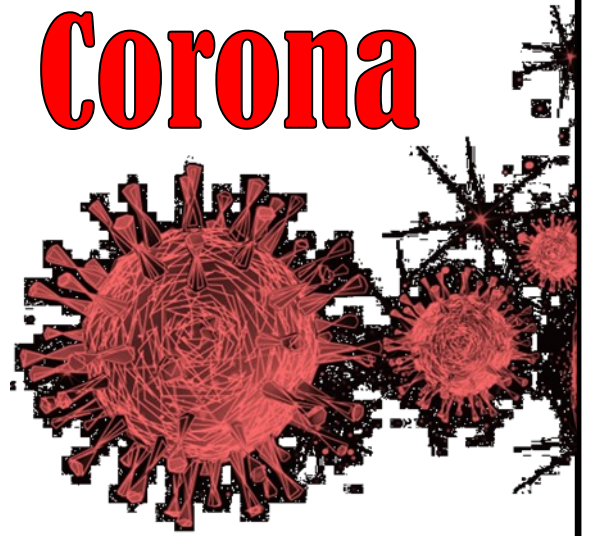


Pakistan Coping with the Corona Crisis



A fortnightly report on
GOVERNANCE

16 March–31 March

This fortnightly report is prepared to study the response of different governance structures which includes the federal government, provincial governments and the autonomous regions, the role of the constitutional bodies which includes the parliament, judiciary and the military, during the different phases of the corona crisis.

Starting from the criminal negligence at Taftan border

Taftan, a border town located in Chagai District of Balochistan is one of Pakistan's border crossing with Iran. The border is often used for trade and transit place for pilgrims from Pakistan into Iran. Since, the outbreak of the coronavirus in the Holy city of Qom in Iran, serious concerns were raised in Pakistan due to the higher possibility of transmission. The Federal government in Pakistan reacted by closing the border crossing. However, the problem started with the admission of the stranded pilgrims in Iran. In a similar situation before with China, the Federal government decided against the evacuation of the 1,000 students stuck in Hubei, China. The decision was taken to avoid the potential spread of virus in Pakistan.

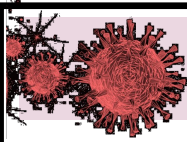
The Federal government failed on the diplomatic front with Iran. With the border being closed, the Irani government kept sending pilgrims to the border to pressure the Pakistani government for opening of the crossing. Many critics argue that Pakistan could have exercised its influence over Iran to make a similar arrangement as sought with India. The arrangement included that the stranded pilgrims would be tested and quarantined in Iran before returning to home country.

According to Balochistan Chief Minister's official figures, some 6,080 have returned from Iran via Taftan border since February in which 4,596 have been sent to home provinces and 1,484 remain in quarantine at Taftan.

The second biggest mismanagement was reported in the quarantine facilities at Taftan. The provincial government doctors did not reach the facilities to inspect the suspects. