' socio-economic conditions in the province.

"The Sindh government in the month of September would transfer cash to persons affected by Covid-19 for their economic welfare, and for the purpose a sum of Rs20bn has been reserved in the provincial budget for 2020-21," said Mr Shah.

### **Rs500m for livestock breeding**

During the meeting, the livestock and fisheries secretary presented a three-pronged plan regarding interventions in the livestock sector.

The plan envisaged improvement of livestock breeding through provision of breeding bulls to poor livestock farmers and for this the "department would procure 1,000 bulls and 2,000 poultry males", which would be placed at the union council level.

"In the second phase livestock breed improvement would be made through artificial insemination services to poor livestock farmers free of cost and for this high yielding exotic and local breeds bulls will be purchased," added the statement.

"While approving the plan of the livestock department the chief secretary stated that the government has allocated Rs500 million for livestock breeding in order to address post Covid-19 crisis and to support and uplift socio-economic situation of livestock farmers," the statement said.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 05/08/2020)



## 95pc people testing positive for Covid-19 report no symptoms, study finds

More than nine out of 10 people infected with coronavirus experience no symptoms of the disease, according to a new study conducted by Aga Khan University (AKU) researchers.

Karachi has the largest number of Covid-19 cases in Pakistan and the study saw AKU faculty investigate Covid-19's prevalence in parts of the city with high and low rates of transmission in people in April and June 2020.

They found that 95 per cent of those who tested positive for Covid-19 through blood tests — which register the presence of antibodies to fight the disease — reported feeling no symptoms of the illness such as cough, fever or sore throat. In other words, they were asymptomatic.

According to researchers, the proportion of asymptomatic cases in Pakistan is much higher than the developed world. Since asymptomatic people do not seek hospital treatment, this may help explain why Pakistan's hospitals have not been under the same strain as hospitals in Spain and the UK.

Results also indicate that children and adolescents are just as likely to catch the disease as adults. Men and women face the same risk of being infected.

The study also confirmed a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases between April and June this year from 0.2pc to 8.7pc in low-community transmission areas such as Ibrahim Hyderi, and from 0.4pc to 15.1pc in high-community transmission sites like Safoora Goth, Faisal Cantonment, Pehlwan Goth and Dalmia/Shanti Nagar.

These results are in line with the federal government's national seroprevalence study where antibody testing found that overall, 11pc of Pakistanis had contracted the disease.

"The sharp increase in antibody levels in an area with low reported cases indicates that the virus continues to spread unchecked in populations where testing rates are sub-optimal," said Dr Imran Nisar, assistant professor at AKU and co-investigator on the study.

Over 2,000 participants participated in the first two phases of the study. Researchers are currently undertaking a third serosurvey and plan to do a fourth this month.

These surveys will show the impact of easing lockdowns around Eidul Azha and the impact of Muharram processions on the coronavirus transmission rate in communities.

"Antibody testing or seroprevalence provides a true picture of Covid-19 burden as they capture asymptomatic cases who represent silent carriers of the disease," said Dr Fyezah Jehan, associate professor at AKU and co-investigator on the study. "Understanding how, when and in what types of settings, Covid-19 spreads is critical to developing effective public health and infection prevention measures to break chains of transmission."

AKU's Dr Nadia Ansari and Dr Mashal Amin as well as US-based international collaborators Dr Bailey Fosdick and Dr Daniel Barremore also contributed to the study.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 09/08/2020)

## Ignoring safety guidelines may lead to rise in Covid-19 cases, experts warn

As the country opens after months of lockdown, more and more people are coming out of their homes without face masks and under the illusion that the Covid-19 pandemic is over. The Independence Day celebrations across the country were proof enough that the citizens have thrown caution and social distancing to the wind.

Health experts warn that foregoing safety measures will lead to a jump in infection rates and urged the people to wear face masks, particularly in situations where social distancing is not possible, stressing that careless attitude of the public can lead to another spike.

As per the data shared on the government's Covid-19 portal, there are 16,261 total active cases in the country on Aug 15, confirmed case numbers are 288,047, 6,182 Pakistanis have lost their lives due to coronavirus while 265,624 have recovered.

Face masks were made mandatory in the country on May 31 for crowded places, mosques, bazaars, shopping malls and public transport including buses, trains and planes. In July, at a meeting of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), it was stressed that wearing masks and compliance with standard operating procedures (SOPs) by the public were the only measures to contain Covid-19 outbreak in the country.

However, a visit to the city's main markets shows the advice was either not heard or forgotten. People roam around without any face masks as they bump into each other on overcrowded sidewalks. Some shopkeepers might have a surgical or fabric mask dangling from one ear or placed under the chin. The situation is no different at public and private offices where masks are mandatory for entry but once inside, the coverings are often left on desks.

*Majority of the people all across the country have stopped wearing face masks outside their home*

Sources from Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and many cities and towns shared similar opinions.

Most say it is too hot and uncomfortable to wear a mask. Many feel the pandemic is over, many more feel that “coronavirus was nothing more than a hoax”.

“Cases have gone down thankfully but the public needs to wear masks and follow SOPs. People have mingled a lot during Eidul Azha and the impact will be visible in the next week. Muharram is coming up. This laidback attitude will complicate things,” said Dr Shireen Khan, the head of tuberculosis and chest diseases department at the Fatimah Jinnah Hospital in Quetta.

Dr Khan, who has been named as one of the recipients of Sitara-i-Imtiaz for his efforts against coronavirus in Balochistan on Aug 14, said Covid-19 numbers had gone down because there was a coordinated response and restrictions were in place but another peak was likely if people were careless.

A similar experience was shared by Dr Muhammad Adil, the focal person of Covid-19 at Lahore’s Mayo Hospital. He said that the case numbers had gone down but the “risks have not”.

He too stressed that people must wear masks in public settings. Along with hand hygiene, masks provide an added layer of protection. People touch their nose and mouth subconsciously. Wearing a mask means that you don’t end up touching your nose or mouth directly,” he said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) notes that the “use of masks is part of a comprehensive package of the prevention and control measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory viral diseases, including Covid-19”.

“Masks can be used either for protection of healthy persons [worn to protect oneself when in contact with an infected individual] or for source control [worn by an infected individual to prevent onward transmission]. However, the use of a mask alone is insufficient to provide an adequate level of protection or source control, and other personal and community level measures should also be adopted to suppress transmission of respiratory viruses,” the WHO said.

#### **What type of masks?**

Dr Khan and Dr Adil both advised that surgical masks were ideal but fabric masks were okay too. They stressed that the public should leave the N-95 masks for medical workers.

“Masks prevent saliva and respiratory secretions and droplets from reaching other people. They also protect the wearer against secretions of others. So infections like Covid-19 can be blocked from getting from one person to another. Use of masks is an effective strategy to block disease transmission,” a representative of the Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Society Pakistan (MMIDSP) told Dawn.

The society said children should also wear fabric masks when out in public and once schools reopen. “This would protect them and also block them from taking it to their families. Along with fabric masks, good hand hygiene must also be practiced at all times.”

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, USA, advise that people wear masks in public settings when around people outside of their household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

The spread of Covid-19 can be reduced when masks are used along with other preventive measures, including social distancing, frequent hand-washing, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces. The masks recommended here are not surgical masks or respirators.

“The purpose of masks is to keep respiratory droplets from reaching others to aid with source control. Masks with one-way valves or vents allow exhaled air to be expelled out through holes in the material. This can allow exhaled respiratory droplets to reach others and potentially spread the Covid-19 virus. Therefore, CDC does not recommend using masks if they have an exhalation valve or vent,” the CDC says on its website.

#### **Eating out and travelling**

In the country’s northern areas, tourists have been coming out in droves. “A strict policy of ‘No mask, no stay’ has been implemented,” said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Secretary Abid Majeed.

Till last month, Mr Majeed was heading the relief and rehabilitation department of KP that was working on Covid-19.

“We are ensuring that the ‘masks on’ policy is strictly implemented in the province so that local population and tourists are both safe,” he added.

Health experts said masks and social distancing was very important when it came to travelling and dining out.

“Open spaces are fine with social distancing but enclosed spaces pose a risk. If an infected person stays in an air-conditioned restaurant for a long time, there is a real risk of infecting others. Take away and delivery are still the best option. If staying in a hotel have your meals in the room or in an open space,” the MMIDSP added.

While the public stays away from masks, many politicians have been sporting masks for a while now. Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar and PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari have been wearing masks in public.

Some of those at the top wear masks, but somehow the message fails to trickle down to their followers.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan tweeted on Aug 12: "Covid-19 in Pakistan is down but NOT out and it can spread again if we abandon caution and care. Please wear masks — especially in indoor and crowded situation. A simple measure to protect ourselves and our country!"

The next day Prime Minister Imran Khan was seen wearing a mask at the inaugural ceremony of the BRT in Peshawar, one of the few occasions in the recent past.

In a video statement, Sindh Health Minister Azra Fazal Pechuho urged that people follow SOPs and wear masks. "The lockdown has been lifted keeping in mind the financial situation of the people but Covid-19 has not gone away," she said, her face covered in a mask.

(By Sumaira Jaja Dawn, 13, 16/08/2020)

### **Drap approves clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine**

In a major development on Monday, the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap) gave a nod to holding clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine in the country.

According to a document, signed by Drap Clinical Studies Committee secretary Shafqat Hussain Danish, and available with [Dawn](#), the committee recommended that the trial be held in Indus Hospital, Karachi.

This test will be carried out by the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences, Karachi, in collaboration with a Chinese company already conducting trials in China.

As many as 200 volunteers from Karachi, representing various ethnic groups, have been registered. The trial will be completed in 56 days during which three injections of inactivated virus will be administered to the volunteers — both male and female.

The document said the National Data Safety Monitoring Committee will closely monitor the safety of the patients and submit reports on a monthly basis.

*200 volunteers from Karachi to participate in test*

A Drap official, not authorised to speak on record, said it was a major development as, in case of a successful trial, the vaccine would become available to people.

"Though vaccines are being prepared in different countries, we cannot surely say whether we will get them as there will be high demand for the vaccines across the globe. If this trial is successful, the vaccine will be easily available to us at affordable rates," the official said.

Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar, who also heads the National Coordination and Operation Centre on Covid-19, said he was hopeful that the trials on the vaccine would be successful.

"It is one of the potential vaccines which can become successful," he added.

Mr Umar said Pakistan was unable to participate in the phase-III trials held in different countries. However, he added, an opportunity had finally been created wherein volunteers could participate in the trials within the country.

The phase-III clinical trial is designed to evaluate whether an investigational vaccine can prevent symptomatic Covid-19 among adults.

On March 24, Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry had constituted a committee — Scientific Task Force on Covid-19 — which was headed by renowned scientist Prof Dr Attaur Rehman.

Its other members are University of Health Sciences Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Javed Akram, Dr Ghazna Khalid, Prof Al Fareed Zafar, Prof Iqbal Chaudhry, Prof Dr Khalid Khan and Prof Mariam Riaz Tarar.

One of the committee members, requesting not to be quoted, said: "The trial will commence from next week which will be participated by 200 volunteers, all over 18 years of age. We have selected volunteers from various ethnic groups to analyse their results. I believe Karachi is the most appropriate city as people from all backgrounds are settled there."

He said inactivated virus would be injected in each volunteer on zero day, day 28 and on the 56th day after which they would be tested for antibodies.

"An amount of Rs50,000 will be paid to each volunteer. After completion of the trial, we will move to other cities of the country," he added.

When asked about the side effects of the vaccine, the committee member said though its safety profile was very good, every medicine had a side effect in one per cent cases with mild fever, tiredness, headache or allergy.

"These are mild symptoms and people should know that even the committee members are willing to volunteer themselves for the trial. We are taking part in global efforts against Covid-19. Moreover, as we are passing through the 'fifth generation warfare' phase, the trial will build a positive image of Pakistan," the committee member added.

Meanwhile, according to a statement issued by the National Institute of Health (NIH), this would be the first-ever phase-III clinical trial for any vaccine in Pakistan.

Recombinant Novel Coronavirus Vaccine Adenovirus Type 5 vector (Ad5-nCoV) has been developed by CanSinoBio and Beijing Institute of Biotechnology China.

"It is a multi-country multi-centre clinical trial which CanSinoBio is already conducting in China, Russia, Chile, Argentina and will shortly start in Saudi Arabia. The principal investigator of the multi-centre clinical trial in Pakistan is NIH executive director Maj Gen Aamer Ikram," the statement said.

It added: "AJM Pharma CEO Adnan Hussain signed an agreement with the NIH last month for collaborating on the phase-III clinical trial of CanSinoBio Ad5-nCoV in Pakistan. The study will be conducted in prestigious medical research centres in the country — Aga Khan Medical University, Karachi; Indus Hospital, Karachi; Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital, Lahore; Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad, and UHS Lahore."

(By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 03, 18/08/2020)

### Covid-19 vaccine trial

PAKISTAN is now counted among the countries where a [trial for a potential Covid-19 vaccine](#) will be conducted. The coronavirus vaccine candidate will be supplied to Pakistan by China, where it has been developed by a unit of the state-owned China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm).

The group is set to test the effects of the vaccine on 200 volunteers from Karachi who will be administered the inactivated virus vaccine. The trial joins a handful of other vaccine candidates around the world to enter Phase 3, and has also been sent to the UAE where it will be tested on thousands of people.

In this phase, scientists administer the vaccine to thousands of people to observe how many become infected, compared with volunteers who receive a placebo. Phase 3 trials are said to be large enough to show evidence of rare side effects that may have been missed in earlier studies.

The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan has given the green light for the trial and recommended it be held at the Indus Hospital, where each participant will be paid Rs50,000.

That Pakistan is included in a trial linked to such important global research is significant. It also raises the hopes that, if this particular trial is successful, the vaccine will be available in Pakistan at "affordable rates", according to one official.

Like many other vaccines being tested, the Sinopharm endeavour is part of a global race and is being facilitated by the WHO. It is imperative that the government fulfil its trial obligations with utmost professionalism and by maintaining ethical standards. The proper documentation of the data gleaned from the trial is important, as is the question of which volunteers are selected and then compensated.

In a situation where desperate people will flock to volunteer for the trial given the hefty compensation, trial administrators must ensure participants express genuine consent and are aware of the benefits and risks of vaccination. The trial must maintain the highest scientific, clinical and ethical standards.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 19/08/2020)

### Schools in Sindh ill-prepared for Covid-19 SOPs

Health and safety risks loom in most public schools of Karachi, with school administrations and relevant officials failing to make arrangements for the implementation of necessary pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) ahead of the start of the new academic year, starting on September 15.



Garbage piles plague most public school buildings, some of which are in derelict condition, it emerged on Sunday. The lack of cleanliness, if not addressed urgently, poses the threat of spread of the coronavirus pandemic, imperilling students' health and safety.

Besides, fumigation and disinfecting initiatives on public schools' premises remain in abeyance, even as educational institutions are set to reopen tomorrow after a six-month-long closure. The problem seems to become graver in the light of reports of the absence of sweepers and other cleaning staff at a majority of schools.

In Federal B Area, Moonlight Government Boys Secondary School is a prime example of relevant authorities' negligence. The school's building is in bad shape, with plaster crumbling from the ceilings of classrooms. Garbage piles aplenty litter the corridors and, to make matters worse, filth-ridden washrooms are being used as a chicken coop, with roosters strutting around.

With little chance of these problems being set right before the commencement of on-campus classes tomorrow (Tuesday), students will not just be exposed to the possibility of contracting the coronavirus, but also suffering due to structural damages.

According to principal Saeed, he had made arrangements for cleaning the school but when he visited it the next day, he found paint and plaster covering the floors and desks once again, having fallen in chunks from the ceiling overnight.

He claimed he had informed relevant authorities, including the works and services department, but no action was taken to rectify the situation.

Meanwhile, the woes of the newly-constructed Allama Iqbal Government Boys Higher Secondary School in Gulberg Town are of a slightly different nature.

According to sources in the school, who requested anonymity, no sweeper or other cleaning staff have been hired. They said around 700 students were enrolled in the school and among them, matric and intermediate students would begin attending on-campus classes from tomorrow, yet no proper arrangements for the implementation of SOPs and cleaning had been made.

It's all on paper, they said, adding that no practical measures had been taken.

The Express Tribune has learnt that, reportedly, neither of these schools have been provided the funds allocated for school management committees for the past two years.

The Sindh School Education and Literacy Department's steering committee had earlier approved pandemic-related guidelines to be observed at educational institutions as they reopen.

In a notification issued in this regard, educational institutions' managements were instructed to ensure the regular cleaning and disinfecting of school buildings, as well as round-the-clock availability of water and sanitation facilities. As per their instructions, classrooms, washrooms, other areas, and furniture were all to be disinfected regularly, with hand sanitisers and covered trash-cans placed at different spots on school premises.

However, the present condition of numerous public school buildings suggests that relevant authorities, as well as schools' management paid little heed to these instructions.

In fact, it seems that the Sindh government and the school education department are generally not bothered about administrative issues posing hurdles in the way of running government schools - to the point that the post of the Karachi primary schools director has been lying vacant for the last 15 days and there is no authority to monitor schools' organisational affairs.

Similarly, no permanent appointment has been made for the post of Karachi secondary schools director for the past two months.

Currently, Hyderabad schools director Rasool Bux Shah is serving as the interim Karachi secondary schools director, and is only able to visit the city for a couple of days a week.

Admitting to the lack of sweepers in many schools under his authority, he acknowledged that it was a major problem.

"We are trying to deal with it," was all he had to say when asked about the dire condition of public schools ahead of the new academic year, adding that he would be attending a meeting with Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani to discuss the arrangements for reopening schools.

While he did not say when this would happen, he assured The Express Tribune that the plan chalked out would be shared with the media by Ghani himself.

However, it appears the plan will be of little help in keeping Covid-19 at bay in schools across the province tomorrow, when they reopen after a hiatus of six months.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 14/09/2020)

### **PMA raises concerns over rise in Covid-19 cases**

Seeing an increase in the number of Covid-19 cases in Pakistan over the past two days, the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) has warned that the country might see a relapse of the coronavirus public health crisis if people continued to ignore standard operating procedures (SOPs) against the disease.

It also called upon the government to ensure strict implementation of SOPs, especially at public sector institutions.

"The National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) has reported 750 cases of new infections with nine deaths in two days. In addition, a large number of cases are being reported at educational institutions, which have just resumed their academic activities," a PMA press release issued on Friday said.

Explaining the reasons behind the resurgence of Covid-19 cases, the association stated people in Pakistan did not follow SOPs and many recently opened educational facilities had been found to be flouting preventive guidelines.



So far, 35 academic facilities have been closed down across the country for violation of SOPs.

“Given these circumstances, the association believes that the situation can again turn serious, if the number of patients continued to grow that would ultimately put pressure on limited health facilities and medical staff. So far, the country has lost 126 health professionals to Covid-19.”

*Asks govt to ensure strict implementation of safety guidelines, particularly at public sector institutions*

The association emphasized that since no treatment was available for Covid-19, it's important that compliance was ensured to preventive guidelines including maintaining hand hygiene, ensuring social distancing and wearing face masks at public spaces.

“All provincial education departments should postpone opening of classes scheduled for Sept 23 whereas the authorities concerned should carefully analyse the situation at educational institutions that have been opened. Children have been found to be less vulnerable to Covid-19 but they can be a source of disease transmission,” it added.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 19/09/2020)

### **Clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine begins in Islamabad**

While the number of active cases of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) has again started rising, in a major development the country started clinical trials of a vaccine on Tuesday.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health, Dr Faisal Sultan, who was accompanied by the Executive Director of National Institute of Health (NIH), Maj Gen Aamar Ikram, announced the launch of the clinical trial.

He said trials would be held in different cities and a vaccine prepared in collaboration with China would be used to monitor the development of antibodies.

Maj Gen Ikram told Dawn the trial had started from the federal capital.

“Islamabad's Shifa International Hospital, Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and the University of Health Sciences in Lahore, and the Aga Khan University and the Indus Hospital (in Karachi) have been collaborating for the clinical trial,” he said.

*Minister says a total of 40,000 people across seven countries will participate in trial, including up to 10,000 in Pakistan*

“The vaccine will be administered to 8,000-10,000 volunteers across the country. Volunteers will be over 18 years of age and most of them will be under the age of 60 years,” he said.

In reply to a question about the process of registration as a volunteer, he advised people to contact the hospitals conducting the clinical trials. Moreover, he added, people would soon be able to register themselves as volunteers through websites of the National Institute of Health and other hospitals.

“It is the first-ever phase III clinical trial in Pakistan and will be hailed as a great success if the vaccine is found to be effective. If the vaccine turns out to be effective, we will transfer the manufacturing technology from China to Pakistan as it will not be possible for any single country to meet the high demand.

“We have already installed a plant at NIH as manufacturing of vaccines is a multi-billion dollar industry,” he said.

The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap) gave a nod to conducting clinical trials of Covid-19 vaccine last month.

According to a document signed by the secretary of Drap's clinical studies committee, the body had given the go-ahead to trials last month.

An official of the Ministry of National Health Services said three injections of an inactivated virus would be administered to volunteers — both men and women — during the 56-day trial.

“The National Data Safety Monitoring Committee will closely monitor the patients' safety and submit monthly reports. Although vaccines are being prepared in different countries, we cannot be sure whether we will get them as there will be a high demand across the globe.

“But if this trial is successful, the vaccine will be easily available to us at affordable rates,” the Ministry of Health Services official said.

On March 24, Science and Technology Minister Fawad Chaudhry had constituted a committee, known as Scientific Task Force on Covid-19. It was headed by Prof Dr Attaur Rehman, a well-known scientist.

One of the committee members said: “An amount of Rs50,000 will be paid to each volunteer. We will move to other cities of the country soon.”

Asked about side effects, the committee member said every medicine had a side effect in one per cent of the cases.

**Highest number of tests**

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Covid-19 claimed that the highest number of tests in a single day — 36,155 — were conducted across the country on Tuesday.

The number of active Covid-19 cases, which had dipped below 7,000 last week, has again climbed above 7,000.

Agencies add: Pakistan launched Phase III clinical trials for CanSino Biologics' Covid-19 vaccine candidate, according to a minister and an official at the Chinese pharmaceutical company.

The trial is being conducted by the government-run NIH and a pharmaceutical company, AJM, the local representative of CanSino, for the latter's candidate, Ad5-nCoV.

"Just launched the Phase III trials for a Covid-19 vaccine in Pakistan," said the minister for planning, Asad Umar, who also oversees command and control operations headed by the country's military to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

He said a total of 40,000 people across seven countries will participate in the trial, including up to 10,000 in Pakistan. Initial results are expected in four to six months, the minister said in a tweeted statement.

The trial began at a hospital in Islamabad, where 20-25 subjects were expected to be enrolled daily, and will expand to several other cities in the coming days, Hassan Abbas Zaheer, who is heading the trial for AJM, told Reuters.

"Our team is there and they have told us a lot of people have turned up to participate, and it is very encouraging," Zaheer said. (By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 23/09/2020)

**Covid & 'shecession'**

AS 35 million individuals plunge into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic, there is no denying that such factors will lead to further feminisation of poverty. In almost all societies of the world, women show higher poverty rates than men. The causality of this can be attributed to the way economic resources are allocated as well as overall gender-discriminatory beliefs that emanate from patriarchy and misogyny. Such notions have led to the oppression and brutalisation of women, while sustaining huge economic disparities.



Over time, gender discrimination has been highlighted as a structural issue, where there are inbuilt biases which work against women at all levels — from gender roles within households to legislation to the distribution of wealth or the way in which the economy and workplaces are organised. The Covid-19 world has forced us to reassess the state of capitalism,

especially in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic constraints that women face, which prevent their full participation in the economy while inhibiting the potential gains from their financial contributions.

Beyond doubt, Covid-19 has had an indelible effect on the economy; yet the impact needs to be viewed from a gendered lens in order to determine its true significance. This recession has been termed a 'shecession', and for good reason. Although during previous economic recessions or pandemics, men have fared worse, this time, the effects are severer for females. The 1919 Spanish flu for example hit young men between 20 and 39 years, ie 49 per cent of those that died in the Spanish flu fell in that bracket. Essentially, this meant that families lost their primary breadwinner.

At the height of the Spanish flu, many countries in Europe and North America were in the process of industrialisation and transforming into free-market economies. Post flu, market adjustments took place in the labour supply. Research shows that with male labour supply being negatively affected due to higher mortality, women and minors were forced to enter the labour force to make up the differential, as relatively low skills were required. Despite this move women were not paid wages equal to those of males even at the height of the pandemic.

*The pandemic has exacerbated the lot of women.*

Today, economic realities are somewhat different, with greater globalisation of world markets through a network of supply chains. According to the ILO, there are 3.3 billion workers worldwide of whom 2bn work in the informal sector and in developing countries. Due to lockdowns and reduced demand, over 50pc of such workers will lose their jobs.

Essentially, women workers are ghettoised in low-value, unskilled and insecure jobs, eg in South Asia alone, 85pc of women who work are employed in the 'grey' economy. This leaves them without the protection of labour laws including job security, paid sick leave and child care. Women rely on such jobs as they lack the education and requisite skills that are necessary for them to compete with men for employment in the formal sector.

Things haven't been better from a gender perspective in the formal sector. Among the 20.5m jobs lost this year in the US, 55pc of those who worked in them were females. Female employment is segregated in the services industry, including entertainment, tourism, hospitality sector and the like. Salons, flight attendants, cleaners, part-time agriculture workers; all of these remain vulnerable to the post-Covid-19 economic downturn. Economic data has revealed that Covid-19 has negatively affected these sectors, and thus more females are out of a job today.

A major effect of the 'shecession' is the inordinate amount of physical and psychological burden placed on women, which is rarely measured or acknowledged. Women faced by traditional gender roles have double the responsibility at present, with over 1.5 billion children out of school, they not only have to perform as employees while at home, but simultaneously provide child-care and act as homemakers.

They are also the first ones to attend to the sick and elderly. Combine this with the fact that during the current pandemic there has been a 20pc increase in domestic violence globally. All these factors imply that women are getting the short end of the stick.

It is not often that we have the opportunity to reset our priorities in order to build a society that honours the dignity and well-being of each and every human being. There is a clear relationship between patriarchal mindsets which suppress a woman's growth, and the extreme economic recession that has befallen females during this pandemic.

We need to bring about change by devising economic policies which benefit women, and enable them to be equal participants in the economy, for it is unlikely that market forces will find an optimal solution on their own. There can be no doubt that the gains from gender inclusion are much bigger than ever imagined before.

(By Roshaneh Zafar Dawn, 07, 24/09/2020)

### **'18th Amendment gave us freedom to deal with Covid crisis'**

We should still be worried. The second spike of the virus is coming. We would like parents and teachers to follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs) so that we don't have to close down schools again. This was said by Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah while answering a question put to him by S. Akbar Zaidi, executive director, Institute of Business Administration (IBA) at an event titled 'Leadership Under Crisis: Pandemic and Civic Issues' held on the institute's city campus on Thursday evening.

The first thing that Mr Zaidi talked about was the praise that the Sindh government received for handling the Covid-19 crisis. Mr Shah said the crisis started on Feb 26. Before that they had a meeting of parliamentarians in which a member of the provincial assembly asked how prepared the government was to handle the pandemic. The answer was "we're not prepared at all".

A day later he was sitting at Bilawal House where [former] president Zardari told him that the minister for health Dr Azra wanted to talk to him [Mr Shah]. She told him about the first case of Covid-19. He called up the chief secretary for a meeting. He also had a call from the education minister asking for his permission to close down schools. His first response was "we're not closing schools".

The chief minister said then he called up doctors, the health department, and the WHO [representatives]. He had that meeting for four to five hours, which was where he learned about the seriousness of the issue.

From that time onwards, he formed a task force and took stock of the hospitals' situation etc. The very first decision that was taken by his government was to set up a fund. For six weeks there were meetings on a daily basis.

Mr Shah said his government imposed the first lockdown when there were only 16 coronavirus patients in the province and 26 in the country.

#### *Chief minister warns second wave of virus may be coming*

Mr Shah said only the day before (Wednesday) the highest number of suspected cases, 18,360, were tested [in Sindh] and claimed "we have tested per capita thrice the number of people tested in Pakistan ... and almost 80 per cent of testing is free". Narrowing down the reason for his government's success in the crisis he attributed it to the policy of testing, tracing and isolating/quarantining.

Mr Shah, in reply to a question, said the 18th Amendment gave his government the freedom to do what it did when the pandemic hit the province. They had a lot of support from the doctors' community and from the law enforcement agencies (LEAs). The first death [from the virus] took place on March 19 in the country and the first formal lockdown was announced on March 21. And within three days the other provinces followed [Sindh].

"We contacted the prime minister's office and we are grateful to the prime minister [for listening to us]." The first countrywide lockdown on April 1 for 14 days was imposed. We were able to set up spaces for patients such as one at Nipa, so we could be a little more independent because of the 18th Amendment.

Mr Shah said there may be a second wave of the disease coming. We should be careful and not let our guard down. Unless there is a vaccine available or a cure for the virus is found. He agreed that after the loss of life, education was the biggest sufferer. "We are asking schools and parents to be more careful. We need to follow the SOPs."

Answering a query about with the pandemic experience, how difficult it was to meet the challenges arising out of the situation such as recent torrential rains, the chief minister said, "we learn every day" and it has been a big challenge.

On the issue of local government Mr Shah said local government did a good job during the crisis and his government was trying to address the gaps in the local government act.

After the conversation, the floor was opened for the audience, which had turned up in a decent number, to ask questions.

(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 25/09/2020)

## Covid-19 precautions

DURING the past couple of weeks, there has been an uptick in Covid-19 cases in the country. According to news reports, 74 new cases surfaced only in Islamabad on Sunday. This is the highest increase in the number of cases for this month and is more than twice the total number of cases reported in KP for the same day. A few days after the reopening of schools, 34 children in three towns of central Punjab also tested positive for Covid-19. Moreover, the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences put off reopening its private wards after five doctors contracted the infection since the hospital's out-patient department started functioning again last month. Meanwhile, in Sindh, the provincial government's spokesperson held a news conference on Monday to share his concern over the rising incidence of Covid-19. He said that in the past two weeks alone, the ratio of coronavirus-positive patients had risen from 1pc to 2.6pc, and lamented that the public had mostly stopped taking all precautions. Balochistan has also seen a sharp increase with Covid-19 cases tripling between August and September to reach May levels, while in KP, seven teachers tested positive for the infection earlier last week.

This resurgence in cases can indeed be attributed to the public's complacent attitude after lockdowns were lifted. It appears that with the easing of restrictions and resumption of educational and business activities, people are under the impression that the pandemic is now a thing of the past, when in fact the global death toll from Covid-19 has crossed the million mark. Some government officials believe that the increase in the number of cases is a reflection of ramped-up testing. This can only mean that earlier figures were hugely undercounted as a result of less testing. The authorities need to be just as proactive in the implementation of SOPs now as they were about enforcing lockdowns when initial cases were reported — that is, if they want to prevent a second wave of Covid-19 in the country.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 29/09/2020)

### 'Micro-smart lockdowns' begin in Karachi

After as many as 22 new cases were reported in a single union council - with a population of only 4,000 people - in West district on Wednesday, the Sindh government decided to impose 'micro-smart lockdowns' in the city's virus hotspots.

The move came after the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) expressed concern over an increase in Covid-19 cases, particularly in Karachi, which accounted for nearly half of the new cases registered countrywide on Tuesday.

The NCOC said in its daily update that the country registered 747 new cases on Tuesday, out of which at least 365 cases were reported in Karachi. On Wednesday, meanwhile, Karachi reported 221 cases out of a total of 311 in Sindh, according to the Sindh chief minister, while the city has reported a majority of Pakistan's cases since the pandemic began.

During the NCOC meeting, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan highlighted that the strategy of smart lockdowns, contact tracing and stressed that following the health protocols was essential to control the spread of the virus.

Sindh health secretary Zahid Abassi, meanwhile, informed the NCOC that the city's administration was monitoring the situation and appropriate administrative action would be taken in consultation with all stakeholders.

The new micro-smart lockdown was imposed in UC-8, Manghopir and Gadap Town late on Wednesday evening in line with the relevant district health officer's (DHO) directives, after fresh cases emerged there.

The West deputy commissioner (DC) issued a notification for the implementation of pandemic-related standard operating procedures in the affected areas.

According to the notification, the entrance of unnecessary persons was restricted, while residents are to wear face masks.

Furthermore, public transport and pillion riding have been banned along with public gatherings, while trade and commercial activities have been suspended. Only shops selling essential items and pharmacies may remain open, while one person from a household may leave the house at a time for necessary activities.

Earlier in the day, the Sindh Health Department wrote to the Karachi police chief and DCs, asking them to ensure strict implementation of SOPs and impose 'micro-smart lockdowns' in affected areas to prevent the virus from spreading further.

The health department also suggested deploying additional police officials to enforce this lockdown, adding that DHOs should be consulted in this regard.

#### Flouting SOPs

Meanwhile, Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput ordered officials to take action against restaurants and wedding halls violating SOPs.

Rajput chaired a meeting with DCs, DHOs and other relevant officials on Wednesday, where it was decided that eateries and wedding halls flouting the SOPs would be closed for at least three days.

The commissioner directed the DCs to inspect restaurants and wedding halls in their jurisdictions and initiate action against the offenders immediately. The meeting further decided to increase testing capacity for schools and to seal any educational institutions violating the SOPs as well.

Further, the commissioner asked the officials to ensure the implementation of SOPs in parks, restricting people from entering without wearing face masks. He also directed the DCs to take action against industrial units failing to adhere to the.

#### **School sealed**

Separately, irked at the disregard for SOPs at educational institutes, Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani ordered relevant authorities to seal a private school, World Grammar Learning School, in Kharadar.

The minister issued the directive during surprise visits to schools in the locality.

He expressed anger over SOP violations at various private schools and instructed the Directorate of Inspection and Registration of Private Institutions Sindh director-general to ensure that pandemic guidelines were being observed at all institutions. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 01/10/2020)

### **Move to set up national emergency helpline**

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday directed the PM Delivery Unit (PMDU) to set up a national emergency helpline for the assistance of people.

The decision was taken in the wake of the gang-rape of a woman in front of her children on Lahore-Sialkot motorway on Sept 9 as she waited for help after her car broke down.

According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Prime Minister Khan asked the PMDU to complete work on the emergency helpline within two months.

He was informed that a separate network would be established for the helpline, accessible from across the country and all emergency helpline numbers would be linked to the new system. Cellular companies will also be approached in this regard.

A toll-free number will be dedicated to the helpline, the prime minister was told.

*Decision by PM comes in the wake of Lahore-Sialkot motorway gang-rape incident; Imran reiterates Pakistan will strengthen its capability to safeguard vital national interests*

Besides, Prime Minister Imran Khan has said the country's energy sector is facing crisis, and regretted that past pacts have had "negative impacts" on the cost of electricity and circular debt.

Presiding over a meeting on the energy sector, he said the common man and the industrial sector were burdened with the earlier agreements which not only resulted in costly power generation but also high circular debt accumulated while making efforts to keep electricity prices down.

"That weight also impacted the national exchequer," he added.

The prime minister directed that the system for provision of subsidy should be made fair and transparent and special focus be made on ensuring relief to the deserving people.

APP adds: Prime Minister Khan said that Pakistan's nuclear and strategic capability is safe and secure under the robust command and control system.

During his visit to the satellite ground station of Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission, Mr Khan resolved that Pakistan would continue to strengthen its strategic capability to safeguard its vital national interests.

Meanwhile, Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan called on the prime minister and discussed matters related to the aviation sector.

(By Syed Irfan Raza Dawn, 01, 01/10/2020)

### **'Mini smart lockdown' imposed in Karachi's Manghopir for 15 days**

The provincial government on Wednesday night imposed a 'mini smart lockdown' in a city neighbourhood following an abrupt increase in the Covid-19 cases as 60 per cent of positive cases across the country were reported overnight from the provincial capital.

Two localities in Manghopir, district West, were placed under a two-week 'mini smart lockdown'. The deputy commissioner, West, issued a notification placing Saima Villas and Samama City under the lockdown from October 1 to 15.

All business activities, except for groceries and pharmacies, will remain closed and all public transport including taxis and rickshaws will not be allowed to move in the two localities of the UC 8, having a population of over 4,000, during the lockdown.

The order said that only one person of a family would be allowed outside for buying food items and medicine by displaying original computerised national identity card to the law enforcement agencies.



*Officials say 60pc of total cases in country overnight are from Karachi*

Earlier, the city administration had decided to identify the localities and neighbourhoods with increased number of Covid-19 cases and imposed a smart lockdown there.

#### **Strict action against SOP violators ordered**

It was also decided to take strict and immediate action against violators of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) notified to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Official sources told [Dawn](#) that Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput while presiding over a meeting with city administration and provincial health department directed the deputy commissioners to immediately seal the schools, restaurants and marriage halls that were found not following the SOPs.

The meeting noted that almost 60pc of the total cases across the country reported overnight were from Karachi, while 4,667 positive cases were reported in the city in September alone.

The deputy commissioners were directed to keep a vigilant eye on the schools, restaurants, marriage halls and public parks to ensure observance of SOPs by public.

The meeting also decided to increase Covid-19 tests at schools.

It also decided that the industry department would keep a strict check on offices, industrial units and factories and the deputy commissioners concerned would take action against violators on the report of the industries department.

The deputy commissioners were also directed to submit to the commissioner office their respective reports on a daily basis.

#### **Two die overnight**

Meanwhile, in a statement issued in the morning the chief minister said that 311 new cases of coronavirus emerged when 10,940 tests were conducted raising the tally to 137,109 and two more patients died lifting the death toll to 2,499.

He said that 10,940 samples were tested against which 311 new cases detected and this constituted 2.8pc current detection rate.

“Two more patients died overnight lifting the death toll to 2,499 that came to 1.8 per cent death rate,” he said and added that so far 1,363,079 samples had been tested which diagnosed 137,106 cases all over Sindh forming overall 10pc detection rate.

The CM said that currently 4,255 patients were under treatment, of them 3,978 in home isolation, six at isolation centres and 271 at different hospitals. He added that the condition of 181 patients was stated to be critical, including 38 shifted on ventilators.

Mr Shah said that 215 patients recovered overnight taking the number of patients recovered so far to 130,352 that constituted 95pc. He said that out of 311 new cases of coronavirus, 221 were detected in Karachi, including 75 in South, 53 in East, 40 in Central, 27 in Korangi, 17 in Malir and nine in West.

The CM said that Hyderabad had 14 cases, Jamshoro six, Badin and Dadu four each, Sujawal three, Ghotki two, Khairpur, Mirpurkhas, Naushahro Feroze, Shaheed Benazirabad, Sukkur and Thatta one each.

He urged the people of the province to follow SOP and keep themselves, their friends and families safe.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 01/10/2020)

### **Lockdown extended to more areas of Karachi; over 60 eateries sealed**

The Sindh government on Thursday extended ‘mini smart lockdown’ to more city neighbourhoods as the number of coronavirus cases continued to increase and an advisory issued by the health department recommended restricted movement in the affected parts of the metropolis.

Two localities of district South were identified as ‘fresh hotspots’ of the pandemic and were placed under a ‘mini smart lockdown’ for a fortnight.

The deputy commissioner, South, issued a notification placing block ‘A’ of the Creek Vista Apartment in Phase VIII of DHA and subdivision of Saddar under the lockdown from October 1 to 15.

The notification asked the local authorities to seal these localities and arrange logistic support for the purpose. They were also asked to work in close coordination with the district health officer in Karachi South and law enforcement agencies, including police and Rangers.

“The Assistant Commissioner is further directed to make implementation plan and enforce the above order in letter and spirit and penalize the violators of SOPs guidelines under the directives of Home Department’s order,” read the notification.

The notification also carried details of the standard operating procedure (SOPs) to be enforced in the areas that advising anyone entering or leaving the locked down areas to wear a face mask. Movement of people residing in the locked down areas be strictly restricted, it added.

*Four wedding halls sealed, gatherings and transport services in closed areas also banned*

The notification further says that only grocery shops, convenience stores and pharmacies would be allowed to remain open in these areas during the timings specified in the home department's order while all other businesses would remain strictly closed without any exception.

"All kinds of industrial units falling in the area shall remain closed. No home delivery/take away of any sort will be allowed from restaurants, fast food joints. Only one person of each household shall be allowed outside for buying food items and medicines by displaying original CNIC to the law enforcement agencies. Only one attendant, where extremely necessary, shall be allowed with a person in need of medical care," added the advisory.

Earlier, the provincial government warned that the coronavirus hit new heights in Sindh on Thursday with 13 deaths reported overnight, lifting the toll to 2,512 and infecting 361 others. The number of infected people rose to 137,467.

The government has also put a ban on private and family get-together events at homes as well as pillion riding in these areas. Movement of public transport vehicles, including buses, taxis, rickshaws and ride hailing services, are also banned in these areas.

On Wednesday, the provincial government had imposed a 'mini smart lockdown' in two localities of Manghopir in district West, whose deputy commissioner issued a notification placing Saima Villas and Samama City under lockdown from October 1 to 15.

Meanwhile, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said in a statement issued on Thursday that 13 patients lost their lives while struggling against the coronavirus, constituting 1.8 per cent current death rate. He said that 11,689 samples were tested against which 361 positive cases were detected. This constituted three per cent current detection rate. He said that so far, 1,374,768 tests had been conducted which diagnosed 137,467 cases across the province. Of them, he added, 95 per cent or 130,510 patients had recovered and they included 158 overnight.

The CM said that currently 4,445 patients were under treatment. Of them 4,161 have been in home isolation, seven at isolation centres and 277 at different hospitals. He added that the condition of 192 patients was stated to be critical. Thirty-seven of them have been shifted to ventilators.

"Out of the 361 new cases, 249 have been detected in Karachi (85 in South, 66 in East, 37 in Central, 36 in Malir, 17 in Korangi and eight in West districts), the statement added.

It noted that Badin had 19 cases, Hyderabad 12, Dadu seven, Ghotki six, Jamshoro five, Mirpukhas three and Naushahro Feroze, Kambar-Shahdadkot, Larkana and Sukkur districts had two cases each while Matiari, Shaheed Benazirabad, Shikarpur and Thatta districts had one case case.

#### **Over 60 restaurants, four wedding halls sealed**

Following warning from the provincial administration, local authorities sealed as many as 61 restaurants and four marriage halls in different parts of the megalopolis over violation of the Covid-19 SOPs.

According to a report issued from the commissioner's office, the officials inspected 177 restaurants and 50 marriage halls in several districts, including South, East, West, Central, Malir and Korangi.

As many as 29 restaurants, the highest number of eateries, were sealed in district Central while two marriage halls each in district Central and Korangi were sealed for violation of SOPs.

Besides, three marriage halls in district Central and 15 restaurants in district East were issued warnings.

#### **'No plan to shut down educational institutions'**

Despite a sudden rise in the case, the Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani ruled out closure of schools, colleges and universities, saying that "the situation is under control so far". However, he hinted at a review of the decision if the situation deteriorated.

Speaking to reports after attending an oath-taking ceremony for the newly-elected body of Shaheed Benazirabad Chamber of Commerce and Industries, in Nawabshah on Thursday, he said that there was no proposal under consideration for the closure of schools. The monitoring of SOPs' implementation is being done.

"Some cabinet members have expressed their concern over health of children [at schools]," he said. "We have not observed anything harmful so far at the educational institutions. But let me make it very clear that in case of any adverse change in the situation, we will definitely review the decision. Sindh is the first province where lockdown is enforced immediately. The pandemic is not over yet. The people must follow SOPs and wear masks. In case people don't take it serious, this may lead to strong measures to be taken by the government."

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 02/10/2020)

### **Virus hotspots**

It is satisfying to see the relevant authorities spring into action as 365 coronavirus cases emerged in Karachi in a single day on Tuesday. The figure makes up nearly half — 48.86% to be exact — of the total number of cases (which is 747) reported across the country on the mentioned day. The swift action taken by the Sindh government saw a 4,000-strong union council in the city from where 22 new cases had been reported put under a 'micro-smart lockdown' while several restaurants have also been

sealed for not adhering to the prescribed SOPs. There will be no unnecessary movement in and out of the areas under lockdown and only medical and general stores will be allowed open there. Some more hotspots have also been identified in nearly all the districts of the city while banquet halls and school have been warned of strict action in case of non-compliance of safety protocols.

The decision to impose 'micro-smart lockdown' was taken at the level of the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) — the nerve centre which has representation from all provinces and regions of the country and which is tasked with implementing Covid-related decisions after national consensus. The sudden emergence of so many cases in Karachi in a single day had raised concerns of NCOC representatives which led to a swift counter action — something that speaks of the constant vigilance of the authorities on the situation related to coronavirus in the country.

With number far smaller than in many other countries of the world, Pakistan has been a success story in terms of Covid-19 suppression — a fact that has been recognised by the director general of the World Health Organization as well. However, we need to continue to be vigilant if we are to prevent a second wave of the deadly virus, especially now that educational institutions at all levels have been reopened across the country.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 02/10/2020)

### **Govt mulls another lockdown in Karachi**

With trends showing a resurgence of Covid-19 in Karachi, the Sindh government is now considering re-imposing a lockdown in the city from next week, it was reported on Thursday, as authorities went ahead with imposing 'micro-smart lockdowns' in two localities of South district.

Karachi health director Dr Nadeem Sheikh told The Express Tribune that 24 localities in South district, 41 localities in Malir district, two localities in West district, a cluster of 39 houses in Korangi district, four localities in Central district and a cluster of 637 houses in East district had been identified as Covid-19 hotspots in the city.

He added that the hotspots would be sealed, while relevant authorities were mulling the possibility of a complete lockdown if people continued to disregard pandemic-related standard operating procedures.

Separately, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah announced the emergence of 361 new Covid-19 cases overnight, of which 249 belonged to Karachi. Among them, 85 were reported from South district, 66 from East district, 37 from Central district, 36 from Malir, 17 from Korangi and eight from West district.

Stating that the province's Covid-19 tally had climbed to 137,467 after the emergence of the new cases, the CM said that the coronavirus had claimed 13 more lives in Sindh, lifting the provincial death toll to 2,512.

#### **Micro-smart lockdowns**

Meanwhile, the South deputy commissioner issued a notification announcing the imposition of micro-smart lockdowns in the surroundings of Creek Vista Apartments in Defence Housing Authority Phase VIII, and Askari-III.

Besides, in a letter to the Central DC, the Central district health officer proposed imposing a mini-smart lockdown in localities of North Karachi, North Nazimabad, Gulberg and Liaquatabad where 46 fresh Covid-19 cases were reported.

The Sindh government had earlier announced that micro-smart lockdowns would be imposed in selected areas of Karachi, following a rise in Covid-19 cases. The National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) too expressed concern over the uptick in Karachi, which accounted for nearly half the cases emerging in Pakistan on Tuesday

Starting Wednesday, the government imposed a micro-smart lockdown in West district's UC-8, after it reported 22 new Covid-19 cases among a population of 4,000.

According to a notification issued by the West DC, the entrance of unnecessary persons was restricted, while residents are to wear face masks. Furthermore, public transport and pillion riding have been banned along with public gatherings, while trade and commercial activities have been suspended. Only shops selling essential items and pharmacies may remain open, while one person from a household may leave the house at a time for necessary activities.

Police have also been deployed in sealed areas, and most shops remained closed there on Thursday, in line with the notification's instructions.

In Saima Arabian Villa, which houses 80 shops apart from residential apartments, only grocery sellers and pharmacies were allowed to open business.

Many shopkeepers waited outside in hopes of being allowed to conduct business, but in vain.

Law enforcers were particularly deployed around residential apartments, where they, along with apartments' management, ensured the SOPs were duly followed.

Only residents following government guidelines were allowed entry into apartments, where gatherings were also restricted.

Area residents, facing inconvenience in the face of stringent restrictions, complained they had not been informed of the lockdown beforehand and were given no time to prepare for it.

According to the West DC, the micro-smart lockdown in UC-8 of Gadap Town and Manghopir will remain in place until October 15.

#### **Businesses sealed**

In the meantime, further stepping up action against the SOPs' violations, the city administration sealed 61 restaurants and four marriage halls.

According to a report issued by the city commissioner's office, relevant authorities inspected 177 restaurants and 50 marriage halls across Karachi on Thursday, and sealed those violating the SOPs. Of these, the highest number, comprising 29 restaurants, was sealed in Central district.

Beside, a marriage hall each was sealed in Central and Korangi district.

The authorities also issued warnings to three marriage halls in Central district and 15 restaurants in East district.

(By Tufail Ahmed & Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 02/10/2020)

### **10 doctors die of Covid-19 within five days in country**

As the Covid-19 cases are soaring across the country, the second wave of the pandemic is taking a high toll on medical professionals, causing the death of 10 doctors within five days and forcing some 3,000 health workers into isolation across Pakistan, it emerged on Wednesday.

A list prepared by the Pakistan Medical Association shows that six of the 10 doctors died on a single day (Nov 29) in Karachi, Lahore and Multan.

The latest victim is Dr Muhammad Farooq, an additional director of the Khalifa Gul Nawaz Hospital, Bannu, Peshawar, who died of Covid-19 on Wednesday.

The second wave of the pandemic starting from November has so far claimed the lives of 18 doctors in the country.

The names of Punjab-based doctors who died of Covid-19 from Nov 28 to Dec 2 are: Dr Sarwar Bilal, Millat Hospital, Chistian, Bahawalnagar, Prof Brig retired Zafar Ahmed Malik, also a former adviser in anaesthesiology at the Pakistan Armed Force Medical Services, Rawalpindi; Dr Masood Amjad Chughtai, a former professor in biochemistry at the Nishtar Medical University, Multan; Prof M.B. Jamil of the Nishtar Medical University, Multan; Dr Ziaullah, the head of department of medicine and allied sciences at the Sheikh Zayed Hospital, Lahore, and Prof Brig Shaheen Moin, the dean of Medical School, Rawalpindi.

The list includes three Karachi-based doctors: Prof Rasheed Choudhary, a professor of surgery and former director at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre; Dr Khalid Khan, a senior anaesthetist at the Liaquat National Hospital, and Dr Shahab Yameen, the chief medical officer at the Qatar Hospital in Orangi. They all died on Nov 29.

Early in November, Prof Nizamul Hasan, a former National Institute of Child Health director and founder of the Child Aid Association, and Dr Nizamuddin Rajput, the chief medical officer at the DMC Central Hospital, also fell prey to Covid-19.

*Second wave of pandemic has claimed the lives of 18 doctors so far*

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) four doctors died of the infection last month. They are: Dr Adnan Haleem, a medical student in Peshawar; Dr Muhammad Bashir, a former deputy medical superintendent at the King Abdullah Teaching Hospital, Mansehra; Dr Javed Iqbal, a former in-charge of the District TB Control Centre in Haripur; Dr Raja Asif, a medical officer at the Ayub Teaching Hospital in Abbottabad.

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Dr Sadiq Hussain, an associate professor in paediatrics at the Poonch Medical College Rawalakot and Dr Rizwan Abid, a consultant cardiologist in Muzaffarabad, died of Covid-19 in November.

In October, the list shows two doctors' death in Punjab, four in Sindh and one in KP.

A total of 154 health professionals, 128 doctors and 26 paramedics have died of the coronavirus since March 3. Dr Usama Riaz, a Gilgit-Baltistan-based physician, was the first health professional to fall prey to the disease.

#### **Strict enforcement of SOPs**

Describing the situation as alarming, PMA general secretary Dr Qaiser Sajjad, who himself is recovering from Covid-19, said doctors were not getting proper protection, indicating an acute shortage of personal protective equipment.

"Doctors are forced to work in poor conditions. There are no checks at entry and exit points of healthcare facilities, increasing chances of infection among the staff," he said, adding that doctors were often not provided with rooms to sit and relax after long duty hours.

He also spoke about the economic hardships being faced by doctors and said they were deprived of the risk allowance and the government was not even releasing their salaries on time.

“The Shuhada Package announced by the federal and provincial governments in September for the families of doctors dying of Covid-19 hasn’t been implemented yet,” he said.

“Currently, more than 3,000 doctors are in isolation and, on the other hand, the number of Covid-19 patients is increasing day by day, burdening hospitals and healthcare workers. There is a shortage of medical facilities due to which hospitals are refusing to take in new patients.”

On behalf of the association, he demanded the immediate provision of PPE, strict enforcement of SOPs or imposition of a lockdown based on a uniform policy.

He also called upon the government to reserve a few beds at each hospital for ailing doctors.  
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 03/10/2020)

### **Crackdown intensified against SOP violators as second wave feared**

As five more Covid-19 patients died overnight and more than 300 new cases emerged in Sindh, the local administration imposed “mini smart lockdown” in five more neighbourhoods of Karachi’s East district on Friday evening, sealed six marriage halls and 104 restaurants across the metropolis for failing to comply with safety guidelines.

A notification issued by the deputy commissioner-East said that five different localities — Al Mustafa Apartment in Gulistan-e-Jauhar, Askari IV in Faisal Cantonment, Block 13 of Gulistan-e-Jauhar, Al Khaleej Tower on Shaheed-e-Millat Road and few streets of Martin Quarters — had been placed under a 15-day “mini smart lockdown” with effect from Friday night.

#### **223 new cases in Karachi**

In the daily situation report, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said five more Covid-19 patients died lifting the death toll to 2,517 and 316 more infected when 12,990 samples were tested raising the tally to 137,783. The current detection rate came to 2.4 per cent.

*104 eateries sealed in two days; smart lockdown imposed in five areas of East district*

Urging the people to stay alert and practise caution, he said that so far 1,387,758 tests had been conducted which detected 10pc, or 137,783 cases, against which 95pc, or 130,730 patients, recovered, including 220 overnight.

He said that currently 4,536 patients were under treatment, of them 4,250 in home isolation, seven at isolation centres and 270 at different hospitals.

“The condition of 200 patients is stated to be critical, including 37 shifted to ventilators,” he said. “Out of 361 new cases, 223 have been detected from Karachi. They include 108 from East, 56 South, 32 Central, 23 Malir, seven West and six from Korangi.”

He said that Hyderabad has nine cases, Badin eight, Dadu and Kambar five each, Jamshoro four, Larkana three, Ghotki, Matiar and Tando Mohammad Khan two each, Mirpurkhas, Naushahro Feroze, Sukkur, Tando Allahyar and Thatta one.

“I appeal to the people of Sindh to observe SOPs [standard operating procedures] because cases are on the rise,” he said.

#### **Action against SOP violators continues**

The city administration, which had already imposed mini smart lockdown in selected areas of districts West and South, continued a crackdown against businesses and public facilities violating SOPs.

“Some 104 eateries have been sealed so far for violating SOPs and health guidelines in different city districts,” said an official at the Karachi commissioner’s office. “Similarly, half-dozen marriage halls or banquets were closed for the same reasons. The restriction is imposed for 15 days as a penalty. This is an ongoing exercise and the number may increase if the people and business owners don’t pay heed to repeated appeals.”

Meanwhile, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar, who also heads the National Command and Operation Centre, urged the people to exercise responsibility to prevent putting people’s lives at risk and warned that no one should give up precautions.

“Indoor Restaurants & marriage halls emerging as high contributors to Covid spread. NCOC today has directed all provinces and federating units to crack down on SOP violations in these places. We must not allow irresponsible behaviour of some to put the health of everyone at risk,” he tweeted.

#### **PMA concerned over ‘second wave’ risk**

The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) expressed concerns over a sudden surge in Covid-19 cases in Pakistan in recent weeks, particularly in Karachi.



“Currently, Pakistan is at risk of Covid-19’s second wave as being experienced in other parts of the world. Unfortunately, however, people are showing little regard to the health and safety guidelines that may put burden on our hospitals facing acute shortages of staff and equipment,” the PMA stated in a press release.

It urged the government to closely monitor the situation and opt for the lockdown strategy if cases increased in some areas or institutions. The general public, it emphasized, should consider face masks as the strongest preventive measure against the disease till a vaccine was developed.

“We all must know that it’s a viral disease and spreads rapidly. Educational institutions, hospitals, marriage halls and markets are more sensitive areas where standard operating procedures should be strictly followed. It’s also important that children — who could be a source of virus transmission — follow preventive measures for which parents need to play their role,” it said.

(By Imran Ayub & Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 03/10/2020)

### 291 new Covid-19 cases detected, says CM

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said on Sunday that 10,813 samples were tested which detected 291 new coronavirus positive cases overnight, taking the tally to 138,341. One more patient lost his life overnight, lifting the death toll to 2,521, he said.

In a statement issued here from CM House, he said that so far 1,408,489 samples had been tested against which 138,341 cases were detected which constituted 10 per cent overall detection rate. He added that 219 patients recovered overnight. The number of patients recovered so far has reached 131,030.

According to the CM, currently 4,790 patients were under treatment, of them 4,509 were in home isolation, seven at isolation centers and 274 at different hospitals.

“The condition of 201 patients is stated to be critical, including 35 shifted to ventilators,” he added.

Murad Ali Shah said that out of 291 new cases, 219 were detected in Karachi.

They include 107 in the South district, 59 in East, 30 in Central, 12 in Korangi, seven in Malir and four in the West district.

He said that Hyderabad had eight cases, Sukkur six, Shaheed Benazirabad and Sujawal four each, Sanghar three, Larkana, Mirpurkhas and Tando Allahyar two each, Jacobabad, Umerkot, Kambar-Shahdaddock, Kashmore, Khairpur and Naushahro Feroze districts had one case each.

The CM urged people of the province to follow the SOPs and stay safe.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 05/10/2020)

### The second wave

After managing the first wave of coronavirus infections, the government should now be preparing for the second. For its earlier work, the Imran Khan government earned praise in the manner the first wave was dealt with. World Health Organization chief Dr Tedros Adhanom praised the Pakistani government’s response against coronavirus and “recognised the positive trend of virus curtailment” in the country.



In an op-ed in a British online newspaper recently, Dr Tedros lauded Pakistan’s strategy saying that the country deployed the infrastructure built up over many years for polio to coronavirus. He also wrote that those community health workers who were trained to go door-to-door vaccinating children against polio have been redeployed and utilised for surveillance, contact tracing and care.

Earlier, Dr Tedros had listed Pakistan among six countries from which the international community should learn how to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The challenge was to impose restrictions in such a way that the economy was not unduly impacted. More importantly, that the daily-wage earners would not suffer unduly. This is something that had been achieved to a large extent by the government.

But now with the re-opening of schools and educational institutions, we are seeing that numbers which had mercifully fallen have started to rise again. The government has decided to go for what it calls “small smart lockdowns”. This includes placing restrictions on buildings or houses instead of streets or mohallas.

We all know that the coronavirus is far from over. Some countries are still dealing with large epidemics like neighbouring India, but even those currently controlling the virus are waiting for the second wave. October started with the depressing news that the official death toll from Covid-19 surpassed one million worldwide as casualties continued to mount from a pandemic that has ravaged lives and countries.

The pandemic has brought great cities to a standstill, closed schools and factories, grounded air transport and unleashed the ongoing social and political uncertainty. It triggered restrictions on where people could go and when, while ushering in mandates

to wear face coverings and discourage close contact with fellow humans. This seems to be the new world order — we call it the “new normal”.

Many victims perished alone, secluded in hospital wards and sealed-off rooms, their loved ones barred from their final moments. In Pakistan, there were several heart-wrenching stories as well. *Namaz-e-Janaza* for victims in Pakistan were held from a distance and people started questioning what the world held in store in coming times. We have come a long way since. Public confidence is being restored and activity is returning to pre-Covid times. This, of course, has meant that infections are also again on the rise.

According to some health sources, Pakistan is the 18<sup>th</sup> most-impacted country in the world, in terms of confirmed cases of the deadly virus. But given its population density as well as other factors, it has the potential of rising fast.

Dr Tedros recently said the pandemic could be over in under two years but warned that “no country can just pretend the pandemic is over”. This is a strong message for countries whose leadership is in danger of being complacent.

Pakistan is one such country. Here, due to some natural phenomenon and lack of extensive testing, the country till a month back was recording hundreds of Covid-19 cases daily, as compared to thousands in May and June. But, even with lesser cases, the facts on the ground remain unchanged.

The question now is how prepared we are for the second wave. Pakistan has a weak healthcare system and is unable to effectively provide proper medical care to its millions. We have not been able to eliminate infectious diseases like tuberculosis, hepatitis and most importantly, polio. We do not have the resources or the infrastructure in place. Experts now say that even if a vaccine for coronavirus is available quickly, there are few immediate benefits for less developed countries like Pakistan.

It is time perhaps for another round of measures. From public service messages to ensuring that people wear masks and follow SOPs in public spaces. For many it seems that the coronavirus has been eliminated in Pakistan. We have resumed public gatherings and it is clear people are not following SOPs. This could have far-reaching effects in days to come.

(By Kamal Siddiqi The Express Tribune, 15, 05/10/2020)

### **380 school staffers test Covid-positive in Sindh**

As many as 380 teaching and non-teaching staff members of private and government schools have been diagnosed with coronavirus in Sindh, with 246 of the infections reported in Karachi alone.

The Directorate General Monitoring and Evaluation released a report on Sunday, revealing that 64,827 people associated with schools had been tested for the contagious disease from September 12 to October 2. Of them, 54,199 had tested negative, while results were pending for 10,248.

Moreover, the report stated that 2,108 educational institutes in 29 districts were inspected for compliance with pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs), adding that 46 government schools and a private school were sealed for failing to implement them.

According to the report, 857 schools were found violating social distancing guidelines, 1,039 did not have proper facilities to wash hands or sanitisers, the classrooms at 807 schools were not being disinfected, 1,204 schools did not have clean toilets and 1,352 schools did not display guidelines about coronavirus.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 05/10/2020)

### **Second wave**

CONSIDERING that the second wave of Covid-19 has already started confronting shaken health systems across the world, Pakistan must remain on guard. While this country has mercifully dodged the devastation some of the world's Covid hotspots have endured, there is no reason to be complacent. This was the thrust of the prime minister's tweet on Sunday, in which Imran Khan urged people to wear masks in order to “avoid a spike”. Indeed, winter is approaching and viruses find a more favourable atmosphere to spread during colder weather. According to figures released by the National Command and Operation Centre, the number of active Covid-19 cases is nearing 9,500, whereas there were just over 6,000 cases last month. The Pakistan Medical Association has also sounded the alarm, saying that people's relaxed attitudes may cause an increase in infections.

Soon after the threat Covid-19 posed to the national health system became clear earlier this year, different pillars of the state responded in different fashion. For example, the federal government was seen to be reacting slowly, whereas the Sindh administration was quick to announce lockdown measures. Though these measures severely affected daily life — with economic and educational routines paralysed — the pain was necessary and manageable, compared to what the situation may have looked like had Covid-19 spread rapidly in the country. With the right preventive measures and perhaps some luck, Pakistan escaped a catastrophic situation that many in our region — such as India and Iran — as well as those farther afield — the US and European states — had to face. However, the challenge the coronavirus poses has not gone. Wearing masks and following other SOPs, such as regular handwashing and social distancing, are indeed simple steps that can go a long way in keeping a second wave at bay.

Moreover, with much of the public abandoning SOPs, there is a need to step up awareness campaigns and prevent crowding at workplaces, markets and educational institutions. And while larger lockdowns may be an option considering the severity of the situation, perhaps mini lockdowns can quickly be put in place in areas where a high number of infections are being reported. As the

PMA has said, the fight against Covid-19 can only be won if people act responsibly and follow SOPs, and the state implements rules strictly. Pakistan must be ready to face the second wave and defeat it through preventive steps.  
(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 06/10/2020)

### Covid-19: renewed concerns

A link between the spread of Covid-19 and winter remains largely unanswered by medical science though, there are growing concerns that the reigning coronavirus, like all other viruses, will peak as it gets colder. In what provides anecdotal evidence to this perception, the coronavirus numbers have started spiking in parts of the world, especially in the western countries, with the advent of winter there. New York, Paris, Tehran and several other cities have been put back under restrictions. In Pakistan too, there have been widespread apprehensions of a second wave of the microbe striking the public as the winter season sets in. In Azad Jammu and Kashmir — located in the north of the country where it is already pretty cold — the government of Raja Farooq Haider has decided to re-impose lockdown measures in a bid to keep the deadly contagion in check. According to PM Haider, corona-positive cases in the autonomous Himalayan territory have surged to 8.3% to those tested, which is higher than in any part of the country.

Prime Minister Imran Khan — who has been averse to the idea of a full-fledged lockdown in the country since the very beginning so that the wheel of the economy keeps moving and those belonging to vulnerable social classes are deprived of their daily wages — has also shared his fears about a winter-related coronavirus spike in the country, urging “everyone to wear face masks in public”. The PM’s concern comes as the number of active coronavirus cases in the country has witnessed a continuous rise over the last three weeks or so — from 5,673 on September 13 to 7,070 on September 23 and 8,884 on October 3. This rise in the cases coincides with the reopening of educational institutions and marriage halls across the country — in what nearly completes the withdrawal of the coronavirus curbs that had been imposed on March 23 in line with the decision of the National Command and Control Centre which has representation from all provinces and regions of the country as well as relevant institutions and stakeholders.

But returning to a near-normal work routine without adhering to the prescribed SOPs has started causing consequences. Complacency — both on the part of the public and the authorities — has crept in. According to media reports quoting health authorities, 80% of the people have stopped following the SOPs; about 75% have not been wearing face masks while 85% have not been using hand sanitiser and keeping physical distance. Besides, businesses — including restaurants, shopping malls, barber shops and beauty parlours — are running without any safety measures in place. The most flagrant violation can be witnessed in the public transport — even in school vans. While consequently, there has been a spike in the infection all across the country, Karachi has been kind of leading. Virus hotspots have emerged in nearly all the districts of the city; and many areas, including those in the upscale Clifton neighbourhood, have been put under micro-smart lockdown in a swift counter-action. Besides, dozens of schools, restaurants and marriage halls have also been sealed for violating the SOPs.

The Corona Experts Advisory Group, which had been formed soon after the coronavirus crossed into Pakistan, has warned of a second wave of the scary virus if SOPs continue to be violated. Quoting PM Imran, “Compared to some other states, Allah has been kind to us in Pakistan and spared us worst effects of Covid-19.” Now to prevent the virus from rearing its ugly head again, people need not be complacent. The authorities too need to ensure that they adopt all safety protocols.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 06/10/2020)

### Second wave?

COVID-19 cases are rising steadily in the country, with the positivity ratio crossing 2pc and daily deaths once again in double digits. Planning Minister and head of the NCOC Asad Umar has said that the rate of those testing positive for the coronavirus has increased after being less than 2pc for six weeks.

As a result, the government is rolling out smart lockdowns in areas where transmission rates are high. In Punjab, the authorities fear a second wave is imminent as daily cases surged to a 30-day high and five critical patients succumbed to the virus overnight. In Sindh, too, daily cases are climbing, with some days seeing more than 400 confirmed cases in the province.

While the government statistics suggest two out of every 100 patients tested are positive, testing is still abysmally low. In the past week, daily tests have been under 30,000 — a sorry figure considering the sheer size of our population. According to numbers compiled by some international Covid-19 trackers, Pakistan’s daily testing at 0.14 per thousand is among the lowest in the world.

This means that the confirmed cases being recorded by labs and collated by the government are just a fraction of the true number. Given the high transmission rate of the virus, if the spread is not controlled now, hospitalisations and deaths can once again jump and overwhelm the healthcare system.

While these grim figures are very much a reality, if one were to go into commercial or public spaces in the country, it would appear as if Covid-19 has been defeated. SOPs are being openly flouted, and distancing and face coverings are a rarity — a casual attitude which is sadly seen in members of the government as well as opposition politicians.

The prime minister recently spoke at an event where scores of attendees sat in a packed auditorium, many without masks. The opposition parties, too, are going ahead with their protest under the PDM banner, for which they are urging thousands of political workers to gather. These public figures and political leaders should be more responsible, and use their respective platforms to caution people about the dangers of contracting the virus.

The government must take the lead, and refocus its energy on Covid-19 prevention as it did during the peak — a genuine need for vigilance is why the government should dissuade the opposition from protesting, which is a democratic right. Failure to act by both sides will be a catastrophic mistake.  
(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 13/10/2020)

### As if Covid has gone

Despite the active coronavirus cases in Pakistan currently numbering in excess of fifteen thousand with an addition of more than five hundred daily cases for a couple of weeks, there has been a near normal activity almost everywhere in the country. Life is generally back to normal in the country – as if the coronavirus has been eliminated from our soil. We, as a nation, tend to take things lightly – even in genuinely serious situations. But the reopening of educational institutions and marriage halls – in what nearly completed the withdrawal of the coronavirus curbs that had been imposed on March 23 – has perhaps given us an all-clear signal.

As a result, it's business as usual nearly all over the country. Use of face masks by the public is a rarity. Social, political and religious gatherings are being held with scant regard to physical distancing protocols. Shopping centres and other market places are only following the prescribed SOPs as a formality. Buses are plying at full seating capacity. Even schools vans are neglecting social distancing. Given the lax attitude of the public, one can assume a general violation of the Covid safety measures in commercial and industrial units. An atmosphere of neglect can even be witnessed in major private hospitals.

Why would then the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) be not concerned? Its chair, Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar, has very rightly emphasised the need for risk mitigation in order to prevent a second Covid-19 wave in the country which is feared to surface with the advent of the winter season. While the Covid numbers in Pakistan – 319, 848 patients and 6,588 deaths – are not as disturbing as those in the neighbouring India, there is no room at all for complacency. The authorities need to ensure implementation of the SOPs at all costs and the people need to cooperate with them.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 14/10/2020)

### NCOC issues guidelines on public gatherings

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Tuesday asked all the chief secretaries of provinces and the chief commissioner of Islamabad to formulate fresh modalities/SOPs based on guidelines issued by it to contain the spread of Covid-19. The NCOC issued the guidelines for public gathering (to minimise wedding and sports activities) as the number of positive cases kept on increasing gradually.

Officials said the NCOC asked all the concerned, including the chief commissioner Islamabad, to ensure the implementation of the guidelines.

All federating units should formulate modalities/standard operating procedures (SOPs) remaining within these guidelines, according to a letter issued by the NCOC and available with [Dawn](#).

The letter said with the opening of all sectors and onset of the winter, there was an increasing trend of Covid-19 positivity, with the average rate rising from 1.75pc in the fourth week of August to 2.03pc in the second week of October.

*Provinces and capital administration told to formulate SOPs based on guidelines as Covid-19 cases continue to rise*

Public gatherings are high risk activities and banned in most countries as they have the potential to increase the spread of the virus exponentially and jeopardise the success achieved against the pandemic, it added.

In public gatherings, people are assembled on any given space, indoor or outdoor, for some purpose such as cultural events, religious gathering, sports events, political gathering or other similar events.

While formulating SOPs/guidelines, it should be borne in mind that public gathering should be discouraged in view of their potential to become super spreaders and preferably no public gathering be held except those related to economic activities.

Besides, these must be held in well-defined venues which facilitate enforcement of SOPs if holding public gatherings is unavoidable. For indoor events, the maximum participants should be 300 people or 50pc of the capacity.

Duration of the event/activity should not exceed three hours and all the participants should be seated and there should be no standing participation, the letter said, adding inter-chair/seat distance should be at least three feet or more.

The SOP for outdoor events, including control entry/exit, density, social distancing says all persons would be seated. Besides, a minimum of three-foot distance and a maximum duration of not more than three hours should be maintained.

Rallies/walks/gatherings on roads and streets and other ill-defined places should be avoided.

Organisers will be responsible for ensuring compliance of guidelines particularly wearing masks, social distancing and provision of Covid-19 safety kits to the participants.

The organisers should execute SOPs through an implementation committee. No public gatherings to be held in cities where positivity ratio is consistently higher.

Children and elderly should be discouraged to participate while people with Covid-19 or respiratory illness related symptoms must not be allowed to attend. Individuals with chronic illnesses, including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart diseases should not be allowed to participate.

Besides, no meals or light refreshment should be allowed in any type of gathering. Drinking water facilities should be arranged at multiple locations to avoid crowding, the letter said.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 04, 14/10/2020)

### Four coronavirus patients die

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that four more patients of coronavirus died overnight in Sindh while 214 new cases were detected.

In a statement issued here from CM House on Tuesday, Mr Shah said that four more patients of Covid-19 had lost their lives overnight, lifting the death toll to 2,587 that constituted 1.8 per cent death rate.

The CM said 7,487 tests were conducted against which 214 new cases of coronavirus emerged that had raised the tally to 214 that constituted 2.8 per cent current detection rate.

He added that so far, 1,547,731 samples had been tested which detected 142,348 cases in all over Sindh, of them 95 per cent or 135,494 had recovered, including 198 overnight.

Mr Shah said that currently, 4,267 patients were under treatment, of them 4,003 were in home isolation, five at isolation centers and 259 at different hospitals.

Out of 214 new cases, 120 had been detected in Karachi. They include 47 in South district, 37 East, 18 Central, 12 Malir, five Korangi and one West. Ghotki has 11 cases, Tando Mohammad Khan eight, Naushehro Feroze seven, Hyderabad six, Jamshoro and Shikarpur four each, Umerkot three, Jacobabad two, Sujawal, Sukkur and Dadu one each.

(By PPI Dawn, 14, 21/10/2020)

### Covid-19 and child education

Before the coronavirus outbreak, Pakistan's education system was already suffering from structural weaknesses and learning crises. However, the unprecedented school closures have resulted in further denting the country's efforts to build productive human capital. School closures have affected 55.3 million children in Pakistan aged between five and 16. Besides, 22.8 million children are already out of school. The pandemic is intensifying the risks and vulnerabilities of an already weak educational system.

Concerning the quality of learning, Pakistan is ranked 134 out of 157 countries on the Human Capital Index (HCI). Further, Pakistan's education quality is bad enough that the Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) and Learning Adjusted Year of Schooling (LAYS) differ by about four years. For instance, children in Pakistan can expect to complete 8.8 years of pre-primary, primary, and secondary school by age 18. However, when adjusted for quality of learning, it is only equivalent to 4.8 years: a learning gap of 4 years. Additionally, a learning gap between girls and boys is also present.

The low performance could be due to school and household level factors. Currently, better-off students are in comfortable homes with good internet connections, can hire a tutor, and are better placed for home schooling by well-educated parents. The disparity in learning would widen as poor students do not have access to such amenities. In addition, these kids are also disproportionately vulnerable to dropout from school.

Our assessment, in this study, confirms that school closures can substantially increase dropouts and erode learning, which tends to adversely affect important outcomes in the long-term. Considering the effect of Covid-19 on LAYS, this decreases to 4.08 (a decrease of 14.64%) in case of school closure for five months. Further, the yearly earning loss to a student in school today is \$234, and the lifetime earning loss is about \$2,349. The aggregate economic cost to the current cohort of children amounts to about \$129 billion. Besides, nearly 15.5 million children are vulnerable to dropout due to workers' layoff.

The economic cost in terms of reduced lifetime earnings is substantial. Therefore, the solution is to devise an effective online learning strategy. For this, the success of online learning strategies depends on the availability and equality in access to computers and internet service. Therefore, in practice, what proportion of households in different regions have real-time access to such amenities needs to be evaluated.

Similarly, online learning strategy can be complemented with the adoption of an effective remote learning strategy. In this regard, proper Virtual Learning Environments can be helpful in giving access to students and educators to connect to a dedicated repository of educational resources. Education broadcasting also needs to be strengthened, so that regions and households without access to the internet are covered.



The income shock to households, whose children are in private schools, would increase their demand for public support as families cannot afford any fees and pressure on a cash-strapped public system will increase. Therefore, the government's priority should be to stimulate economic activities with effective social distancing SOPs in place.

Schools have (partially) re-opened since last month, but the situation is still evolving. The threat of a second outbreak of the virus still exists. Therefore, to create a resilient education system of futuristic orientation, the focus should be to strengthen our capacity in the long-term through consistent human capital policies with adequate budget allocation for child education. (By Muhammad Jehangir Khan & Junaid Ahmed The Express Tribune, 14, 21/10/2020)

### Deaths from coronavirus up by 140pc: minister

While mentioning that the coronavirus-related mortality has increased by 140 per cent, federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar on Tuesday warned the nation that it was collectively committing a blunder by recklessly ignoring all standard operating procedures (SOPs).

"Last week daily Covid mortality was 12. This is a 140pc increase vs few weeks back. We are collectively committing a blunder by recklessly ignoring all SOPs and the results have started to show," tweeted the minister who heads the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Covid-19. He said: "If we do not change our current path we will lose both lives and livelihoods."

Also, Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr Faisal Sultan warned against a second wave of the contagion.

Earlier on Oct 11, the minister while explaining reason for enforcing 'mini' smart lockdowns in Islamabad, Karachi and Azad Jammu and Kashmir said that the positivity of cases, which had been found less than 2pc for the past six weeks, surpassed 2pc. Only four days later, Mr Umar disclosed that the positivity of Covid-19 cases was 2.37pc, which was the highest positivity in past more than 50 days. "Last time that level was seen on Aug 23," he explained.

Since the outbreak of virus in Pakistan in February, the maximum nationwide positivity rate was recorded in June when within three weeks it jumped to 23pc from six per cent. It came down to the minimum 1.7pc last month. On Tuesday, SAPM on Health Dr Sultan said considering the recent number of cases, there was a possibility of second wave of Covid-19 as people had stopped taking precautionary measures.

He said vaccine trial was being conducted and enrolments were being done but it would take time to get results as data and results would be analyzed before arriving at some conclusion.

#### 14 more die

Data released by NCOC on Tuesday showed that 14 patients lost lives due to Covid-19 during the past 24 hours and total number of active cases that had dropped to around 6,000 last month resurged to 9,461 on Oct 20.

Besides, out of total 1,884 ventilators allocated for Covid-19 patients, as many as 80 ventilators were in use and there was no patient on vent in Balochistan and AJK. (By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 21/10/2020)

### Covid-19 vs terrorism

When 9/11 happened, there was a fear in American society that for a huge majority surpassed the fear level of the Red Scare from the days of the Cold War. People lived in fear of radical Muslims inside American society. Taliban and Al Qaeda became the new monsters. Americans started looking over their shoulders and an overwhelming majority supported the invasion of foreign distant lands to avenge the terror attacks on US soil.



Today, the world is invaded by a global pandemic. Inside America, the virus has killed over 220,000 people. That number dwarfs the number of 9/11 deaths: about 3,000. Yet, the fear of 9/11 dwarfs the fear of the virus. Many Americans frequent the beaches, bars, restaurants, and other such places without the fear of the virus and its deadly results. When asked, the various responses include chiefly; when it's time to go, nothing can stop that so they might as well enjoy life while they're alive and they are not afraid of death. Many

display their machismo saying the virus won't kill them.

It's quite mindboggling because after 9/11, there was no argument that we should not invade Afghanistan because an Al Qaeda attack won't kill us or that fate cannot be avoided. After 9/11, Americans were surveilled. When massive surveillance activities were revealed by Edward Snowden, many responded by saying they had nothing to hide, therefore, they didn't care if the government was watching and recording their communications for the greater good.

Today, many naysayers who don't wear a mask somehow do not repeat the same mantra: that they don't believe in it but since they have nothing to worry about, they'll follow the policy of wearing a mask for the greater good.

An entire election campaign against Trump is being built on the basis of his late response to the virus. President Bush had also ignored the intelligence on August 6, 2001, that said, "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US". As a matter of fact, the CIA knew about the plot and presence of two of the bombers on US soil as early as January 2000.

Covid-19, just like terrorism, came from outside America. But xenophobia comes from within. While it's a daunting task to find the exact reason behind this contrasting reaction of the American people, in my humble opinion it boils down to the divided state of America that Trump created. Two terms of Obama followed by joblessness for many White Americans, America was ripe for further division along race and party lines.

Therefore, today the rejection of Covid-19 and masks is an expression of that anger. After 9/11, Americans came together against a common enemy: radical Muslims. Today, Americans are divided between angry working class White ultra-nationalists and anyone who does not agree with their views. The Democrats are trying to show the massive deaths caused by the Covid-19 as proof of Trump's ineligibility for presidency. Whereas, Trump's cult-like followers are going to deny the virus so they can fight their opponents.

In their minds, the deep state conspiracy trying to remove Trump from the White House is a reality. They believe in the QAnon conspiracy theory; that a cabal of paedophiles and Satan-worshippers run a global sex-child tracking operation and that President Trump is the only man who can stop them.

Edgar Welch, a North Carolina resident and father of two, drove six hours to a Washington pizza restaurant called Comet Ping Pong. Edgar was led to believe by a fake news article that the restaurant kept young children as sex slaves as part of a child abuse sex ring led by Hillary Clinton. He found nothing there and was arrested.

Terrorism was America's fight. Covid-19 is the Republicans' fight. Covid-19 is seen as a tool of the Democrats in unseating Trump.

(By Imran Jan The Express Tribune, 14, 22/10/2020)

### **Covid project in doldrums**

It seems the widening gulf between the provinces and the Centre may have swallowed a critical health project. Just as the country starts to face a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the federal government has withdrawn its Rs70 billion Covid-19 Responsive and other Natural Calamities Control Programme at the eleventh hour over a lack of consensus. The project had been designed to provide support to the provinces in mitigating the impact of the deadly respiratory disease. It was twice presented before the Central Development Working Party, and while its umbrella project was approved, the final, revised project concept paper could not be passed. The provinces demanded that the federal government bear the full cost of the initiative.

The government has, however, not completely axed the programme. Instead, it was decided that sub-projects will be prepared for priority areas and that the National Finance Commission will be approached for funds. The government, though, reversed its previous decision of allocating projects on a first-come-first-served basis while provinces will have a brief window to prepare and submit projects. The Centre and a couple of provinces have been at odds with each other over the issue of autonomy and funds as guaranteed under the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. On the surface, it appears that a health project at this critical stage where the fatal virus is witnessing a resurgence across the country is falling to such a discord. The federation needs to do more to include the provinces while the provinces would do well to cooperate with the federation. Creating a cordial atmosphere to work together is the responsibility of both.

All sides must realise that this pandemic is perhaps the only semblance of an equal opportunity organism. That dealing with it through a united and cohesive front perhaps presents the best chance for everyone to survive and it is hoped that this unity translates to the common man over implementing SOPs.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 25/10/2020)

### **Study warns Covid-19 may worsen TB, HIV services**

A recent survey conducted to measure the impact of Covid-19 outbreak on tuberculosis and HIV services in 64 low- and middle-income countries, including Pakistan, has shown that restrictions on movement seriously impeded access to health facilities not only for patients, but also for healthcare providers needed to deliver services.

The survey was carried out by a multinational team, which included three Pakistani scientists, from May to August this year.

According to its findings, over 40 per cent of respondents said it was impossible or much harder for TB and HIV patients to reach healthcare facilities since Covid-19 began. Similarly, according to 37 per cent respondents, it was much harder or impossible for TB healthcare providers to reach their place of work.

Challenges were also reported in relation to HIV healthcare providers reaching their place of work, but these were not considered as severe as for HIV patients.

Although the study focused on provision of medical services (diagnosis and treatment), over 70 per cent of respondents reported that important nutritional or mental health support services for patients were impacted by Covid-19 outbreak.

A total of 669 TB and HIV professionals, including doctors, nurses, community healthcare providers, policymakers, laboratory technicians, health facility managers and researchers, participated in the survey.

**Stigma**

The most common barriers affecting access to healthcare facilities were: fear of getting infected with Covid-19, transport disruptions and movement restrictions owing to lockdowns and reduced income.

The study also highlighted increased stigmatisation of HIV and TB patients owing to changes in the delivery of health services. Examples provided by respondents included stigmatisation when HIV patients were asked to show health cards in order to travel, when patients presenting with TB symptoms were first isolated and tested for Covid-19, and when attention is drawn to HIV or TB patients in their neighbourhoods during community-based distribution of medicines.

It also reported the stigma about Covid-19 as there was increased concern among people that healthcare providers or community members would think they had Covid-19 if they sought care for TB.

**Why focus on TB, HIV**

According to researchers, while the direct health effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are colossal, and are continuing to grow, the indirect effects of Covid-19 on global health – through the disruption of essential healthcare services – may be even larger and longer lasting.

Tuberculosis and HIV are the two infectious diseases that cause the highest number of deaths globally; in 2018, 1.5 million and 1.1 million people died from TB and HIV-related illnesses, respectively.

A modeling study estimating the impact of severe disruptions to service delivery predicted that HIV and TB deaths could increase by up to 10 per cent and 20 per cent over five years, respectively, in high-burden settings, reverting to levels seen a decade ago. National programmes for controlling these diseases already face immense challenges and the pandemic has increased these by diverting healthcare professionals and resources to contain Covid-19.

According to researchers, maintaining effective TB control services in Pakistan is critical as this is one of eight countries that account for the majority of the 10 million new TB cases every year.

The newly released Global Tuberculosis Report shows a huge drop (25pc to 30pc) in TB diagnosis owing to disruptions caused by Covid-19.

**Urgent action**

Prof Mishal S.Khan, the study lead and Associate Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said insights from frontline health professionals should be incorporated into planning of mitigation strategies as Covid-19 numbers had begun to rise.

Prof Khan along with co-investigators Razia Fatima and Dr Afshan Isani, suggested three strategies to minimise health service disruptions.

First, reduce the need for health facility visits by providing medication for longer duration, increasing government community-based services, and using telemedicine.

Second, ensure that affordable transport is available for patients and health providers to reach health facilities, with awareness campaigns to highlight that travel for healthcare is allowed and is safe even during lockdowns.

Third, allocate resources to maintain or expand nutritional and mental health support services as these become more critical when Covid-19 reduces income generation.

“We need to act urgently as progress on TB control is being reversed by Covid-19,” warned Dr Razia Fatima representing the Common Management Unit (HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria) in Islamabad.

Dr Afshan K. Isani of Stop TB Partnership – a global alliance against TB – underscored the need for informed policy decisions to prevent indirect health impacts of Covid-19 in Pakistan and call for a multi-sectoral action to galvanise TB/HIV response. (By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 27/10/2020)

**'Smoking, diabetes, hypertension increase stroke risk in Covid patients'**

An estimated 1,000 people have major or minor strokes in Pakistan. Of them, 400 die the same day while around 200 or 250 suffer disability for life.

This was shared by senior neurologists at a press conference held on Tuesday in connection with World Stroke Day at the Karachi Press Club.

The event was organised by Pakistan Stroke Society (PSS) in collaboration with Neurology Awareness and Research Foundation (NARF), Pakistan Islamic Medical Association and PharmEvo, a local pharmaceutical firm.

According to experts, Covid-19 has emerged as a serious risk factor for stroke and it has increased the occurrence of stroke across the world.

Now, they pointed out, smokers and patients with diabetes and hypertension were more at risk of having stroke, if they contracted coronavirus, calling upon the government to launch stroke prevention programmes.

“There is an urgent need to have a national stroke treatment centre and a stroke research institute in Karachi,” said president of NARF Prof Muhammad Wasey.

He said hardly 250 out of 100,000 people reportedly had a stroke in Pakistan in 2005.

General secretary of PSS Dr Ravi Shankar said a stroke was an emergency and timely proper intervention could save life.  
(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 28/10/2020)

## Second Covid wave under way in Pakistan

As active cases of Covid-19 surpassed the 11,000 mark, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr Faisal Sultan on Tuesday formally announced that the second wave of the deadly virus has started in the country. He also said that a time schedule can be set for certain businesses to avoid the spread of coronavirus.

During a media briefing, the SAPM said the number of Covid-19 cases was increasing every day. “A few weeks ago we were getting 400 to 500 cases per day, but now it has increased to 700 to 750 cases. Moreover, the mortality rate has also increased. Another ratio which is considered is percentage positivity that remained less than two per cent, but now it has reached close to 3pc,” he said. It is worth mentioning that the number of positive cases in samples of 100 is called percentage positivity.

*Active coronavirus cases cross 11,000 mark; PM’s aide laments SOPs not being followed*

Dr Sultan said the masses were not following the standard operating procedures (SOPs) to the extent it was necessary to avoid the spread of the virus. “It has become necessary to strictly implement the SOPs. We will start it from local level. In districts where the disease is more rampant we will start from there. Focus will be on those areas which have been badly hit by the virus. We are deliberating on the restrictions but district administrations have been advised to impose fines on buses, wedding halls, restaurants and other crowded areas,” he added.

The SAPM said time schedule would be fixed for some businesses to control the spread of the virus. “We will discuss it at the platform of National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) and it will be finalised after getting input from all stakeholders. Moreover, a mechanism is being devised to get complaints from the masses. People will be requested to register complaints regarding violation of SOPs. On Wednesday (today), we will discuss it with the provinces to finalise the proposals,” he added. According to data released by the NCOC, 773 people tested positive for Covid-19 across the country on Monday and the number of total positive cases reached 11,190 on Tuesday.

The number of active cases dropped to 6,000 last month.

Out of 1,884 ventilators allocated for Covid-19 patients, 93 were occupied on Tuesday. There was no patient on ventilators in Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan.

Spokesperson for the Ministry of National Health Services Sajid Shah, while talking to [Dawn](#), appealed to the masses to follow health guidelines. “We cannot win the war against the deadly virus without cooperation of the people. A few weeks ago Pakistan was being praised globally for its efforts and strategy to control the virus, but people stopped following the SOPs due to which the number of cases again started increasing,” he added.

Mr Shah said that if the number of Covid-19 cases continued to increase, the government would have no option but to take unpopular decisions due to which the country’s economy would be affected.  
(By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 28/10/2020)

## No commercial activities in 11 virus-hit cities after 10pm

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Covid-19 on Wednesday announced schedule for commercial and social activities in 11 cities which are most vulnerable to the deadly coronavirus.

Since 80 per cent Covid-19 cases are being reported in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Hyderabad, Gilgit, Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Peshawar and Quetta, commercial activities — markets, shopping malls, marriage halls and restaurants — will be closed at 10pm and amusement/public parks at 6pm daily from Thursday (today).

Wearing of mask is mandatory at public places and a fine of Rs6,000 to Rs35,000 and punishment of six-month imprisonment will be slapped on the violators. A notification in this regard will be published in the Gazette of Pakistan on Thursday, but it will come into effect after Eid Milad-un-Nabi.

*NCOC says parks to be closed at 6pm; heavy fine, six-month imprisonment to be slapped on violators; 80pc Covid-19 cases reported in major cities*

"All the parameters i.e. positivity of tests, mortality rate, admissions in hospitals, etc, are increasing. Though there is no exponential increase in cases, I believe that the time has come to take steps to control the virus, otherwise things can become worse," Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr Faisal Sultan said while talking to [Dawn](#).

He said the message was that Pakistan should not lose the war won against the virus. "We are taking provinces onboard and I have reached Lahore to talk to the Punjab government. Similarly, other provinces will also be taken onboard," he added.

When asked about the heavy fine which most of the common people may not be able to pay, Dr Sultan said it was necessary to ensure that everyone wears mask and the NCOC would go to any extent to save the masses from the deadly virus.

According to a statement issued by the NCOC, strict enforcement of compulsory mask wearing in confined spaces (indoors, public transport, outdoor crowded settings like markets and bus stands, railway stations, etc) will be ensured.

Commercial activities will not be allowed after 10pm, but essential services — medical stores, clinics, hospitals, etc — will remain open. Moreover, broad-based smart lockdowns in hotspots are also under consideration.

"Wearing of face mask is must in all offices, both public and private sectors. NCOC has directed provinces to ensure compliance with mask wearing SOPs, particularly in bazaars, shopping malls, public transport and restaurants. Eighty per cent disease spread and increase in positivity ratio [has been reported] in 11 major cities across Pakistan. At present 4,374 lockdowns are imposed, with 30,610 population under lockdown," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the Islamabad district administration has declared the wearing of mask mandatory at public places by imposing Section 144 under the Criminal Procedure Code, 1898. "The order has come into force with immediate effect and shall remain in force for a period of two months. In case of violation, strict action will be taken against the violators," the notification states.

Islamabad Deputy Commissioner Hamza Shafqat, while talking to [Dawn](#), said that as per rules a fine of Rs6,000 to Rs35,000 can be imposed on the violators.

"Moreover, there is also a provision of up to six-month imprisonment but in 99pc cases, only fines are imposed and in the remaining 1pc cases, the violators are sent to jail for one day," he added.

Mr Shafqat appealed to the masses to wear mask in their own interest as it would save them and their loved ones from the deadly virus.

(By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 29/10/2020)

### Growing virus concerns

THE feared second wave of Covid-19 cases in Pakistan has arrived, with daily confirmed cases and hospitalisations increasing at an alarming rate. At the time of writing, 14 people in the previous 24 hours had succumbed to the virus and 825 had tested positive, marking a rise in both mortality and positivity rates. On Wednesday, after repeated warnings of rising Covid-19 cases across the country, the National Command and Operation Centre made it compulsory for all citizens to wear a face mask when leaving their homes — a directive that came as the positivity rate approached 3pc and the total reported number of active cases in the country crossed 11,000. All provinces have been asked to ensure that people wear face masks and adhere to the SOPs, particularly in bazaars, shopping malls, restaurants and on public transport.

The decision to enforce mask-wearing is indeed welcome and necessary, but it is a step that should have been taken much earlier. Many countries that emerged from the first wave of infections made mask-wearing mandatory even during the months when cases were fewer — a guideline authorities in Pakistan did not declare mandatory till this week. A few months after the pandemic began, international health authorities started to stress on the importance of mask-wearing as there is clear evidence that face coverings significantly lower transmission. In the post-July euphoria period in Pakistan, however, when Covid-19 cases were successfully lowered after restrictions and SOPs were enforced, mask-wearing sadly remained voluntary. Still, it is not too late to enforce the SOPs and stem the rising Covid-19 tide to prevent an all-out disaster. Authorities must build on the knowledge and strengths that helped them lower the curve previously and use the data available to take decisive action. They must also improve their messaging to the public and convey how serious the threat has become. Without strict adherence to the SOPs, the closure of schools and businesses will become inevitable — something that will deeply impact the education sector and economy which are already reeling from the restrictions of the first wave.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 29/10/2020)

### Pakistan sees 1000 cases a day first time in 90 days

For the first time since the end of July, the number of coronavirus cases being reported on a daily basis has surpassed the 1,000 mark, while active cases have also doubled in one and a half months with around 100 patients requiring ventilators at present.

In view of the deteriorating situation, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Covid-19 held a special meeting on Saturday and discussed measures to stem further spread of the virus.

According to the NCOC data, 1,078 new cases — the highest in the past three months — were reported from across the country on Oct 29. While the number of new patients dropped to 807 the following day, the health authorities and medical experts expressed concern over the situation and advised the masses to ensure strict compliance to the health guidelines issued by the government.



The NCOC data showed that as many as 1,114 people contracted the virus in the country on July 30. Since then the number of daily cases remained less than 1,000, with 330 cases reported on Aug 3 and 213 on Aug 30. However, the number of new cases again rose to 330 a week later, after which there has been a constant increase in positive cases. On Oct 3, 632 new cases were reported. The number of daily cases jumped to 755 on Oct 14, 847 on Oct 23 and 1,078 on Oct 29.

*NCOC asks provinces to increase drug stocks at hospitals; spike in cases feared amid winter*

Similarly, the number of active cases has more than doubled during the past one and a half months, as there were only 5,936 active cases reported on September 15, but the figure jumped to 12,121 on Oct 31, according to the NCOC data.

The situation can also be assessed through the increase in use of ventilators by patients. One hundred ventilators out of the 1,884 allocated for Covid-19 patients across the country are in use in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa only.

Meanwhile, the NCOC special meeting, which was presided over by Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan, expressed its concern over the prevailing situation and asked the provincial administrations to not only ensure availability of medicines and equipment in hospitals but also increase their stocks.

The provinces were further advised to make sure that people followed the standard operating procedures, according to a statement issued by the press information department.

A few days ago, the NCOC had [directed](#) the relevant administrations to fine violators of SOPs in 11 cities where commercial activities have been banned after 10pm and public parks are supposed to remain closed after 6pm.

Talking to [Dawn](#), University of Health Sciences (UHS) Vice Chancellor Dr Javed Akram said the virus had again started spreading among the masses and the number of cases was expected to rise further during the winter.

"When cases declined, people stopped taking precautions. They need to understand that the cases had declined due to rain and humidity as aerosols become droplets in humid conditions and chances of infection decrease because the droplets become heavy and fall on the ground. Cases are rising again because there are no checks on gatherings and educational institutions are also open," he said.

The UHS vice chancellor appealed to the people to behave responsibly in order to prevent the situation from worsening.

Replying to a question, Dr Akram said the third phase of the vaccine's clinical trial was under way, but he could not say when it would become available for commercial use.

### Imran visits PIMS

Earlier on Friday, Prime Minister Imran Khan accompanied by Information Minister Shibli Faraz and Special Assistant Dr Faisal Sultan visited Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), Islamabad.

The prime minister visited the emergency block and inquired about the facilities being provided to patients. He also spoke to doctors and asked about the issues they were facing.

Dr Sultan briefed the prime minister about the facilities and how Covid-19 suspects were isolated and patients were treated.  
(By Ikram junaidi Dawn, 01/11/2020)

## Protecting against the second wave

AS Covid-19 cases rise across the country, it seems to be a matter of time before strict public health measures designed to stem the virus's spread will be implemented. These steps will be accompanied by the same types of issues regarding socioeconomic vulnerability witnessed earlier between March to June.



To some extent, the government rightly prides itself over its socioeconomic response to the virus. The relatively efficient expansion of the flagship BISP cash transfer scheme to include new enrollees and the overall scale of disbursement has been impressive.

A second wave of the virus and its accompanying containment measures pose a complex set of challenges for policymakers. These challenges gain further salience in a context currently marked by rapid food inflation. Contemporary vulnerability has multiple dimensions, livelihoods are already under pressure and incomes remain squeezed. The government needs to ask itself two important questions in the coming weeks: firstly, did the first set of vulnerability-addressing responses achieve their intended goal? Secondly, will they prove to be sufficient this time around?

This piece does not propose an answer to either of these questions. However, it attempts to provide a framework through which they may be answered.

*A new wave of the virus and its accompanying containment measures pose a complex set of challenges.*

One aspect of the past social protection response that deserves scrutiny is the metric being used to evaluate its success. So far, the focus has been on 'output' metrics, rather than on outcome ones. What this means is that the government has fixated on numbers

— people/businesses reached, amount disbursed — rather than an evaluation of whether these outputs actually addressed vulnerability.

Extant survey data tells us that the number of households reporting a livelihood shock of the scale that required some form of assistance — from family/friends or the government — is very high. In some estimates, it was reported as high as 50 per cent. The corresponding number of households reporting access to Covid-19-related government assistance is closer to 12pc.

An accompanying point is with regard to particular types of populations that require targeting for vulnerability-related assistance. Various researchers have mentioned that the pandemic's urban bias (related to density and population), and the corresponding public health measures arguably make urban informal-sector workers more vulnerable than the rural poor. However, Pakistan's social protection mechanisms — given their reliance on the poverty scorecard method that places greater weightage to asset and consumption scores — are geared towards addressing persistent vulnerability, rather than the type that's induced by an exogenous shock.

The challenge in reaching these populations is immense, and one that requires considerable state capacity. Identifying vulnerable groups in a population characterised by frequent displacement and migration is a challenge, and one that poses an additional set of health-related complications. The case of India, where mass migration accompanied the ill-timed and communicated lockdown, is instructive in this regard.

At the same time, a higher level of difficulty in targeting should not in itself be a reason to give up. There are several tools that the government can draw on for this task. The first and most obvious one is to carry out district-representative surveys ahead of any public health measures being undertaken. The ideal time to do this would be now, when cases have not yet reached a point necessitating harsh lockdowns and restrictions on economic activity. These surveys would also be able to provide reasonable evidence of the past success of the cash transfer scheme in terms of the types of population reached.

Using survey data would also be able to establish the differential impact of vulnerability across different sectors of the urban economy — manufacturing, home-based work, construction, and retail-wholesale trade. It can then be used to identify possible points of contact within civil society that would help reach out to at-risk populations.

A second mechanism would be to rely on existing constituency-based political structures. For the past decade, there has been a general reluctance to involve political actors in the design and implementation of social protection and welfare measures, largely in a bid to keep them non-partisan and programmatic. The historical case of zakat and Baitul Maal funds serve as cautionary reminders of how unaccountable political control over welfare measures can result in patronage-based outlays that have little consideration for actual need.

However, there are some intrinsic benefits of involving political input into welfare programmes beyond the obvious ones of ownership and electoral accountability. In the current structure of Pakistani politics, the constituency already serves as the key arena in which citizens claim rights and access to services. A sizeable pool of party leaders and activists are usually tasked with running party affairs in the constituency, and elected representatives are first and foremost concerned with constituency-related affairs. Livelihoods and associated vulnerabilities are one such affair.

Politicians can engage with constituents in relevant localities to obtain specific information on how the pandemic may have impacted their livelihoods in either urban or rural areas in general. They can also receive feedback on if current policies designed to limit the impact of Covid-19 are working and what else can be done. Such exercises constitute 'learnings from the field' that can be compiled into 'fact-finding and assessment' documents that summarise the feedback and views received from grassroots supporters and constituents. Ultimately, these can feed into higher tiers of administrative decision-making — the district, divisional, or the provincial tier — thus opening up insular and mostly bureaucratic bodies to new sets of information.

The core task of the measures suggested here is to widen access to information and data that decision-makers may not have. The country's virus status is currently at a particular point in time where such measures can have the greatest amount of impact because they're sequenced, unlike in the first wave, prior to any welfare interventions being designed and undertaken. This should help make them even more effective and efficient.

(By Umair Javed Dawn, 06, 2/11/2020)

## Smog and Covid-19

Smog envelops Lahore every year in winter — from November to February, and the issue has been persisting for the past many years threatening humans as well as other living beings. Since smog makes breathing difficult, it is now posing a greater danger to human life due to the resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic. It is mostly difficulty in breathing that kills most Covid-19 patients. Even in this dangerous situation nobody seems to be taking any particular notice of this stubborn problem. On Nov 1, the city ranked among the most polluted cities of the world. It was Sunday and commercial concerns and industries in the city and the surrounding areas were shut yet the US Air Quality Index registered an unhealthy score of 156 and the air contained pollution concentration of PM2.5 at 64.6 microgrammes per cubic metre. On Saturday, the AQI reading was recorded at 225, evidence that the atmosphere was very unhealthy.

Despite all these dangerous signs, there is no let-up in use of coal, tyres and other waste materials for energy generation in industries and brick-kilns. PM2.5 denotes atmospheric particulate matter. These very small and light particles could enter the lungs and the circulatory system through the nose and throat. Studies have established a close link between exposure to these fine particles and death from heart and lung disease. In areas where industries burn coal and tyres for energy to save on their fuel cost, rooftops and walls are blackened and clothes put on lines to dry out are blackened due to the high level of carbon particles in the air. Respiratory, throat, eye and skin diseases have become common among the residents.

Most industries in the province are operating in violation of environmental laws, a fact that even the provincial minister of environment admitted. It is time to act against pollution. Death and disease should not be the price for prosperity. No one is pleased to see things blackened. Smog is not perfume to anyone.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 03/11/2020)

### **No closure of educational institutions due to covid**

Federal and provincial education ministers on Thursday decided not to close educational institutions in the country as positivity rate of coronavirus in the institutions remains "scarcely one to two per cent".

The Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC), held under the chairmanship of federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood through video link, discussed the existing Covid-19 situation in the country, particularly in educational institutions.

According to a spokesperson for the education ministry, National Health Services Director General Dr Safi Malik gave a detailed presentation to the forum on the current Covid-19 situation in the country. The provinces shared data of positivity rate of virus cases in schools and colleges which ranged between one and two per cent scarcely, "hence the forum was satisfied with the controlled situation in educational institutions," the spokesperson said.

A press release issued by the education ministry after the meeting said that keeping in view the overall situation, the forum unanimously ruled out closure of educational institutions.

*Ministers' conference opposes long winter vacations; Shafqat seeks proposals from provinces about uniform academic calendar*

"It was agreed that the targeted closure of institutions where the infection rate increases would be carried out with the help of local administration," it said, adding that the forum opposed long winter vacations and recommended that there should be either no vacations or these be limited to a few days so that students could cover their courses.

It is pertinent to mention that regular academic year before Covid-19 was of 32 weeks which has now been reduced to 11 weeks only. So there is no rationale for long vacations, the statement said.

About the agenda item of moving academic year from April to August, the federal education minister sought proposals from all the provinces in the next 15 days about a uniform academic calendar across the country. Keeping in view the loss of students during the six-month closure of schools due to Covid-19, Mr Mahmood asked for proposals about moving academic year from April to August, at least for the current academic year.

He asked the provinces to ensure strict compliance with the Covid-related standards operating procedures (SOPs) in educational institutions.

According to the press release, the federal education minister will brief the National Command and Operation Centre on Friday (today) on the decisions taken by the IPEMC.

The educational institutions across the country were reopened in September after six months' closure; however, due to resurgence of Covid-19, the forum discussed the issue but decided not to close the institutions.  
(By Kashif Abbasi Dawn, 01, 06/11/2020)

### **Fresh Covid curbs**

As the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic keeps taking its toll on major urban centres of the country, the government on Friday slapped major restrictions on the people to stem the proliferating contagion. The government has ordered work-from-home policy for half of the staff in both public and private sector offices and relatively broader smart lockdowns in the cities as part of the second phase of measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. Under the decisions taken at the level of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), indoor wedding gatherings have also been banned. The measures will remain in force from November 20, 2020 to January 31, 2021 in major cities of the country that have shown high positivity rate and bigger potential of spread of the virus.

In a pretty pertinent step, the NCOC has also ordered the implementation of Gilgit-Baltistan model as regards wearing of face masks. Accordingly, any person not wearing a mask will be fined Rs100 and issued three masks on the spot. Supplementing the NCOC measures, the Karachi administrator has issued fresh SOPs, making the wearing of face masks mandatory at public places, failing which a fine of up to Rs500 would be slapped. The authorities must take the face mask fine order seriously and ensure that it has a deterrent effect on the public, like in many other countries of the world.

The deadly virus first emerged in the country in February this year and hit a peak in mid-June. However, it started to decline in the following months but surged again in the last month, prompting the government to issue warning of the second wave. Since last week, the number of single-day new cases had crossed 1,000 mark for the first time since the first week of August. It is, however, satisfying to see that the authorities have sprung into timely action. It is hoped that with the cooperation of the public, we will go past the second wave of the virus less scathed.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 08/11/2020)

## Daily tally crosses 1,500 mark first time since July

With the second wave of Covid-19 intensifying, the number of coronavirus cases being reported on a daily basis crossed the 1,500 mark for the first time since July on Saturday.

As many as 1,763 cases were reported on July 23 after which the number gradually fell to fewer than 300 in September. The country saw the highest number of daily cases on June 14 when 6,825 people contracted the virus.

On the other hand, health experts have criticised the government's recent decision to impose Rs100 fine on those not wearing masks and allow 1,000 guests at outdoor weddings.

Due to the continuous violation of health guidelines, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Friday had decided to fine violators Rs100 and provide them three masks on the spot. It also announced that from Nov 20 onwards, wedding events will be held in open areas with a maximum of 1,000 guests.

### *Experts assail govt measures to check virus spread*

The NCOC also directed that only 50 per cent staff may work from their offices, both in the public and private sectors, while the remaining from home.

According to the centre's data, 1,543 people tested positive for the virus on Saturday while the number of active cases, which was less than 6,000 last month, has reached 17,520.

As many as 129 ventilators, out of 1,857 allocated for Covid-19 treatment, were in use with no patient on vent in Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan.

Talking to Dawn, University of Health Sciences (UHS) Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Javed Akram said the rise in cases was expected as 90 per cent of the people had started ignoring standard operating procedures.

"The fact is that the virus was subdued due to the hot weather, and with the change in temperature, it has started to spread rapidly," he said.

Replying to a question, Dr Akram said the Rs100 fine was nothing but a joke, suggesting that up to Rs10,000 fine should be announced to create a deterrence.

"Allowing 1,000 guests at a wedding function is also unacceptable. I suggest not more than 100 people should attend such events. By permitting outdoor functions, people might get an impression that the virus does not affect people in an open area. However, they should know that US President Donald Trump and his staff contracted the virus from the Rose Garden of the White House," he said.

About the phase-III clinical trial of a potential vaccine, the vice chancellor, who is also a member of the Scientific Task Force on Covid-19, said 3,000 volunteers had been vaccinated across the country and the results on its tolerance and efficacy have so far been satisfactory. However, he said results would be shared after 10,000 volunteers received shots of the vaccine.

Pakistan Medical Association general secretary Dr Qaiser Sajjad told Dawn that a minimum Rs1,000 fine should be imposed on violators and 100 to 150 people permitted to attend wedding events. Guests should also be given takeaways instead of serving them lunch or dinner at the event, he added.

"The virus in this second spell seems to be more lethal as nine doctors have died in the last three weeks. The PMA had observed that the majority of patients on ventilators were not recovering so we need to avoid putting them on vents as there was a possibility that the machines were damaging their lungs. China had also taken a similar decision," he said.

Dr Sajjad urged the government to distribute free masks and regulate their prices as well as of sanitisers so that they were affordable for people.

He feared that with the increase in cases, medicines, oxygen cylinders and other necessary items might disappear from the markets, therefore, it was all the more important for the relevant departments to ensure their availability at affordable rates.

Meanwhile, Ministry of National Health Services spokesperson Sajid Shah said all possible efforts were being made to control the virus.

"The NCOC meets on a daily basis with all stakeholders brainstorming on ways to protect people from the deadly virus," he added.  
(By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 08/11/2020)

## Alarming rise in Covid-19 cases spells fresh curbs on weddings

While the number of active cases of Covid-19, which was less than 6,000 in September, has increased threefold i.e. 17,804 and 148 ventilators are in use across the country, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) has issued additional guidelines for marriage ceremonies to contain the spread of the deadly virus.

According to new guidelines, participants of wedding ceremonies will have to sit at six feet apart. The event timing has been restricted to two hours with cutoff time of 10pm. All guests will have to wear face masks and organisers of marriage events will have to display the seating/gathering capacity of their venues at the entrance/ reception. Moreover, the organisers will have to take precautionary measure against dengue fever.

Thermal scanning of all attendees at the entrance and wearing face masks have been declared mandatory. Buffet dinner/lunch has been banned and only lunch boxes and table service have been allowed. The wedding event managers will have to retain the names and contact details of all wedding attendees and staff for at least 15 days.

Meanwhile, as about 600 new Covid-19 cases were reported over the weekend, the Islamabad administration on Sunday decided to seal five residential areas for at least one week.

The order will come into effect at 10 am on Monday (today). Police have been told to cordon off the areas to contain the spread of the disease.

According to a notification issued by Deputy Commissioner of Islamabad Hamza Shafqaat, subsectors I-8/3, I-8/4, G-9/1, G-10/4 and G-6/2 will be sealed.

The new guidelines, which have been prepared by the Health Services Academy, National institute of Health and Health Planning, Systems Strengthening and Information Analysis Unit, will be implemented from Nov 20 on wards in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Hyderabad, Gilgit, Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Peshawar, Quetta, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Faisalabad, Bahawalpur and Swat.

The draft of the guidelines, available with [Dawn](#), states that public gatherings are potential risk for the Covid-19 infection and community transmission in the area.

Therefore, wedding events during the epidemic should be organised while taking care of the precautions and standard operating procedures (SOPs) pertaining to gatherings to minimise the chances of spread of the virus.

According to the guidelines, for 1,000 guests an area of 36,000 square feet (200X180 feet) will be required, for 200 guests 85X85 feet and for 100 guests 60X60 feet. On Nov 6, the NCOC had announced Rs100 fine on violation of wearing mask, allowed only outdoor marriages with maximum limit of 1,000 persons and the policy of work from home for 50 per cent of the staff of all public / private offices.

According to new guidelines, the organisers of wedding events will have to ensure availability of water, so that every visitor would wash hand for 20 seconds with soap, and hand sanitiser that contains at least 60pc alcohol.

The organisers will have to promote everyday protective measures and will discourage traditional greetings i.e. hand shaking, hugging etc.

Moreover, it is advised to clean and disinfect buses, vans and other vehicles used for a wedding event, avoid sharing cell phones, cameras and other devices unless disinfected, avoid use of carpets and mats and encourage hand wash and hand sanitisation before and after the meals.

There will be no offering of any self-service food or drink options, such as buffets, salad bars and drink stations. The organisers have been advised to consider having pre-packaged food boxes for the participants and if this is not possible, dinner must be served at tables with standard hygienic measures.

Retaining the names and contact details of all wedding attendees and staff for at least 15 days by the event managers will help the public health authorities to trace and contact people who may be exposed to Covid-19 or if one or more persons become ill shortly after the event.

Meanwhile, health experts have criticised the government's recent decision to allow 1,000 guests at an outdoor wedding ceremony. Talking to [Dawn](#) on Friday, University of Health Sciences Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Javed Akram warned that rise in number of Covid-19 cases was expected as 90pc people of the country had started ignoring SOPs.

"The fact is that the virus was subdued due to the hot weather and it has started to spread rapidly due to change in temperature," he said.

"Allowing 1,000 guests at a wedding function is unacceptable. I suggest that no more than 100 people should attend such an event,"

Professor Akram said. "People might have an impression that the virus does not affect people in an open area. However, they should know that US President Donald Trump and his staff contracted the virus from the Rose Garden of the White House."

(By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 09/11/2020)

### **All online : SZABIST shuts campus amid virus threat**

As concerns grow about a second wave of Covid-19 in Pakistan, the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) management has decided to shut down its campus in Karachi for another month.



After resuming only a month ago, all physical classes have now been suspended entirely, while the ongoing academic session has been moved online.

As per the latest notification issued to students and faculty, the higher education institute is expected to remain closed until November 30.

However, the recommendation to reopen the university on December 1 is still up in the air and will only be finalised upon thorough assessment of the virus situation, closer to the tentative reopening date.

Earlier, when educational institutions across Pakistan, including Sindh, were mulling reopening on September 15 after more than six months of closure, SZABIST too had agreed to open doors to its students. Following strict SOPs, the university had chosen to adopt a hybrid model of learning, where the semester was split between online and on-campus lessons.

According to varsity sources, the brief reopening of campus on the basis of the country's much-extolled control of infections had resulted in several faculty members testing positive for Covid-19.

"After the first few cases emerged, there was much concern over the decision to keep SZABIST open. But the university chancellor is herself the provincial health minister, and it was her ultimate recommendation to shut down the campus to avoid further transmission," the source informed.

Expressing her disapproval of the university's hybrid model of learning, Rida, a social sciences student at SZABIST, said that the semester shifting entirely online is a welcome decision in her opinion.

"The thing is that our classes are quite crammed and stuffy, making it difficult to maintain SOPs on campus. We do sit with a person's gap in between, but I don't think that's enough to keep the virus at bay. Opposed to that, online classes are not only more flexible, but also safer than any time spent on campus," said Rida.

"I prefer in-person classes over online learning, which is too distracting for students with shorter attention spans, but the lack of social distancing I experienced on campus during the hybrid sessions was very callous," commented another student, on conditions of anonymity.

It is pertinent to note that SZABIST is so far the only university in Sindh to assume a month-long closure after its earlier reopening.

When virus cases emerged at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in September, the campus was immediately shut down for two days. Upon sanitisation and disinfection, it was soon reopened for students, while the hybrid-learning system continues to be in place.

Speaking about the campus closure, SZABIST academics vice president Dr Altaf Mukati confirmed that two faculty members had tested positive for the virus after the university's reopening. "We did not want further transmissions among our faculty and students, which is why we have moved the term online. We will assess the situation on November 26 and then decide whether we are ready to reopen on December 1," he told The Express Tribune.

\*With additional reporting by  
Muhammad Phaseeh Ul Haque  
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 09/11/2020)

### **Five more Covid-19 patients die in city overnight**

As many as five more patients of Covid-19 died overnight lifting the death toll to 2,684 whereas 627 new cases emerged in 14,343 tests conducted during the last 24 hours in the city.

In a statement issued here from CM House on Sunday, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said that five more patients died overnight lifting the death toll to 2,684 that constituted 1.8 per cent death rate.

He said that 14,343 samples were tested which diagnosed 627 cases that constituted 4.3 per cent current detection rate.

Mr Shah said that so far 1,728,156 tests had been conducted which diagnosed 150,167 cases, of them 95 per cent or 140,550 patients recovered, including 142 overnight.

He said that currently 6,935 patients were under treatment, of them 6,658 were in home isolation, four at isolation centers and 273 at different hospitals.

The chief minister added that the condition of 245 patients was stated to be critical, of them 31 had been shifted to ventilators.

He said that out of 627 new cases 507 were detected in Karachi, of them 202 in East district, 181 in South, 59 in Central, 31 in Korangi, 26 in Malir and eight in West district.

The chief minister said that Hyderabad had 34 new cases, Thatta 10, Matiari eight, Khairpur and Larkana six each, Sukkur five, Sujawal, Naushahro Feroze and Shaheed Benazirabad three each, Mirpurkhas, Tando Allahyar, Umerkot, Ghotki, Qambar-Shahdadkot and Dadu two each and Badin, Kashmore and Sanghar had one new case each.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 09/11/2020)

### **Virus restrictions leave citizens baffled, sceptical**

One doesn't have to think too far back to recall when nearly everyone in the city knew someone with the coronavirus. The deadly virus was making the rounds, hospitals were full, doctors were losing hope and the measures were strict. But then it got better. The government clamped down, the doctors hollered, and the public listened - and so, it seemed, we managed to get ahead of the pandemic.

Now, though, it appears we have grown complacent and the second wave of the pandemic is upon us. And with it, the authorities have once again turned to imposing stricter restrictions on citizens in the hope of warding off the contagion.

But with what appear to be quite contradictory regulations to many, citizens are baffled - and find themselves more sceptical and less inclined to take the measures seriously.

"Does the government think the virus is a bat?" laughed Karachi resident Shayan Ahmed, wondering why authorities were opting to shut shops, restaurants and wedding halls earlier at night, even though they were open all day.

S\*, a shopkeeper at Tariq Road, posed the same question. "Why is everything so restricted after sunset? And why only in the city's posher areas?" he demanded, with others chiming in in agreement.

"I can see everyone shaking hands and hugging each other in most of the city. It's only in some places that citizens are asked to keep a distance or avoid meeting each other," pointed out A\*, a university lecturer. "From what I know, the virus travels so quickly - so why are only a few areas treated like hotspots?"

For Ahmed, there is really just one answer to all these questions: "It must be some kind of politics," he said, nodding his head. A parade of political gatherings in the city, one after the other, has only reinforced this impression as the Pakistan Democratic Movement, Pak Sarzameen Party and Sindh Awareness March - to name a few - turned up in the metropolis.

"The virus sleeps when there is a political procession here," remarked a shopkeeper near Pakistan Chowk. "Honestly, I don't think it's the virus that kills, but rather such policies," he opined. "The lockdown already disturbed everything. More restrictions will destroy us common people."

#### **A question of habit**

Regardless of whether the virus is nocturnal, health services director-general Dr Irshad Ahmed Memon is of the view that the time of the day is an important factor, given the habits of Karachi's residents.

"People here go out to shop in the evening. They go to restaurants and hotels for dinner with their families and friends. A lot of social interaction takes place after sunset," he explained.

With the new wave of the coronavirus surging, numbers have been going further and further up each day, but no one was taking it seriously, he added. "Through these restrictions, the government wants to discourage social gatherings. We had great success with the same strategy before," he told The Express Tribune, adding that health workers were at greater risk because the public was taking the virus too lightly.

Another senior health official warned that if the number of infections continued to rise, the government may opt for another lockdown. "We're all at risk and we must minimise it. The only way is to restrict people to their homes."

Meanwhile, other health department officials informed The Express Tribune that the impact of the recently imposed restrictions would be studied after two weeks, adding that the government was only trying its best to keep everyone safe.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 05, 10/11/2020)

### **'Milestone' Covid vaccine claims boost hope**

One of the teams racing to develop a coronavirus vaccine announced on Monday its drug had shown 90 per cent effectiveness against the illness, sending stock markets soaring and raising hopes of an end to draconian restrictions on movement.

US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer said tests involving more than 40,000 people had provided results that were a "critical milestone" in the search for a vaccine, as global infections soared passed 50 million — almost one-fifth of them in the United States.

Stock markets had already jumped after Democrat Joe Biden was called as the winner of the US presidential election on the weekend, and accelerated rapidly on the vaccine news.

An effective vaccine is seen as the best hope to break the cycle of deadly virus surges followed by severe restrictions across much of the world since Covid-19 first emerged in China late last year.

Tens of millions of people in Europe are currently living under restrictions preventing them from leaving their homes, and millions of business owners are enduring forced shutdowns.

#### **'Much-needed breakthrough'**

The lockdowns and other curbs on daily life have shredded the global economy but with few other tools at their disposal to protect vulnerable populations, politicians have felt their hands forced.

"We are a significant step closer to providing people around the world with a much-needed breakthrough to help bring an end to this global health crisis," Pfizer chairman and CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement.

The drug, being developed jointly with German firm BioNTech, is one of more than 40 candidate vaccines, but no other has yet made similar claims about its effectiveness.

The companies said they could pass the final hurdles for a US rollout later this month, and could supply up to 50 million doses globally this year and up to 1.3 billion next year.

The scientific community reacted positively to the news, with top US expert Anthony Fauci describing the results as "extraordinary".

World Health Organisation director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the news as "encouraging" shortly after warning that the world "might be tired of Covid-19. But it is not tired of us."

But others pointed out that no information had yet been disclosed about the ages of the participants in the trial.

"If a vaccine is to reduce severe disease and death, and thus enable the population at large to return to their normal day-to-day lives, it will need to be effective in older and elderly members of our society," said Eleanor Riley, professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the University of Edinburgh.

#### **Biden task force**

Outgoing US President Donald Trump was among the first to react, writing on Twitter: "STOCK MARKET UP BIG, VACCINE COMING SOON. REPORT 90% EFFECTIVE. SUCH GREAT NEWS!"

Joe Biden quickly followed, congratulating "the brilliant women and men who helped produce this breakthrough".

American voters handed victory to Biden at least partly because of Trump's failure to rein in the epidemic — often refusing to back restrictive measures or even wear mask in public and repeatedly undermining his own experts.

Biden, who will not be sworn in until January, has already announced a task force charged with handling the virus.

#### **'Out of control'**

The vaccine news will be of particular relief to people in Europe — the current focal point of the pandemic and the region subject to the most widespread restrictions.

On Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky became the latest leader to test positive for the virus, with his office saying he felt well and would self-isolate and continue to work.

Italy was edging closer to a full lockdown, with experts warning of a drastic situation in hospitals. "There is no doubt that the situation is largely out of control," said Massimo Galli, head of the infectious diseases department at Milan's Sacco hospital.

And the grim news kept on coming elsewhere, with Russia surpassing its record for daily infections again Monday.

Hungary is now one of the hardest-hit countries in terms of deaths proportionate to its population, and the government announced new national restrictions to come into force on Wednesday.

Portugal, meanwhile, entered a state of emergency that will see curfews imposed on most of the population.

And Montenegro's capital Podgorica was set for a curfew as officials tried to stem an outbreak a week after huge crowds attended the funeral of a top bishop.

In France, which has imposed nationwide stay-at-home orders and is clocking more than 40,000 cases a day, the central bank revised its expectations of the damage wrought by the curbs.

"Before the second wave, we thought the recession would be a little less than nine per cent, we think today that for 2020 as a whole it will be between nine and 10 per cent," Banque de France chief Francois Villeroy de Galhau said.  
(By AFP Dawn, 01, 10/11/2020)

### **Murad tests positive for coronavirus**

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah was on Monday diagnosed as Covid-19 positive and went into home isolation.

In a statement issued here from CM House, the chief minister said that last Friday he felt light fever, therefore, he got his PCR test done which detected him as Covid-19 positive.

He said that he had isolated himself in his home, adding that sometimes he was feeling light fever, otherwise with the grace of God he did not have serious symptoms.

Meanwhile, in another statement he said that as many as four more patients of coronavirus died overnight lifting the death toll to 2,751 and 848 new cases emerged when 11,596 samples were tested raising the tally to 156,528.

Currently, the chief minister said, as many as 10,525 patients were under treatment, of them 10,020 in home isolation, six at isolation centres and 499 at different hospitals.

He added that the condition of 376 patients was stated to be critical, including 37 shifted to ventilators.

The chief minister said that out of 848 new cases, 592 were detected in Karachi, including 264 in East, 152 in South, 76 in Central, 43 in Korangi, 31 in Malir and 26 in West.

He said that Hyderabad had 81 cases, Jamshoro 29, Sukkur and Thatta 13 each, Shaheed Benazirabad and Dadu 11 each, Tando Allahyar nine, Shikarpur and Tando Mohammad Khan seven each, Qambar, Larkana and Matiari five each, Jacobabad and Naushahro Feroze four each, Badin and Ghotki three each, Kashmore two, and Mirpurkhas and Tharparkar had one case each.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 17/11/2020)

### Corona waste

There had been reports about theft of harmful hospital waste and its sale to recycling factories, in different cities of the country. Now there are reports that unscrupulous contractors are stealing waste produced in hospital wards where coronavirus patients are being treated. This is going on, though stealthily, at hospitals in Punjab. Thieves are not being deterred by the fact that Covid-19 is a contagious disease and so special care has to be taken for disposal of the waste generated in isolation wards for coronavirus patients. As is the case in most spheres of life, this is happening as a result of negligence on the part of relevant departments.

The theft and sale of the highly dangerous hospital waste are taking place reportedly due to the failure of the provincial health and environment departments to develop a mechanism for safe disposal of medical waste during the coronavirus pandemic. A provincial health department official has admitted that there is no monitoring system in place for disposal of medical waste and few hospitals have incinerators, saying around 20% of the waste are highly infectious as it is produced in coronavirus, cancer, AIDS, hepatitis and surgery wards. This situation has made it easy for contractors to steal such dangerous waste and sell it to recycling factories. Another health official says tonnes of harmful waste are produced at hospitals, including in isolation wards, in the province, and a large part of this waste is stolen. There are many factories in Lahore and other cities of the province where medical waste is recycled into plastic pots, toys and other items. Those handling such products run the risk of contracting dangerous diseases.

Why strict action against this illegal recycling business is not being taken remains an official secret. According to WHO instructions, the coronavirus waste should be buried at landfill sites at a safe distance from human settlements. These SOPs are reportedly being followed more in breach than in observance.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 17/11/2020)

### Head of surgery at Karachi's NICVD removed after raising alarm over Covid-19 cases

A key member of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) was on Tuesday removed from his assignment just a day after he announced suspension of all surgeries at the health facility and its satellite centres in Tando Mohammad Khan and Sukkur due to prevalence of Covid-19 in many staff members, sources and officials said.

"It is notified for information that Dr Asad Bilal Awan, Associate Professor of Cardiac Surgery, has been given additional charge as Acting Head of Cardiac Surgery Department with immediate effect," said a hospital order signed by NICVD executive director Prof Nadeem Qamar without mentioning anything about Dr Pervez Chaudhry, former head of surgery at the institute.

Dr Chaudhry had announced on Monday cancellation of all the surgeries at the NICVD-Karachi and its satellite centres in Tando Mohammad Khan and Sukkur for a week after some surgeons, nurses and paramedics tested positive for the infectious disease. The fresh orders from the NICVD's executive director, however, did not mention the status of its surgery department. [Dawn](#) tried to seek the version from the institute's spokesman but he did not respond to many phone calls.

*Some 15 doctors, surgeons and other staff have tested positive for coronavirus*

When contacted, Dr Chaudhry sounded furious over the decision but did not elaborate any reason behind his removal as the head of the surgical department of one of the country's major cardiac treatment centres.

#### 'Personal agenda'

He only "regretted" that he was requested to return from the United States to serve the country and now it's a "kind" of humiliation to replace him with his "student" despite following the defined rules and health practices.

On Monday, he had postponed all surgeries as a precautionary measure to protect surgeons and other health staff as well as patients from any complication. He had added that they had decided not to discharge any patient who had been operated upon for at least a week as a precautionary measure.

"If they reopened the department of surgery, they would risk public health for personal agenda," Dr Chaudhry told [Dawn](#).

Sources privy to the situation said that some 15 staff members of the NICVD including doctors, surgeons and other staff, had tested positive for the infectious disease, compelling them to postpone all surgeries and elective procedures leaving only emergency services operational at the cardiac-care facility.

With more than 100 highly qualified surgeons, doctors and trainees, providing superior cardiac treatment to approximately 400,000 OPD patients, 37,000 inpatients and nearly 200,000 emergency cases every year, the NICVD has emerged as one of the success stories claimed by the Pakistan People's Party government in Sindh. The institute was also praised for its free-of-cost services to every segment of society.

However, the financial affairs of the institute came under the National Accountability Bureau's (NAB) radar, which more than two years ago initiated an inquiry against the NICVD over corruption allegations under Section 19 read with 27 of the National Accountability Ordinance of 1999.

It had transpired during the inquiry that the executive director of the NICVD was in "possession of information/evidence whatsoever, which relates to the commission of the offence(s)".

The NAB probe is still under way and only last month the bureau's team had raided the NICVD, checked its financial records, questioned officials of the health facility, gathered relevant documents and returned after more than five hours raising doubts over financial affairs of the largest specialised public-sector hospital and inviting strong reaction from the ruling PPP on the anti-graft body's action.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 18/11/2020)

### **Hospital for Covid-19 lags in development**

A few months into the coronavirus pandemic, amid the multitude of measures the Sindh government had announced to tackle the contagion, came the much-vaunted establishment of the Sindh Infectious Diseases Hospital and Research Centre.

Initially set up as a 54-bed facility in July, primarily to treat Covid-19 patients, the government had aimed to expand its capacity to 200 beds within the next six weeks.

After four months - and as the country heads into the pandemic's second wave - the object is yet to be achieved, with the hospital having just 66 beds. Besides, the hospital management no longer sees expanding the facility's bed capacity to 200 as its short-term target and looks to add just enough to increase its capacity to 150 beds.

Part of the hospital, which was conceived to accommodate 400 beds, is still under constructions. While two of its blocks have been erected, the remaining two are yet to see completion.

Moreover, the hospital's high-dependency unit, initially comprising 34 beds and planned to have 88 beds by the target of six weeks after its inauguration, remains at the same capacity it had when it was set up.

The facility's management and relevant authorities have also failed at ensuring the availability of research facilities at the infectious diseases hospital, despite the fact that it has been given the status of a research centre as well.

The target of increasing the bed capacity of the intensive care units (ICU) from 16 beds to 32, though, has been achieved. There are two ICUs at the hospital, each comprising 16 beds, according to the facility's medical superintendent Dr Abdul Wahid Rajput.

He said both the ICUs were fully occupied and assured that the number of beds at the hospital would be increased by the month's end.

Besides, the construction of two blocks will be completed within in a year or two, following which the hospital will have 400 beds, he affirmed.

#### **Turned away**

At the time of the infectious diseases hospital's establishment, the authorities saw it as an addition to their resources of battling the pandemic.

However, it was also to serve to provide treatment to patients suffering from other infectious diseases. Nevertheless, the hospital management is purportedly only accepting Covid-19 patients, coming from across Sindh, as well as Balochistan.

According to Dr Rajput, the healthcare facility, though established to treat all infectious diseases, had been reserved for Covid-19 patients for now, as hospitals struggled to accommodate all cases with limited bed capacities.



"The first priority is to control the coronavirus and this is why the facility has been dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients."

Even then, the hospital lacks Covid-19 testing facilities. Consequently, the samples collected from suspected Covid-19 patients visiting the hospital are sent elsewhere for testing.

To add to this, Covid-19 patients who develop complications such as difficulty in breathing and kidney and cardiovascular diseases, too, are referred to other healthcare facilities, according to sources.

This was denied by Dr Rajput, who said no comorbid patient had been sent to any other facility.

According to him, Covid-19 patients are being treated for free at the hospital, with the Sindh government bearing all the expenses.

He also assured that patients having other infectious diseases, such as pneumonia, hepatitis, tuberculosis, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever and influenza, would be treated at the hospital after the pandemic abated.

(By Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 19/11/2020)

### IHC upholds ban on public gatherings

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has ruled that the implementation of the decisions of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) is mandatory in the event of a coronavirus crisis and legal action may be taken against those violating its decisions.

Dismissing a petition challenging the ban on marquee halls during the second wave of Covid-19, the court endorsed the decisions of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) to ban the gathering of 300 persons and the public meetings across the country, including Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) and Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) due to the coronavirus.

In the eight-page judgment, the court observed that it could not interfere in the affairs of executive. It stated that the organisers of the public meetings would be responsible for any loss of human life due to the coronavirus and legal action would be taken in case of violation of the NCOC orders.

It said that in view of the second wave of coronavirus, the standard operating procedures (SOPs) introduced by the NCOC should be strictly implemented. IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah also said that it was high time for all the political parties to demonstrate unity against the pandemic.

Earlier, the attorney general submitted a report which stated that the NCOC took many decisions, including banning of all outdoor gatherings of more than 300 persons.

The SOPs' implementation would be the responsibility of the organisers and they would be liable for any death or spread of Covid-19 due to the gatherings as per law, the report said.

The NCOC also made a decision that no indoor event would be allowed and only outdoor events with a maximum of 300 guests would be allowed, the report added. Similarly, the other decision of the NCOC was to allow indoor dining for the time being, which would be reviewed in a week's time, while the public was strongly encouraged to use either outdoor or takeaway options.

The report said that the option of early winter vacation would be reviewed after consultation of the Federal Education and Professional Training Division with all provinces and federal units in a week's time.

The chief justice said that the court had trust in the steps taken by the government as the NCOC comprised experienced people. The chief justice also observed that in the situation of coronavirus, everyone should limit their social activities.

The chief justice pointed out that many lawmakers had lost their lives due to the corona pandemic. He observed that what happened in Gilgit-Baltistan was unfortunate, where poor people were brought out in political processions.

"We lost a valuable chief justice due to this pandemic and nobody knows who will be the next victim of the virus," the chief justice said, referring to Peshawar High Court Chief Justice Waqar Ahmed Seth, who passed away last week after contracting Covid-19.

"We have to trust the incumbent government and this court is also subject to the government decisions. The national institution has taken its decision and the court cannot question it under such an uncommon time."

The chief justice said the second wave of Covid-19 was comparatively more severe and there was need to strictly implement the SOPs. In Britain, the police had been given powers to fine the people on violation of the SOPs, he added that it was the responsibility of the government to ensure full implementation of the SOPs.

The attorney general informed the court that Prime Minister Imran Khan had cancelled his party's public meeting due to the severity of situation. The chief justice observed that the court had a lot of expectations from parliament to introduce a universal policy in the current situation.

During the proceedings earlier, the chief justice, while addressing petitioner's lawyer Sardar Taimoor Aslam, observed that what they wanted, people should have closed everything at their own in the current circumstances. The lawyer said that his client wanted the same policy for everyone.

The attorney general adopted the stance that the matter of public health was most important, adding that the government was taking steps keeping in view the situation. He said that coronavirus policies had been introduced with the consultation of Ministry of Health and all provinces.

The court asked the petitioner that everyone should follow the decision of national bodies and demonstrate trust in the state institutions. The chief justice further remarked that the decisions of leaderships should be extraordinary during extraordinary situation.

While dismissing the case, the court stated that it could not pass an order about the decision of the federal government. The court, however, asked the attorney general to invite representative of marqueees in any meeting of the NCOC. The court further directed Ministry of Human Rights to view the medical facilities of the prisoners in all jails across the country.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 01, 19/11/2020)

### Four city districts to go under smart lockdown in Karachi

The city administration on Friday decided to impose 'smart lockdown' in four districts and 'micro lockdown' in other two districts of Karachi in the wake of an alarming surge in the number of Covid-19 cases.

The decision was taken in a meeting presided over by Commissioner Iftikhar Ali Shallwani, who is also the administrator of Karachi. All deputy commissioners also attended the meeting.

As per the decision taken in the meeting, smart lockdown would be imposed in districts East, West, Central and South while districts Korangi and Malir would go under a 'micro lockdown'.

The DCs briefed the commissioner about precautionary measures and standard operating procedures in their respective districts. They said that a notification regarding restrictions in high-risk area would be issued at the earliest after consultation with health officials.

The commissioner said that Covid-19 was spreading quite rapidly and smart lockdown in most affected areas was the need of the hour.

He directed the DCs to take effective measures to ensure that SOPs and preventive measures were adopted in true letter and spirit.  
*929 new Covid cases emerge overnight in Karachi alone*

"A campaign being run to ensure following of SOPs at marriage halls, restaurants and supermarkets should continue," he added.

Meanwhile, the commissioner held a meeting with office-bearers of the Marriage Hall Association. The association's president Rana Raees Ahmed assured that they would follow all the SOPs and only open-air marriage lawns would be opened as decided by the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC).

It was also decided in the meeting that buffet would not be allowed in the marriage halls.

### 19 die overnight in Sindh

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday said that 19 more patients died in the province overnight and 1,276 new cases emerged when 12,975 samples were tested.

In a statement issued here from CM House, he said that the death of 19 more patients lifted the death toll to 2,799 that constituted 1.8 per cent death rate.

Mr Shah said that 12,975 samples were tested, which diagnosed 1,276 cases that constituted 10pc current detection rate.

He added that so far 1,872,262 tests had been conducted against which 161,028 cases were detected, of them 90pc, or 145,143 patients, recovered, including 827 overnight.

The CM said that currently 13,086 patients were under treatment, including 12,537 in home isolation, nine at isolation centres and 544 at different hospitals.

He added that the condition of 446 patients was stated to be critical, including 48 shifted to ventilators.

The CM said that out of 1,276 new cases 929 had been detected in Karachi, of them 333 in South, 273 in East, 94 in Central, 92 in West, 75 in Korangi and 62 in Malir.

He said that Hyderabad had 130, Umerkot 36, Jacobabad 24, Ghotki 18, Sukkur and Tando Allahyar 17 each, Qambar 15, Larkana and Shikarpur 12 each, Dadu six, Jamshoro and Sanghar two each and Khairpur and Badin one each.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 21/11/2020)

## 14-day lockdown imposed in several parts of Karachi

The city administration on Saturday enforced smart and micro-smart lockdowns in several emerging hotspots across Karachi to deal with the rising cases of Covid-19 as part of the second wave of the novel coronavirus.

Official sources said that it had become fundamental to ensure quarantine, contact tracing and testing to reduce the transmission and spread of Covid-19, besides mandatory mask wearing and social distancing interventions.

Therefore, they said, the deputy commissioners in different districts of the city under Section 3 of the Sindh Epidemic Diseases Act, amended in 2020, ordered imposition of smart lockdowns and micro-smart lockdowns in the streets and houses of specified areas for at least two weeks.

In district Central, as many as 109 houses along with their streets in different parts were placed under micro-smart lockdown. The houses were located in Blocks 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19 in Federal B. Area; Blocks B, C, D, G, L and N of North Nazimabad; Firdous Colony in Nazimabad, Sectors 11-A, 11-B, 11-E and 5-C-1 of North Karachi.

According to the order, movement of people residing in areas under the smart lockdown shall be strictly restricted and only grocery shops, convenience stores, bakeries and pharmacies shall be allowed to remain open during specific timings as per directives issued by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOCC).

*17 more patients die overnight in Sindh due to Covid-19*

### Food delivery not allowed

All kinds of industrial units in these areas shall also remain closed and no home delivery/takeaway of any sort will be allowed from restaurants and fast-food joints.

In district East, over 70 houses and flats were placed under micro-smart lockdown.

The houses and flats were located in Delhi Mercantile Society-1, Civic Centre, Essa Nagri-4, Blocks 1, 2, 10-A, 13-C, 19, 13-D, 4-G, 13, 14, 15, and 10 in Gulshan-i-Iqbal; Blocks 10, 12, 3, 8 and 7-G in Gulistan-i-Jauhar; Gulzar-i-Hijri, Blocks 2 and Block 6 in PECHS, Jacob Lines and Baloch Para.

In district South, 5th Street, Khayaban-i-Momin, 6th Street, Khayaban-i-Badban, 12th Street, Bath Island and 35th Street off Khayaban-i-Ittehad in DHA were placed under micro-smart lockdown until active cases came down to zero.

No private or family get-togethers will be allowed in homes and no gatherings of three or more person will be allowed in the specified areas, the order of the deputy commissioner-South said.

A major shopping mall in Clifton was sealed on Saturday by deputy commissioner-South for violating SOPs notified by the provincial government. During his visit to the mall, the deputy commissioner also fined 15 people Rs500 each for not wearing masks.

In district Korangi, three houses in sub-division Korangi, and two houses each in Shah Faisal and Model Colony were placed under micro lockdown.

The lockdown in the specified areas will remain effective till Dec 5 or till the infected people are cured as per the guidelines issued by the provincial government.

In district West, Surjani Town police station and a flat in Gulshan-i-Maymar in Gadap Town were placed under micro-smart lockdown.

### 1,199 new cases

As many as 17 more patients of Covid-19 died overnight and 1,199 new cases emerged when 11,537 tests were conducted.

This was stated by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in a statement issued here on Saturday.

He added that so far 1,883,799 tests were conducted against which 162,227 cases were detected, of them 90pc, or 145,525 patients, recovered, including 382 overnight.

According to the CM, currently 13,886 patients are under treatment, of them 13,333 are in home isolation, nine at isolation centres and 544 in different hospitals.

"The condition of 477 patients is stated to be critical, of them 62 have been shifted to ventilators," he added.

Mr Shah said that out of 1,199 new cases, 859 were detected in Karachi, including 247 in South, 233 in East, 133 in West, 109 in Korangi, 105 in Central and 32 in Malir.

He added that Hyderabad had 189 cases, Jamshoro 36, Dadu 18, Tando Mohammad Khan 13, Qambar nine, Ghotki six, Shaheed Benazirabad and Sukkur five each, Sanghar three, Shikarpur and Thatta two each, Badin, Khairpur, Matiari, Naushahro Feroze and Umerkot one each.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 22/11/2020)

## 120-bedded coronavirus research centre made functional at Abbasi Hospital

Administrator and Commissioner of Karachi Iftikhar Ali Shallwani on Tuesday said that Covid-19 Infectious Disease and Research Centre was now functional at the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH).

“A 120-bedded centre has been equipped with isolation ward, high dependency units (HDUs), having experienced doctors, professors and experts,” he said while addressing a ceremony held at the centre.

The administrator said that there were 25 ventilators in the hospital.

He asked the doctors and paramedical staff to also take precautionary measures and follow standard operating procedures (SOPs) while treating coronavirus patients.

### Free tests

Mr Shallwani said that ASH was the third largest hospital of the city and catered to a large part of Karachi’s residents, especially those living in underprivileged areas. “The hospital is conducting Covid-19 testing free of cost,” he added.

“Doctors and other health workers are our heroes who are treating the patients by [putting] their own lives at stake,” he added.

### 13 more Covid-19 deaths reported

Speaking on lockdown in the wake of alarming surge in number of Covid-19 patients, the administrator said that restrictions might be imposed in more areas while shopping centre might be closed once again to control the spread of coronavirus.

He was of the view that we could avoid the spread of novel coronavirus only through SOPs and preventive measures.

Mr Shallwani also visited different parts of the centre and reviewed the facilities being provided to people.

He directed that machinery and other equipment should be fully functional and maintained around the clock.

The administrator said: “We have to be fully prepared to cope with the second wave of Covid-19.”

He also asked the hospital’s staff to perform their duties with courage and take this work as a service to humanity.

“Each ward of the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital will be updated and it will be made one of the best hospitals,” he vowed.

### 13 more Covid-19 patients die

As many as 13 more patients of Covid-19 lost their lives overnight and 1,382 new cases emerged when 11,738 tests were conducted.

This was stated by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in a statement issued here on Tuesday.

The CM said that currently 16,218 patients were under treatment, of them 15,535 in home isolation, 12 at isolation centres and 671 at different hospitals. The condition of 619 patients is stated to be critical, including 74 shifted to ventilators, he added.

According to Murad Ali Shah, out of 1,382 new cases, 1,091 have been detected in Karachi, of them 503 in East, 257 in South, 134 in Central, 86 in Malir, 82 in Korangi and 29 in West.

He said that Hyderabad had 70 new cases, Sujawal 49, Dadu 21, Thatta 18, Naushahro Feroze and Ghotki 12 each, Umerkot and Jamshoro 11 each, Tando Allahyar and Mirpurkhas 10 each, Shaheed Benazirabad six, Larkana three, Matiari and Tharparkar two each, Badin, Jacobabad, Kashmore, Sanghar, Sukkur and Tando Mohammad Khan one each.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 14, 25/11/2020)

## Drive to fine people without masks not yielding positive results

A government decision to impose a Rs500 fine for not wearing a face mask at public places has failed to make any impact as in more than two weeks officials of the municipal and district administration have managed to penalise only 54 people for violating the notified standard operating procedures (SOPs), forcing them to conclude that the move is impracticable and almost impossible to fetch the desired results.

In view of a surge in Covid-19 cases during the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the country, the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) earlier this month had issued new guidelines banning indoor marriages, fixing a fine for not wearing masks and allowing “work from home” for 50 per cent staff of public and private institutions.

*Authorities have imposed fines on only 54 people across Karachi over two-week period*

Later, Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Ali Shallwani directed the administration to take strict action against those found not wearing mask at public places and impose a Rs500 fine on them for violating the SOPs.

The decision of imposing such a hefty fine that too in Karachi alone came as a surprise for many. However, it has failed to work as a deterrence for the people who are largely ignoring the advice of health experts and officials.

Figures showed that the local administration has itself not been able to make wearing of masks at public places compulsory.

“Only 54 people across Karachi were fined following the launch of the campaign,” said an official at the commissioner office. “Among those 54, 26 were fined in district Central, 15 in Malir and 13 in South.”

He said that the NCOC had asked the provinces to implement its new guidelines under their own modus operandi. Keeping in view the alarming situation of Covid-19 in the province, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had called for strict implementation of SOPs in all business, social, religious, educational and other institutions and in case of non-compliance directed the authorities concerned to take strict action.

The same evening, he said, the commissioner office had announced imposing Rs500 fine for not wearing masks. The fines were imposed the very next day in district Central and people without masks were spotted by random mobile teams of the district administrations and penalised, he added.

“But the initiative proved short-lived,” he said. “This is not a crime and one can only request or convince someone verbally to follow the SOPs or wear masks. We can ask businesses to follow timings, we can issue directives to restaurants or shopping centres to allow restricted number of people at their facilities but we can’t ask everyone to wear mask. The people need to show some responsibility themselves. In district West there was almost a scuffle between officials of district administration and some people when they asked them to wear mask or pay fine. Such situations were reported from almost all districts.”

He said that the recovery rate in the province was encouraging but the new spike in cases was worrisome and needed immediate measures to contain the virus.

The commissioner had already issued directives to the deputy commissioners to ensure proper and strict implementation of SOPs such as wearing masks, observing social distancing, avoiding handshake and crowds, he added.  
(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 25/11/2020)

### Face mask use

Wearing a face mask is the easiest of the Covid safety precautions — and the most useful too. Unfortunately though, this preventive measure is being neglected the most by people in our country who only wear a face mask when they are forced to — like by a policeman on the road or by the doorman outside a bank or a shopping mall. Men mostly carry it in their pockets, and women keep it safe in their purses. Motorists have it displayed on the dashboards of their vehicles.

Experts say the coronavirus can be spread simply through speaking, and according to a study, we spray thousands of droplets invisible to the naked eye into the air just by uttering the words “stay healthy”. A face mask is thus the best protection when one has no other option but to stay in close proximity with others, like on a passenger bus or in a classroom. This is why many countries have imposed heavy fines on mask violation. Some even show a zero tolerance, subjecting the violators to jail sentences.

In our country, new guidelines issued by the NCOC early this month included a Rs100 fine for not wearing a face mask in the public, but there is little to no implementation in this regard. Face mask is nearly completely ignored — rather spurned. We have even seen people avoiding this most important piece of safety even in most threatening situations — like during huge political gatherings, putting their lives and those of others in danger.

With the coronavirus infection peaking again — evident from the daily new cases having exceeded 3,000 and the deaths nearing 60 — the need for the people to follow the SOPs, including the use of face mask, assumes even greater significance. Thus the authorities must avoid being lenient with people, as has been the case thus far, and make sure that they wear face mask while in public.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 26/11/2020)

### In a first, 'serious' coral bleaching reported in Pakistan near Churna Island

WWF-Pakistan on Thursday appealed to the government to declare Churna Island a Marine Protected Area (MPA) after coral bleaching was reported in some areas of the island.

This is the first time that the phenomenon has been reported in Pakistan.

According to a statement released by the WWF-Pakistan, a PADI certified diver, Khizar Sharif, while on a diving expedition around the north-eastern part of Churna Island in the last week of October, noticed serious bleaching of corals. In some areas, large patches of bleaching were observed.

WWF-Pakistan termed the bleaching a grave threat to the coastal biodiversity of Pakistan.



Corals are colonial marine animals that live in clear shallow waters, and are said to be relatives of jellyfish and sea anemones which form reefs in some areas of the world. As one of the most diverse ecosystems, these reefs are referred as rainforests of the sea.

In Pakistan, corals are found in small quantities around the Churna Island, Astola Island, Ormara (Rodrigues Shoals), Gwadar and Jiwani in Balochistan.

In the 2000s, coral patches were identified along the coast of Pakistan under the Darwin Initiative Project, that involved WWF-Pakistan, Centre of Excellence in Marine Biology, and Marine Reference and Resource Centre, University of Karachi.

Later, further studies were carried out on corals under the WWF-Pakistan's Pakistan Wetlands Programme. In total, 55 live coral species were recorded from the coastal waters of Pakistan, which existed on a very limited area and were said to be prone to environmental change and other threats, especially pollution.

A coral pictured near the Churna Island has turned white after environmental conditions possibly caused it to expel the zooxanthellae in its tissues. WWF-Pakistan

Corals live in compact colonies of many identical individual polyps and obtain the majority of their energy and nutrients from zooxanthellae that live there. Negative environmental conditions such as abnormally warm or cool temperatures, high light, and even some microbial diseases can lead to the breakdown of the relationship (symbiosis) between coral and zooxanthellae.

In such conditions, corals expel the zooxanthellae living in their tissues causing the coral to turn completely white. This process is called coral bleaching and leads to the death of corals.

According to Muhammad Moazzam Khan, WWF-Pakistan Technical Advisor (Marine Fisheries), there can be several possible reasons for bleaching of corals in Pakistan.

The major reason may be because of the rise in seawater temperature due to industrial activities, as there is a thermal power plant, an oil refinery and a single point mooring (SPM) in the area. The additional infrastructure has been developed at the site for construction of another coal powered plant, he added.

Cumulative impacts of these activities are likely to be responsible for the coral bleaching.

Furthermore, there are plans to establish a liquid petroleum gas (LPG) terminal at Churna Island, that can cause excessive dredging in the area. "If such development activities are carried out at Churna Island, then they will not only negatively impact the corals but may wipe out most of the rich biodiversity from the area," he said.

Commenting on this issue, Dr Tahir Rasheed, Regional Head Sindh and Balochistan, WWF-Pakistan said that there is a need to protect the rich biodiversity and pristine environment of Churna Island. He emphasised that this can only be achieved by declaring Churna Island a Marine Protected Area (MPA) as the decision has been pending with the Government of Balochistan.

He further added that once Churna Island is declared an MPA, industrial activities will be controlled and tourism can be streamlined. This declaration will also lead to the management of fisheries in the area, which can ensure conservation of diverse fish species and can help reduce ghost fishing.

He urged to closely monitor coral bleaching in the area, adding that in case any major increase is noticed, effective mitigation measures should be taken to control it.

In the past few years, Churna Island has become a major attraction for recreational activities. It is considered an important area for snorkelling and scuba diving. Although most divers and snorkelers are environmentally conscious and do not harm coral, considering them to be nature's gift to Pakistan.

However, a few amateur divers trample or disturb them. In addition, a number of fishermen are also involved in dislodging of corals and selling them to aquarium traders in Karachi.

Another reason for bleaching of corals may be due to the increasing levels of pollution in the area. WWF-Pakistan believes that abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gears (ALDFG) are also a serious environmental challenge in waters around Churna Island. These ghost fishing gears have a severe impact on corals and continue to entangle fish and shellfish leading to their mortality.

A mass-scale ALDFG has been reported in the vicinity north of Churna Island. WWF-Pakistan appealed to the relevant government departments, tourists, local communities and citizens of Pakistan to help conserve this ecologically significant marine area.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 27/11/2020)

### **Covid-19 and precautions**

It is difficult to swallow the Sindh government's decision to allow markets and shops to open from 6am to 6pm in the winter season. Expecting shops to open so early in the cold weather is unrealistic. It is like seeking relief from cold by putting on the air-

conditioner. This, however, should not come as a surprise as the bureaucracy is notorious for making strange decisions the world over. It is for such reasons that people in Sindh are opposing the provincial government's decision.

What is more surprising is that politicians, purely for the sake of safeguarding their own privileges, are setting a bad example by holding public meetings in different parts of the country in the midst of a resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic. Not only are they holding large public meetings, but they are exhorting people to attend these meetings in large numbers, in complete disregard of the fact that large gatherings at one place act as a fast spreader of the deadly virus. An important reason for the present surge in corona cases in Balochistan is possibly the recent PDM meeting in Quetta. Even now when the government has banned public meetings and other gatherings, opposition parties appear to be in a defiant mood as they seem determined to go ahead with their planned meetings. It is the same opposition parties that had been critical of most of the government's decisions during the first wave of the pandemic. The PDM's double standards are in full play.

Traders are one in opposing the provincial government's decision. They are of the view that the present timings are enabling law enforcers to make hay while the sun shines. They allow shops to remain open beyond the closing time if their palms are greased. Moreover, the closing time is giving the opposite of the desired results as more people converge on markets near the closing time. They are also opposed to the two-day complete closure of markets. Undoubtedly, the fatigue factor is also there. What is needed is proper implementation of precautionary measures. This is a reasonable course, of course.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 27/11/2020)

### Five cities dens of country's 70% Covid spread

The country's nerve centre for Covid-19 response was briefed on Sunday that five major cities – Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi – were contributing to 70% of the nationwide coronavirus caseload.

The participants of a meeting of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) were further informed that the countrywide Covid-19 positivity ratio had hit 7.01% and 46 coronavirus deaths on an average were recorded in the outgoing week.

A total of 2,186 coronavirus patients are in a critical situation across the country including 681 in Sindh, 620 in Punjab, 488 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, 315 in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), 50 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and 16 each in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. An average of 237 hospital admissions was reported in the outgoing week.

The forum was briefed on the disease pattern, the positivity ratio in various areas and the measures being taken to contain the virus.

According to the NCOC data released on Sunday, the number of active Covid-19 cases in the country has reached 47,390 as 2,829 more people tested positive for the deadly virus during the last 24 hours.

The highest positivity ratio of 24.85% was observed in Mirpur, followed by 22.181% in Hyderabad and 18.96% in Karachi.

The positivity ratio in AJK stands at 16.58%, followed by 15.31% in Sindh, 9.12% in Balochistan, 5.56% in G-B, 5.30% in ICT, 5.3% in K-P, and 3.45% in Punjab.

In Punjab, Rawalpindi has a positivity ratio 6.80%, Lahore 4% and Multan 2.55 %.

In Sindh, the positivity ratio in Karachi stands at 18.96% and 22.18% in Hyderabad.

Peshawar has a positivity ratio of 11.12%, Quetta 8.84%, Mirpur 24.85%, Muzaffarabad 17.95% and Gilgit 6.77%.

As many as 273 coronavirus patients are on ventilators across the country. In Punjab, there are 63 patients on ventilators in Lahore, 41 in Multan, 25 in Rawalpindi and four in Faisalabad.

In Sindh, there are 61 patients on ventilators in Karachi. There are 34 patients on ventilators in Peshawar and 45 in ICT.

A total of 2,964 hospital beds equipped with oxygen cylinders are occupied by Covid-19 patients across the country.

The Covid-19 mortality analysis shows that the total deaths due to the virus stand at 7,985. The Covid fatality rate (CFR) has reached 2.02% against the global 2.33%.

Around 71% of the victims were male. Of them, 76% were over the age of 50.

The analysis further shows that 72% of the patients who died of Covid-19 had chronic comorbidities (meaning having different diseases existing at the same time with another disease for a long period of time).

Around 91% of the deceased patients remained hospitalised and 58% of them were kept on ventilators.

Highlighting the intensity of the second wave of the pandemic, Prime Minister Imran Khan said the "problem confronting us in Pakistan during Covid-19 is of a political leadership that has never gone through any democratic struggle, nor worked with ordinary citizens to understand the problems they confront, nor contributed in any substantive way for betterment of ordinary citizens".

In a series of tweets, the premier lambasted the opposition for persisting on holding rallies under the Pakistan Democratic Movement's (PDM) banner despite a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases across the country.

"[The opposition alliance's] only goal is NRO at whatever cost to the lives of people and the country's economy," he said.

"In fact not only do these 'leaders' lack any empathy with the masses, their families looted national wealth to further impoverish our masses. These entitled 'leaders' living like royalty in their secluded mansions, have simply inherited their positions because of their families."

The prime minister maintained that the opposition's only purpose for holding rallies was to "save their families looted wealth and corruption of which they are an integral part".

"This is all that guides their politics, not any concern for the lives of ordinary citizens. Their desperation to get NRO any which way they can motivates them," he added.

Referring to the first wave of the virus in the country, the premier criticised the opposition parties for pressuring the government back then to impose a countrywide lockdown, while disregarding the government's current ban on public gatherings.

"So, when we did smart lockdown to save our poor from becoming destitute and save economy from total collapse, these 'leaders' opposed and demanded complete lockdown. Now, with new spike, when we again need smart lockdown, they want jalsas not caring for the lives and safety of people," he observed.

The prime minister's comments come a day before the PDM's Multan rally, which is being staged despite the ban on political gatherings due to the increase in Covid-19 cases.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 01, 30/11/2020)

### Eight months of a pandemic

THE second wave of Covid-19 has been sacrificed at the altar of politics in Pakistan. The entire debate seems to be about the carelessness — or callousness — of the political parties; for each side, the other is at fault for campaigning in Gilgit-Baltistan, or holding big PDM jalsas or the government-organised events. It's an endless debate.



But, the obsession over which of the two sides is leading more people to sickness and possible death also shows how far we have come since the pandemic first began. For the current focus on using the virus for political ends is different from the discussions in March when it seemed everyone and anyone only spoke about the pandemic rather than now when it is politics through the virus.

When the numbers first began to go up at the beginning of the year, the clamour for a lockdown was deafening. The entire debate revolved around just that — the need for a strict and immediate lockdown. The total number of cases in the country were under 1,000 when most of the provinces announced a lockdown — a word which will compete with 'self-isolate' and 'social distancing' for the word of the year for 2020 — towards the end of March.

That this is perhaps not the major debate now, as it was back then, is not just due to the political environment but also to what we have all learnt in eight long months since those lockdowns began. In March, the perception was that a hard, strict lockdown would eliminate the virus, as had happened in Wuhan. We would all — or most of us — hunker down, venturing out only for food, and if we did it well enough, the virus would be gone from our lives. (Those who argued that a lockdown was a temporary measure to prevent the health system from breaking down or ramping it up were ignored.)

*So much is unknown about the infection that views have changed rapidly about what needs to be done.*

This 'elimination' seemed not only possible but also necessary because the projections of an exponential spread of the virus-spelled catastrophe for our overcrowded cities with limited, creaky healthcare. In those very early days, few made the connection between the younger population and the impact of the virus — healthcare professionals painted a scary picture of people collapsing in hospital corridors and even the roads, as we ran out of equipment and health workers to help them.

But as weeks passed, it turned out that even with limited testing and unreported Covid-19 deaths, the health system did not collapse as had been feared. The younger population helped; on the downside the elimination was not as easy as announcing a lockdown.

It also appeared — though a final judgement may still be awaited — that a lockdown is also not the panacea it promised to be. India's example illustrated this. It has been argued by some that the sudden lockdown and the connected movement of the migrant workers may have helped spread the virus rather than curtail it. However, one must always be very careful of drawing too close a parallel between the countries because India has far more urban centres than Pakistan and the density in cities is directly linked to the spread of the virus. Second, India's connectivity with the world means the virus may have spread more widely than in Pakistan's case.

The point of this ramble is to say that with the pandemic so much is unknown that views have changed rapidly — within months — about what needs to be done and why. And this is true not just of the government but also health experts — the WHO itself changed

its decision on the use of masks, which have now become the foremost tool to prevent spread; while in the first quarter of 2020, it was advised that masks be used only by health professionals.

Similarly, time and experience may also be one reason there is not so much pressure for a lockdown in Pakistan, even though the numbers have begun rising again — because we now know it's not the magic wand we had hoped it would be.

Add to this two other factors; the provincial governments are perhaps more averse to a lockdown because of their experience of its impact on the economy.

This is not limited to Pakistan; even in Europe, this time around, the lockdowns were not as severe as the summer ones — for example, France went into lockdown in October; it shut bars and restaurants and non-essential shops but schools and factories stayed open. The north of Italy followed a similar route.

Second, the public at large is also less willing to adhere to severe restrictions the second time around — this has been a point of concern in Europe where governments were aware that fatigue had set in. This is also a factor in Pakistan; not everyone who had willingly imprisoned themselves at the beginning of the year has returned to a similar level of isolation. This is also due to a sense that the virus is now simply a part of life rather than a life-threatening short-term risk that would disappear if we suspended our lives briefly.

Perhaps this is why it is hard to even heed the health experts who are back on television, painting a gloomy picture as numbers go up. In March and April, their voice was impossible to ignore — now they barely register.

And this is why the virus has now succumbed to politics. Because in eight months, we (and the political parties) have realised that it's not going away in a hurry and that the cost to our society and healthcare is not unbearable. So onwards with the jalsas and the conventions, and impatience to throw a government out.

One can only hope that our present knowledge of the pandemic is not as incomplete as it was eight months ago.  
(By Arifa Noor Dawn, 06, 01/12/2020)

### **UK becomes first nation to roll out Covid vaccine**

Britain on Wednesday became the first western country to approve a Covid-19 vaccine for general use, while Italy and Japan promised free inoculations for all even as the global death toll ticked towards 1.5 million.

A mere 12 months after the pandemic began in China, the UK's independent medicines regulator gave its green light to the BioNTech-Pfizer drug in double-quick time but insisted safety had come first.

"Everybody can be confident that no corners whatsoever have been cut," said Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) chief executive June Raine. "The public deserve nothing less."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the move heralded a vaccination programme "that will ultimately allow us to reclaim our lives and get the economy moving again", and the government said some 800,000 doses would be administered as soon as next week.

Johnson will hope for a political boost from the announcement, after he was criticised for his initial lax response to the global outbreak. He has endured months of questions about the provision of protective equipment and protecting care home residents, as well as testing capacity.

*Inoculation work to start next week; Italy and Japan promise free vaccinations*

With over 59,000 deaths from 1.6 million cases, Britain's outbreak remains the deadliest in Europe.

The US and EU had on Tuesday fleshed out plans to administer Covid-19 vaccines as soon as they gain approval.

With the European Medicines Agency (EMA) expected to rule on the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine by December 29, "we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel" with plans for nationwide free inoculations, Italian Health Minister Roberto Speranza said on Wednesday. Japan's parliament passed a bill to the same effect.

As in Britain, Italy plans for medical staff and workers and residents in elderly care homes to be among the first to be vaccinated, followed by other old people, essential workers and chronically ill people.

But "do not mistake the first ray of sunlight for an escape from danger," Speranza said. "If we let down our guard now, the third wave is just around the corner."

With tens of millions in England still under restrictions after the lifting of a nationwide lockdown, Johnson also urged the public to remain cautious.

Close to 1.5m people globally had died from the coronavirus by Wednesday, according to a count based on official sources, while 63.9m have been infected.

Pfizer chief executive Albert Bourla said the UK certification was a "historic moment in the fight against Covid-19".

"This authorisation is a goal we have been working toward since we first declared that science will win," he said.

US giant Pfizer and German newcomer BioNTech added that they expected further regulatory decisions from other countries "in the coming days and weeks".

Other vaccines expected to come on stream soon include ones from Moderna and AstraZeneca/Oxford University, which has strong backing from the UK government.

Scientists also acclaimed the UK news but cautioned that logistical challenges remained. The Pfizer-BioNTech jab has to be stored at -70 degrees Celsius, requiring specialist freezers.

It requires two doses 21 days apart, and the MHRA said immunity kicks in a week after the second dose.

Meanwhile many poorer countries are pinning their hopes on the AstraZeneca/Oxford candidate, which can be kept in regular refrigerators and is being offered at cost price.

But it is undergoing further data analysis after questions were raised over the effectiveness of its dosage regime.

With effectiveness around 95 per cent, both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are based on new mRNA technology, which hacks into human cells to effectively turn them into vaccine-making factories.

Russia was the first country to announce a successful vaccine candidate, dubbed Sputnik V.

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday told health officials to begin large-scale inoculations next week, starting with teachers and medics, adding that Russia has produced close to 2m doses.

The drug has not undergone Western clinical trials.

As mass vaccination inches closer to reality, Interpol warned that organised crime groups could attempt to steal supplies of vaccines or sell their own fake ones.

Beyond the hoped-for jabs, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and biotech firm Regeneron are working on a nasal spray that will stop infection from the virus, initially testing the gene therapy on animals.

The World Health Organisation said that for now people should wear masks in poorly ventilated indoor areas if other people are near, including in schools and workplaces.  
(By AFP Dawn, 01, 03/12/2020)

### **Virus positivity rate on the rise in Karachi, Hyd**

The Covid-19 detection rate - the number of cases reported as compared to samples tested - in Karachi and Hyderabad is rapidly rising, leading to alarm among health officials.

Health department data provided on Tuesday showed the five-day long positivity rate is highest in Hyderabad at 18.4 per cent, followed closely by Karachi at 16.02 per cent. Both these cities have some of the highest positivity ratios in the country, while the rest of the province's districts stand at 4.64 per cent.

And the ratio only went up on Wednesday, when Sindh reported as many as 1,983 fresh coronavirus cases - the highest so far in the second wave - along with six more deaths. As a result, the death toll hit 2,968, while the provincial tally of positive cases stands at 177,652.

According to Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, 14,078 samples were tested in Sindh overnight, yielding an overall positivity rate of 14 per cent.

Based on the health department's data, an average detection rate of 12.64 per cent has been recorded in Sindh since November 26. The data identifies an upward trend in this, indicating a rapid increase in the number of positive cases.

By comparison, when the pandemic eased in the country a couple of months ago, the detection rate was hovering under three per cent.

#### **'SOPs violations'**

Health officials say this rise is down to citizens' refusal to follow the coronavirus-related SOPs. "Even those who have tested positive are going out," disclosed a senior official at the health department, speaking to The Express Tribune.

"Yes, the positivity rate is going up," confirmed health department spokesperson Meeran Yousuf. "It will go up further in the coming days," she predicted.

Despite restrictions and repeated directives, citizens can be found in crowded areas in both cities, flouting social distancing measures and ignoring masks.



"The public doesn't seem serious about precautionary measures," commented Sindh health services director-general Dr Irshad Memon, raising similar concerns.

Irrked with the public's nonchalance, health officials noted that even people with apparent symptoms have been avoiding quarantine.

"There is no social distancing anywhere," said another senior official. "People with positive reports are hugging people and wandering everywhere. This will not help us stop transmission. We are all at risk."

#### **Public mistrust**

On the other hand, citizens appear to find little credibility in the government's claims.

A buyer in busy Khajoor Bazaar claimed the government itself was not serious. "Then why should the people take precautionary measures?" asked Muhammad Salam, saying he only wore a mask when entering a bank or office where it was mandatory. "The numbers only increase when the government wants to scare people."

Pointing to the crowded market, Salam opined, "The virus is only hitting the rich, not the poor."

A commuter, Ahmed Qureshi, noted that most areas of Karachi were not restricted. "The virus is limited to a certain areas. I have not understood why it doesn't hit everyone where the people are not wearing masks and are avoiding social distancing."

Other buyers and sellers at the market were also sceptical, given that all reports were generated by government officials. "The government actually manipulates such reports for its own benefits. God knows if they ever speak the truth," said Akbar Baloch. Their comments pointed to a major trust deficit between the public and government officials. While the government has focused on raising awareness about the pandemic and has also attempted to enforce punitive action against violators, the presence of government officials at public gatherings has not gone unnoticed by the citizenry.

#### **Collective efforts**

"People must understand the value of their own health," pleaded Dr Memon, urging people to wear masks, wash hands and maintain social distancing. "That's the only way we can contain the virus."

According to him, Sindh is the only province sharing daily situation reports. "We do not hide anything like the positivity rate," he said, adding that the detection ratio in rural areas is less than 3 per cent.

According to the CM, there are currently 20,841 known active cases in Sindh, with 712 patients in critical condition and at least 75 on ventilators.

Based on the health department's data, there are 1,075 ventilators in the province, with 404 allocated for coronavirus patients. Given Wednesday's figures, around 18 per cent of the reserved ventilators are currently occupied, but the rapid rate at which the infection is spreading, however, suggests this may rise.

Meanwhile, there are a total of 28 laboratories in the province, 22 of which are in the provincial capital. Their testing capacity is roughly at 88 per cent, testing 14,940 samples per day.

Out of the 1,983 new cases reported on Wednesday, 1,702 cases were detected in Karachi and 40 positive cases emerged in Hyderabad.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 03/12/2020)

### **Vaccine hope**

NEWS that the United Kingdom has become the first country to approve the Covid-19 vaccine has been welcomed by a public that has been battered by the virus. With approximately 60,000 deaths and 1.6m infections, the outbreak in Britain has been the deadliest in Europe. Therefore, the availability of a vaccine as early as next week is indeed something to celebrate. Pakistan, too, believes it can procure a vaccine and roll it out in the first quarter of next year, giving hope that there is light at the end of a long, dreary tunnel.

The Covid-19 graph in Pakistan has spelled doom in the second wave way beyond what was experienced in the first. The spread of the virus throughout the country is worrying, and the continued laxity of the general public may trigger a situation in which the healthcare system is overwhelmed. With a national positivity rate of over 8pc and the number of critically ill patients growing, an all-out nightmare does not seem too far away.

In this situation, the authorities must strategise and focus resources on a mitigation strategy in the short term. If restrictions such as school closures and the limiting of indoor dining do not lower the infection rate substantially, the federal and provincial governments will have to take the difficult decision of imposing a lockdown. It is shocking that public gatherings, weddings, rallies and other large events are continuing unabated in the country.

While some sections of the public and even political leaders go about life in a 'normal' way, healthcare workers are paying a heavy price. In the last few days alone, at least 10 doctors have died across Pakistan while 3,000 front-line workers have gone into isolation — a reality which may worsen if this callous behaviour continues.

The long-term challenge for the government is the Covid-19 inoculation once the vaccine is procured. Undoubtedly, healthcare workers, who have worked at an enormous personal cost, will be the first to get it. That the ECC has allocated funds for the vaccine is a welcome sign and shows the government is thinking about the huge task ahead, which may be complicated by the vaccine's storage and other requirements. The government is considering key features of the vaccines being developed, including their efficacy, safety, side effects, storage, cost, and production capacity.

As the negotiations between the government and vaccine producers take place, it is imperative that attention be given to surmounting the logistical challenges as well as ensuring that there is no profiteering as often happens in such crises. A successful vaccination programme in Pakistan will bring much-needed relief to front-line workers and other vulnerable people, who have spent the greater part of the year living in fear, away from their loved ones and often in isolation. The government owes an effective vaccination strategy to these heroes.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 04/12/2020)

### **Lockdown extended in parts of Karachi's district Central**

As 15 more patients of coronavirus died overnight in Sindh and 1,615 new cases emerged, the local administration in Karachi on Thursday extended lockdown in parts of district Central for the next two weeks, said a statement from the Commissioner Karachi office.

It said that as per the decision of the deputy commissioner Central a few localities in different blocks of Federal B. Area and some in North Nazimabad and Nazimabad were spotted as new hotspots.

Under the standard operating procedures (SOPs) all commercial facilities, business centres, expo halls, all contact sports, indoor sports clubs, indoor gyms and sports facilities, sporting tournaments, indoor and outdoor restaurants, cafés excluding takeaway and home delivery, theme parks, amusement parks and arcades, beauty parlours and spas, cinemas and theatres, public processions/gatherings of all nature would remain closed in the mentioned areas.

"In F.B. Area localities in Blocks 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 18 would remain sealed till December 16," said an official citing the fresh notification. "Similarly, a few streets of Blocks B, C, D, G, L and N were mentioned in the notification. Areas in Nazimabad No. 1, 3 and 4 and Firdous Colony of the neighbourhood would also remain sealed. In North Karachi parts of Sectors 11-A, 11-B and 5-C-1 would face the same restrictions."

He said that the provincial government and district administration, by an order, could restrict all or any activity in areas which were hotspots for the spread of Covid-19.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 04/12/2020)

### **KMC worker with Covid-19 booked for 'forcibly hugging officer'**

The police registered on Saturday a case against an employee of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), who earlier tested positive for Covid-19, on charges of forcibly hugging and kissing KMC human resource management (HRM) director Jameel Farooqui over non-payment of his salary on Friday.

The FIR was registered under Sections 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of public function), 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code against Shahzad Anwar on Farooqui's behalf at the City Court police station. Journalist Rashid Siddique has also been nominated in the FIR for allegedly encouraging Anwar to hug and kiss Farooqui.

Farooqui, in his statement to the police, said he was a BS-19 officer, adding that when he returned to his office after Friday prayers, a person identifying himself as Shahzad Anwar, a BS-16 stenographer at the KMC, barged in and forcibly hugged and kissed him on the neck. He then declared that he had Covid-19, Farooqui told the police.

"Anwar is presently waiting to be posted in the HRM department," he said. "Following this, a panic was created at the KMC's head office."

According to Farooqui, Anwar also disrupted work at the KMC and interfered in official work with the Siddique's help.

The Karachi AIG has ordered the South investigation SSP to conduct an inquiry into the incident.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 06/12/2020)

### **Architect Arif Hasan's wife dies of Covid-19**

Mujahida Hasan, wife of renowned city planner and architect Arif Hasan, passed away here on Sunday. She was 77. She had been suffering from coronavirus pandemic for a week, her family members said. She is survived by husband, a son and two daughters.

Her funeral prayers were offered at KDA Scheme No. 1 before she was laid to rest in the DHA Phase-VIII graveyard.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 07/12/2020)

## Sindh govt seeks WHO help for coronavirus vaccination

The Sindh government on Thursday sought the support of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to meet the upcoming challenges of vaccination for coronavirus prevention in the province and asked it to assist the local authorities from procurement of the vaccines to their storage and from cold-chain management to their distribution.

The proposal to the WHO was made by Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho while inaugurating the refurbished Expanded Programme on Immunisation centres, provision of six vaccination vans, vehicles and other equipment to the EPI Sindh by the WHO. The health minister said the support of a body like WHO was crucial to make the Covid-19 vaccines available to people who could not afford it.

“We should start preparing a plan for the procurement, storage and distribution of Covid-19 vaccine so we can execute the best possible operation of vaccination in an effective way,” she said. “We need WHO’s assistance in its procurement, storage, cold-chain management and distribution so that we could vaccinate our elderly people, who have comorbidities [and] can’t afford it. We don’t want anyone to be missed.”

*World health body donates six mobile vaccination vans to EPI for Karachi districts*

The ceremony was held at the EPI, where the WHO donated six mobile vaccination vans to the EPI Sindh for each district of Karachi which would be used for routine vaccination, provision of health and nutrition support services. The WHO also donated several other vehicles for the monitoring activities, refurbished nine vaccination centres in the city and provided a 500kV generator for uninterrupted power supply to the EPI for maintaining cold chain for the storage of important vaccines in the EPI programme.

“The communicable diseases are really fatal among children under five years of age in Pakistan, including Sindh, but with the help and support of the WHO, the provincial health department and EPI programme are striving to enhance vaccination coverage despite Covid-19,” added the health minister.

WHO country representative and head of mission to Pakistan Dr Palitha Mahipala said he was impressed with the improving health facilities in Sindh. He vowed to continue supporting the people of Sindh dealing with disease outbreaks while providing them vaccination and other health services.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 11/12/2020)

## 'Children biggest victims of Covid-19 pandemic'

Speakers at a discussion held in connection with International Human Rights Day at a local hotel on Wednesday said that the Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on children’s well-being, and there was an immediate need for the government to take steps to address their needs in the light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The event was organised by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (Sparc). Speaking about government efforts for children’s uplift, Special Assistant to Chief Minister of Sindh on Human Rights Veerji Kolhi said approximately 47 per cent of Pakistan’s total population comprised children under the age of 18.

He mentioned that Pakistan ratified the UNCRC in November 1990 but only 24 per cent of its laws were in line with the convention’s requirements.

“Bringing these legislations in conformity with the UNCRC and their effective implementation is the key priority of our government,” he noted.

Sajjad Ahmed Cheema, executive director at Sparc, said children had been the biggest victims of Covid-19 pandemic as it seriously hampered their access to education, health, nutrition, protection and mental and physical development.

He shared a report by the United Nations published in June 2020 which stated that the current Covid-19 pandemic was likely to push more than 120 million South Asian children in poverty within the next six months.

Member National Assembly Kishwar Zehra referred to Article 25-A of the Constitution according to which free and quality education was the fundamental right of every child.

“However, Pakistan’s spending on education is the lowest in South Asia and one of the lowest in the world. Pakistan has 22.84 million out-of-school children which is the second highest figure in the world,” she said, adding that this dropout ratio was expected to increase exponentially due to the pandemic.

Dr Seema Zia, Sindh Assembly member of PTI, expressed concern over the low priority status of children in the country and said there was no special allocation for child health and nutrition. As a result, 40pc of under-five children were at serious risk.

“Pakistan stands third in the list of countries with high mortality burden of children of this age group. Keeping children at home isn’t enough to save them from the pandemic. Efforts must be made to ensure that every child is vaccinated and has access to proper healthcare and nutrition to boost their immunity levels,” she said.

Iqbal Detho, a member of the National Commission on Child Rights, raised concern on the increasing violence children were facing during the Covid-19 pandemic and children were being subjected to physical torture by financially and mentally depressed adults.

He mentioned that child marriages, trafficking, and sale for commercial and sexual exploitation were expected to rise due to increasing poverty whereas cases of physical and sexual violence against girl domestic workers and street children were being reported frequently.

Earlier, Muhammad Kashif Mirza representing Sparc regretted that Pakistan hadn't delivered on its international and national commitments towards child rights.

"Approximately 12 million Pakistani children are engaged in labour and many of them are involved in hazardous forms of work. This figure also includes over 1.2 million children living and working in the streets," he informed the participants.

Citing a report titled Cruel Numbers 2019, he said eight child abuse cases were reported every day in Pakistan this year. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 11/12/2020)

### **Covid-19 unit at ASH faces closure for want of funds**

Amid the growing number of coronavirus cases with Karachi emerging as a key hotspot urban centre in the country, a 100-bed Covid-19 Infectious Disease and Research Centre at the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH) is feared to close its operation after less than a month it became functional as the local administration has failed to meet its financial commitment for the specialised unit of the third largest hospital of the city, officials and sources said.

Fears ran high among family members of the patients, who were being treated at the hospital — six of whom were on ventilators battling for life against the pandemic — seeking support from the authorities so the unit could continue its operation which was mostly benefitting those living in low-income areas. Dozens of Covid-19 patients being treated at the facility were facing serious threat of discontinuation of the services amid growing financial crisis, they feared.

"The Covid-19 Infectious Disease and Research Centre (IDRC) at the ASH was initially established in July 2020 and it took a month to upgrade the facility," said a source privy to the details of the unit and current status of the affairs at the facility. "In August 2020 it was formally inaugurated by then mayor Wasim Akhtar. And finally it became fully operational on Nov 24 after the Karachi administrator formally inaugurated the centre. Since then the patients are coming here daily and being admitted for free treatment. The centre has 75 staff members, including doctors and other health workers, serving round the clock."

There are 25 ventilators in the hospital, he said and added that the facility had also 50 beds with BiPap machines, which was considered one of the most crucial facilities for Covid-19. It offered support to those infected persons who had trouble breathing, as this machine could help pump air into their lungs, he said.

*In July Federal Minister Asad Umar had visited the facility and promised that he would help resolve its financial issues*

"Right now there are several patients being treated at the hospital and six of them are on ventilators. As the number of cases increases, there are strong fears that more patients would need ventilator support," he added.

So what went wrong in the process that had pushed the crucial health facility to a situation where it is near its closure and at the time when the second wave of the pandemic is becoming a serious challenge for the health authorities? The sources said that the local government hospital started the huge operation less than a month back on commitment of funding from the administration, which it never fulfilled.

"All tests, treatment and medicines are supplied free at the hospital," said another source. "The hospital didn't have funds to carry out the operation so an arrangement was made with a welfare organisation of undergraduate students of the KMDC [Karachi Medical and Dental College] which runs different operations for underprivileged patients. It was decided that the Karachi administration would repay the cost being borne by the welfare organisation. The student welfare organisation has been conducting labs for the patients and supplying medicines from its facilities. After nearly a month, the hospital has failed to pay to the organisation even a single penny of the hundreds of thousands of rupees it has spent."

It doesn't end here. The local government hospital is facing serious human resource issues on the other hand where a large number of its doctors and other health workers have not been receiving salaries for the last few months. Even protest by the doctors and assurances from the authorities — both local and federal — have failed to fix the issue during the pandemic.

"In July 2020 Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar along with then Karachi mayor Wasim Akhtar had visited the Covid-19 Infectious Disease and Research Centre at the ASH," he said. "He [Mr Umar] had publicly promised that he would take it up with the authorities concerned and that the financial issues of the hospital would be resolved. It's so unfortunate his promise also fell short of meeting the expectations."

He said that doctors and health workers across the country were receiving extra financial benefits through healthcare allowance to serve during the coronavirus pandemic. In Karachi, he said, they were even deprived of the salaries at the ASH and there was hardly any for them to get the healthcare allowance for their services to Covid-19 patients. (By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 14/12/2020)

### Covid spreads in Sindh's jails

As the pandemic surges across the country, the number of active coronavirus cases in Sindh's prisons has risen from 31 to 112 in a span of 10 days. Given the rise in cases, jail administrations in the province have decided to restrict family visits for inmates to once in 10 days.

Earlier, prisoners were allowed to meet their families twice a week.

The new round of Covid-19 screening among inmates was initiated on the directives of Sindh Prisons IG Qazi Nazeer Ahmed. Despite strict implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to curb the spread of the virus, several more positive cases were detected across the provincial jails.

The new measures have been taken to restrict the inmates' link with the outside world. Prisoners appear before the courts on a daily basis and new inmates are also being brought in the jails, which are already filled beyond capacity.

There are over 18,000 inmates in Sindh's 22 jails, which have a total capacity of 13,000 prisoners. Given the second wave of the virus nationwide, it was inevitable that the virus would rear its head again in Sindh's crowded jails.

According to jail officials, every new inmate is quarantined for 14 days but another round of screenings for current prisoners and jail officials has been initiated. Test reports typically come in two days, add jail officials.

The situation appears to be worst in Karachi's Malir district jail, where 70 positive cases were detected. In Karachi Central Jail, 33 positive cases have emerged, with four of the infected inmates belonging to the Youth Offenders Industrial School. One official of the school also tested positive for the virus.

Meanwhile, as many as three inmates tested positive in Ghotki district jail, two in Hyderabad jail and one in Shikarpur jail.

The provincial jails have managed to limit the spread of the virus by strictly adhering to precautionary measures for the coronavirus.

(By Raheel Salman The Express Tribune, 05, 15/12/2020)

### Covid unit closure

WITH the second wave of Covid-19 presenting enormous challenges to the national health system, the state must remain ready at all levels to face the circumstances. However, the imminent closure of a dedicated coronavirus unit recently in one of Karachi's biggest public hospitals reportedly due to lack of funds shows that bureaucratic bottlenecks are impeding the fight against Covid-19. As reported, the Covid-19 Infectious Disease and Research Centre at the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital faces being shut down less than a month after the facility became operational. The 100-bed centre, run by the local government, offers free treatment and many patients are facing uncertainty if the facility does close down. A charity organisation was paying for the facilities at the centre, but as the Karachi administration has failed to reimburse the funds, the future of the dedicated health facility looks bleak. Moreover, as no elected local government is in place in the city, the issue requires the immediate attention of the Sindh government and the Karachi administrator.

In these times of economic hardship, institutions offering free Covid-19 treatment, as well as other healthcare facilities, are essential. The Abbasi Shaheed Hospital caters to those citizens who cannot afford steep fees at private health facilities, so depriving this large segment of the population of healthcare at a critical time is unacceptable. Unfortunately, the development also speaks volumes for the lack of planning and preparation where public-sector projects are concerned. It must be investigated how such a high-profile scheme at a major city hospital faces the dearth of funds within such a short period of its launch. Unfortunately, it is perhaps yet another casualty of the lack of a functioning local government system in Karachi. Instead of closing down such facilities, more such healthcare interventions are needed in the public sphere, especially where the provision of primary and secondary care is concerned. The people are in no position to fend for themselves and have been left at the mercy of expensive private healthcare providers.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 15/12/2020)

### Sindh govt decides to close seminaries to contain spread of Covid-19

The Sindh government on Thursday decided to close all madrassahs across the province which continued their educational activities despite closure of other educational institutions, including schools, colleges, universities and coaching and training centres, in a move to contain spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

A notification issued by the Sindh home department said that the orders were put in place "with immediate effect" and asked all the relevant district administrations and law enforcement agencies to ensure its implementation. However, unlike schools, colleges and other educational institutions, the authorities have not mentioned any time frame for the closure of the madrassahs in the province.

"In exercise of powers under Section 3 (1) of Sindh Epidemic Diseases Act 2014 (Act VIII of 2015), the government directs the closure of all educational activities in madrassahs throughout the province of Sindh with the immediate effect," said the notification. "The secretary Auqaf and religious affairs department are empowered under Section 3(1) of the above said Act to issue further orders, directions, notices to put this order into effect in letter and spirit and to clarify further for implementation. The deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners concerned as well as personnel of the law enforcement agencies not below the rank of



inspector of police or equivalent rank of other law enforcement agencies are empowered under Section 3(1) of the said acts to take legal action on an act contravention of this order issued thereunder.”

#### *No period for closure mentioned in the notification*

Due to the renewed surge in Covid-19 cases, the federal government on Nov 23 had announced the closure of educational institutions from Nov 26 to Jan 10, postponing the exams scheduled during this period. The decision was taken at an online conference of provincial and federal education ministers, headed by Shafqat Mahmood, after they discussed the wave of Covid-19 and its impact on educational institutions.

At the conference, the ministers agreed that all educational institutions should remain closed and students be taught through online classes from Nov 26 till Dec 24, while winter vacation be observed from Dec 25 to Jan 10, 2021. However, as the government had taken measures to mitigate the impact of the second wave of the pandemic, the Wafaqul Madaris Al-Arabia had announced that the seminaries would not be closed as the largest federation of seminaries in the country was not consulted on the issue.

Though in Punjab, the provincial government had notified the closure of seminaries with schools, colleges, academies and tuition centres, the madressahs continued their educational activities.

“All the madressahs have been conveyed through their umbrella body about the Sindh government decision. We are not sure at this point in time but the decision is expected to be reviewed in the second week of January,” said an official.  
(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 18/12/2020)

### **'Electronic' mourning rituals picking up during pandemic**

“My sister couldn’t reach Pakistan and my father passed away earlier this year. She lives in the UK and she couldn’t make it because of the coronavirus travel restrictions. She was devastated and was inconsolable,” Tehmina said. “Then her husband suggested we take her online and show her our father’s body, the burial and all the rituals. We were a little shocked at this suggestion at first but then realised that it was a brilliant idea to use technology to connect a child to a parent at a time like this.”

Relatives are meeting online to grieve. Generally, we tend to come together to mourn and support one another not only physically and financially but also emotionally. With the pandemic and lockdowns, people were alone to grieve — a shocking development in a close-knit society.

However, this vacuum was quickly filled by electronic mourning — a healthy alternative for a society used to gathering to mourn — and soon online spaces were used to gather people at such times.

With almost everything online — online classes, meetings, webinars — it was only a matter of time before people used technology to connect for mourning.

*For a society like ours it is unthinkable that one does not visit an ill family member or attend a funeral*

People are visiting ill relatives and friends online, as well as attending funerals, religious rituals and prayers.

As the coronavirus pandemic persists and the lockdown prolongs, people are getting used to virtual events and visits with their relatives. More and more people abroad are using online spaces to virtually attend funerals and other rituals of friends and families.

“My siblings are abroad — one is in the UK and the other is in Germany. Both of them couldn’t travel to Pakistan to attend the funeral of my mother. It would have been devastating for me to be alone to go through the whole process,” said Shamim Ali.

“However, my siblings were with me online throughout — technology not only allowed them to bid farewell to mother but also to virtually attend her burial and the fateha.”

Shamim Ali says the coronavirus has turned everything around and so we have all evolved. “Who would have thought that my siblings could be part of my mother’s last journey. I know it isn’t the same as being there, but it is something to be able to have access to this.”

#### **A religious obligation**

For a society like ours where the extended family is closely connected, it is unthinkable that one does not visit an ill family member or attend a funeral. Our funerals are large since it is also a religious obligation for males to attend funeral prayers.

With the onset of the coronavirus people couldn’t attend funerals, prayers or meet the bereaved family. This was a cultural dilemma and causing a lot of social problems for many.

This is when people sought the online spaces to electronically visit relatives when they fell ill or just to talk to them. When people couldn’t attend funerals or visit hospitals they opted for online spaces for ‘e-mourning’ and ‘e-praying’.

“All you have to do is send a link of your event or use other options of virtual meeting,” Saima said. “And everyone can join in from the comfort of their homes.”



Saima's father-in-law died of the coronavirus, shortly after her mother-in-law also tested positive. Her husband was working abroad and wasn't allowed to return home. "We connected him directly to his mother through her phone. We taught her how to get online and connected."

Fortunately, Saima's mother-in-law recovered and is back home but she is thrilled to be able to connect with her children and other relatives from all over the world. Now she can use her phone without any help.

"I lost two dear relatives to corona. One was in another city inside Pakistan and the other one lived in the US. For obvious reasons, I couldn't attend any of the funerals. I was devastated," said Ahmed. "My relatives connected with me online and I was watching everything virtually in real time. It was surreal."

Haider said he was under quarantine when his uncle passed away. "It was strange that we were both in Karachi and I was unable to attend his funeral or any of the fateha events. My brother got me online during the burial and then the fateha. It was a little strange but at least I paid my respect properly and saw my uncle for the last time."

Technology has helped bridge distances between cities, countries and even continents at a time when it was most needed. More people seem to have come online during the last one year due to lockdowns and social distancing than before.

The real-time virtual presence has helped many to tackle these trying times by connecting with people more than before. Maybe the younger generation will not understand why online is such a big deal as they have been connected most of their lives.

But for older generations connecting with relatives and loved ones, especially at a time like this, it is great to be able to keep in touch with one another.

### Connectivity issues decades ago

A little more than 30 years ago, when someone left the country it was quite difficult to keep in touch with them. Parents longed to hear the voices of their children and see their faces. Most of the connectivity was through letters that were personally delivered by a postman which could take weeks. It was a time when people were unable to meet or see their loved ones for the last time if they were unable to travel physically.

There were phones but as unbelievable as it may seem now, not everyone was connected to a phone and many didn't have direct dialling as it was very expensive.

National and international calls were booked via operators who would dial the number you gave them, and they would ask how long do you want the call. The calls could be three minutes, six minutes etc or open — and you would be charged for the last period. The operator would cut the line when the time ran out. Those few minutes were precious for everyone.

If you told them that a time would come when connection would be a click away and free and that you could connect with different people at the same time even if they lived on different continents — they would surely think you were mad.

But technology is evolving all the time. It wouldn't be wrong to think that a time will come when one will be teleported from one place to another, as well as travel back and forth in time.

Sound absurd? Don't be too quick to judge!

(By Lubna Jerar Naqvi Dawn, 13, 20/12/2020)

## Covid in prisons

PAKISTAN'S overcrowded prisons are a Petri dish for disease even during 'normal' times. During a pandemic, however, the inmates are at an even more grave risk. In the confined space, social distancing and other public health precautions become next to impossible to implement. The individuals detained become, in effect, sitting ducks for exposure to the virus. Prisoners of the Pandemic, a joint report by Amnesty International and Justice Project Pakistan, examines the impact of decisions by the authorities pertaining to the well-being and safety of those behind bars in the country during this global contagion. The fact that between April and August 2020, the prison population actually grew from 73,242 to 79,603, an 8.7pc increase, says much about their lackadaisical approach. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that by August at least 2,313 inmates had tested positive for Covid-19. To continue with matters as before violates international law and WHO guidelines about managing Covid-19 in places of detention.

Without proactive measures and some creative thinking, our criminal justice system can fuel an uncontrolled spread of Covid-19. The glacial speed at which trials proceed means that at least 67pc of those behind bars have not yet been convicted by any court. Inmates are crammed together in conditions where in some prisons six to 15 prisoners may occupy a cell meant to house no more than three. According to the above-mentioned report, the problem "is compounded by the courts' reluctance to order alternative measures to detention at the sentencing stage such as fines, community service or probation, although these are available for a number of petty offences". A judicial inquiry commission led by the human rights ministry in early 2020 found that almost 2,400 prisoners suffer from chronic, contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis and HIV, which makes them doubly vulnerable if they contract Covid-19. It is a terrible pity that efforts by activists and some government authorities to reduce the prison population in these exceptional circumstances came to naught. The IHC had ordered that those awaiting trial for non-prohibitory offences be granted bail. The Sindh government prepared lists of several thousand prisoners to be temporarily released on furnishing guarantees. The human rights minister too acknowledged the need to set free at-risk inmates. Unfortunately, the apex court's stance may have stymied any further progress. No prisoners were released as a concession to the prevailing situation. Surely, we can and we must do better.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 21/12/2020)

## New Covid-19 variant

The United Kingdom has been isolated by the neighbouring European countries as well as a lot of others in other continents.

Reason? A highly infectious strain of the Covid-19 coronavirus has been detected in the UK. Pakistan has joined the burgeoning list of countries that have placed restrictions on travellers from the kingdom. Flights from Britain have already been suspended by several European and Middle Eastern countries, as well as Canada, India and Hong Kong. The French even closed their border for goods trucks, meaning that supply shortages of some products may well be on the horizon. Meanwhile, even Northern Ireland — a component country of the UK — is mulling closing the internal border with the rest of Britain.

That makes it unsurprising that Pakistan's National Command and Operation Centre placed a week-long temporary restriction starting Wednesday. The restriction, which is extendable in terms of duration, will apply to everyone that has been in the UK during the 10 days before travel. Exemptions will be made for transit passengers who never leave their UK airports as well as Pakistani passport holders in the UK on tourist visas. However, they will have to meet some basic requirements such as Covid-19 tests before and after travel. They will also have to quarantine for one week on arrival in Pakistan and follow our test and trace policies.

Even though experts across the world have reassured that the new strain does not appear to be deadlier or more vaccine-resistant than the more widespread one, the fact that it is more contagious is enough justification for the abundance of prudence being shown. For instance, in South East England the modeling data suggests that the number of infections have increased from 100 cases per 100,000 in early October to 400 cases per 100,000 in December. The new strain has also been detected in other European countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, and as far away as Australia and South Africa.

While some Britons may complain about their travel plans — specially related to the approaching Christmas and New Year — their domestic leadership is not really helping matters. Boggled down by his failure to get a favourable Brexit deal, which was essentially the only thing that got Prime Minister Boris Johnson elected, his administration is struggling to keep their stories straight. As Prime Minister Johnson tried to urge caution and responsibility, Health Secretary Matt Hancock was essentially saying the world is on fire. Okay, what he did say was, "The new variant is out of control," but that does not sound much better.

It also doesn't help that UK authorities have apparently known about the new strain since September but started openly talking about it only last week. In the meantime, Prime Minister Johnson, despite knowing of the new strain, was announcing relaxations of the UK's lockdown policies ahead of Christmas. And while those relaxations have since been withdrawn, it is still not a good look when some in his government are still trying to accuse China of covering up the spread of the original strain.

Pakistan, meanwhile, has done a good swift job by coming up with UK-specific restrictions. But the authorities here must also make sure the restrictions are strictly followed. There must be no complacency and no casual handling of the potentially emerging situation.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 23/12/2020)

## The Covid year

It's never an easy year for Pakistan, but this one ended up going far worse than anyone could have imagined. And yet, it was still not as bad as it could have been. Even the gloomiest of scenarios painted at the start of the year focused on political strife and economic stress. Nobody would have thought we would be in a situation where nearly 10,000 citizens are dead because of a preventable disease, and we still consider ourselves to be lucky. Nobody would have thought one of our worst economic years in history would actually be considered, objectively, not too bad. As for politics, everybody could have predicted that it would stay as messy as always.

Yes, the year of Covid is almost at an end, taking with it around 10,000 Pakistani lives at the time of writing. But these deaths represent only a tiny fraction of the over 1.7 million deaths recorded worldwide. Despite a significant rise in recent weeks, even the case tolls are far beyond the world leaders and even regional countries. Where some large countries are dealing with millions of cases — including the United States with almost 20 million and India with over 10 million — Pakistan, despite its large population, has still seen under 500,000 cases so far.

But even with a relatively low caseload, weaknesses in our healthcare system have become further exposed. Hospitals are struggling despite the relatively low infection rate. Imagine if it were worse. It is also notable that, before the pandemic, healthcare funding had been considered a possible avenue for austerity measures by several government advisers. Imagine how bad it would have been if their advice were taken.

The pandemic, meanwhile, also exposed something that many of us have long known. Pakistanis have little understanding of the social contract. After some initial flubbing, the government did get its act together and come up with a Covid strategy that, despite its imperfections and pushback from citizens, appeared to be working. But just as the lockdowns were loosened and Pakistan was being seen as a success story over the summer by just doing the little things (mostly) right, the citizenry decided that winning a battle was enough and promptly took it upon themselves to try and lose the war.

Despite the proven benefits of mask-wearing and social distancing, our citizens — mostly young but often old as well — went for the time-tested strategy of only wearing a helmet or seatbelt when a policeman is nearby. Whether it be political rallies, religious gatherings, or everyday social events, apart from the virus, we were also infected with wilful ignorance that transcended age,

gender, and economic background. This essentially neutralised our early successes and left us in a situation where instead of closing the book on Covid, as some countries have done, we are still frantically flipping pages.

Even the most pessimistic critics of the government, or Pakistani governance in general, would acknowledge that the economy cannot turn the corner and other aspects of life cannot return to normalcy until we get past Covid. Unfortunately, few of those critics, or even supporters, are willing to put in the surprisingly little work required to help put the country back on track.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 29/12/2020)

### Three patients tested positive for UK Covid-19 variant stable

Three female patients, who were recently tested positive for the potentially more contagious Covid-19 variant, are stable and under home isolation, health department sources told *Dawn* on Wednesday. The patients are aged between 19 and 37.

According to the sources, the areas where they lived in are under 'micro smart lockdown' whereas their houses are under police surveillance.

Upon contact, a health department official said preliminary results showed that the patients were positive for the new Covid-19 variant. Further blood samples, however, had been obtained and were being tested at the Aga Khan University Hospital to get more details about the pathogen and its effects on the body.

"The results will be available in a few days. All patients were asymptomatic when they were tested. They are stable," he said.

Sources said the health department had so far traced contacts of 89 UK travellers, including these three patients, and none of them had been found positive for the new Covid-19 variant.

The department, he said, was engaged in rigorous monitoring at the airport since Dec 15 onwards and information about the travellers having UK origin was being communicated by the National Command Operation Centre in Islamabad.

*No more contacts of 89 UK travellers so far traced found positive for new variant*

It may be recalled that the health department a day earlier confirmed that three UK returnees were tested positive for the new Covid-19 variant.

"Twelve samples of UK returnees were taken for genotyping out of which six were positive and three showed the new variant of coronavirus in the first phase.

"The genotyping showed 95 per cent match of the new variant from the UK. These samples will go through another phase of genotyping. Meanwhile, the contact tracing of these patients is in process and their contacts are also being isolated," said a statement by the health department.

According to the federal health ministry, two samples from patients suspected to have the new Covid-19 variant are being analysed at the National Institute of Health (NIH).

The first case of the new variant of coronavirus (B.1.1.7) can be traced back to late September in the south of England, indicating that there was ample time for it to spread undetected across the UK and into other countries.

Now that the alarm has been raised, scientists around the globe are actively searching for and tracking this variant that is thought to pass more easily between people. Since then, it has spread to over 50 countries.

According to experts, there is no evidence that the variant is any deadlier than previously known strains of the coronavirus, or that it makes people any sicker or is resistant to the vaccines that have been developed. But a study released last week by a team of UK scientists estimated that it's 56pc more contagious. The British government had earlier said the variant might be up to 70pc more transmissible.

Much remains to be discovered about the variant.  
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 31/12/2020)

### Death toll from Covid reaches five digits in Pakistan

As the death toll from Covid-19 surpassed the 10,000 mark on Wednesday and a number of countries have pre-booked vaccines based on preliminary or incomplete results to ensure availability, a special cabinet committee decided to pre-book 1.1 million doses of vaccine from a Chinese state-owned company 'Sinopharm'.

The decision, which was made on the day when Sinopharm announced that its Covid-19 vaccine was 79.34 per cent effective, is contingent upon emergency use approval by the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap).

Once approved and procured, the government will provide free-of-cost Covid-19 vaccine for all frontline health workers in the first quarter of 2021.



Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar, while talking to *Dawn*, said that the price would be negotiated but it was decided that 1.1 million doses would be procured well before the end of first quarter of 2021 and administered to frontline workers.

*Govt decides to pre-book 1.1m doses of vaccine from a Chinese company*  
 “As two doses will be given to each individual, vaccine will be administered to 500,000 persons with a margin of 10 per cent spoilage of vaccine. In second phase, vaccine will be procured for the citizens over 65 years of age,” he said.

While replying to a question, Mr Umar said he believed that by the start of the second phase vaccine from a number of other companies would also be available.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of National Health Services (NHS), the special cabinet committee, which was constituted as an oversight body for the procurement of Covid-19 vaccine, held its second meeting with minister for planning in the chair.

Besides Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry and Minister for Industries Hammad Azhar, who are members of the committee, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation Dr Sania Nishtar and SAPM on Health Dr Faisal Sultan also attended the meeting.

The meeting reviewed the overall situation of Covid-19 vaccines. “The committee was apprised that a number of countries have pre-booked Covid-19 vaccine based on preliminary or incomplete results in order to ensure the timely availability of vaccines for their populations. In some situations, vaccines were pre-booked even in development stages to ensure availability.

“The committee was informed of the deliberations of an expert committee formed by Drap who are in process of reviewing and analysing available data from clinical studies performed so far. Of the available options, data from one company was submitted for review to the committee for a final adjudication for emergency use,” it stated.

“In line with global practices at present whereby emergency procurement has to be made at times with incomplete and evolving information, the committee decided to pre-book Covid-19 vaccine from a Chinese state-owned company, Sinopharm based on data submitted and timely availability. This decision is contingent upon emergency use approval by Drap. Once approved and procured, the government will provide free of cost Covid-19 vaccine for all frontline health workers in the first quarter of 2021,” it explained. It was also decided in the meeting that other manufacturers of Covid-19 vaccine would continue to be engaged for future bookings for the remaining phases of vaccination, based on further data and availability.

The committee reiterated that the private sector would also be encouraged to approach Drap and follow the laid down procedures for emergency use authorisation of any available and safe Covid-19 vaccine, the NHS ministry statement concluded.

According to the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), the government is in close liaison with leading Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers for its early availability in Pakistan.

“NCOC in collaboration with Ministry of NHS, National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra), and National Information Technology Board (NITB) has developed National Immunisation Management System (NIMS) to ensure efficient supply chain management and administration of Covid-19 vaccine. The system will enable automated phase wise registration of citizens for vaccine through SMS/ internet, based on CNIC numbers. Immunization mechanism will be intimated to citizens shortly. NIMS will be made available by mid of January,” it stated.

#### Death toll reaches five digits

The NCOC data released on Wednesday showed that with 2,155 new cases and 55 more deaths in a single day, the death toll surged to 10,047. As many as 299 ventilators were in use across Pakistan. The data shows that 44pc ventilators in Multan were in use; followed by 41pc occupied in Islamabad, 32pc in Lahore and 30pc in Peshawar.

While national positivity ratio was 5.92, the highest positivity ratio was recorded in Karachi i.e. 13.84pc, followed by 8.79pc in Hyderabad and 7.89pc in Swat.

In all, 2,219 patients of coronavirus across Pakistan were in critical condition.  
 (By Ikram Junaidi Dawn, 01, 31/12/2020)

#### Mutated Covid cases

Several people across the country have tested positive for the new Covid-19 strain that was first detected in the UK, raising fresh questions about whether air travel restrictions should have been applied sooner. And while ‘only’ five cases had been detected by Tuesday — all from overseas — it raises new concerns about how we will avoid an explosion of cases, given people’s refusal to follow social distancing rules and other restrictions. In the last week, even before the British strain cases were detected, we had been seeing some of our worst days for infections and deaths since the pandemic began.

The new strain is about 50 per cent more contagious than the original one, according to the University of London, and while most reports suggest it is not deadlier than the original, the increase in total cases could lead to hospitals being overloaded and sick people being unable to access treatment. This is further strengthened when we recall that senior government health officials, the cabinet, and the PM himself have freely admitted the weaknesses in our healthcare system. And while the NCOC is crediting the measures already taken for helping to detect the five British cases, we have no assurance that undetected cases are already out there. Even though track and trace efforts for their contacts are also underway, there is a high chance of cases slipping through. This will only increase as more cases are detected.

Extending travel restrictions relating to the UK should be a given. The only question is whether or not to enhance them to include Pakistanis. The UK has little justification to object. After all, it is their own political leadership that sat on the news of a new strain for weeks, if not months. Instead, we have seen several other countries reporting cases of the UK strain in recent days. This includes the US and India — the two worst-affected by the original strain. If the British government had been honest, the country's post-Brexit trade dealings would not have included becoming an exporter of deadly diseases.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 31/12/2020)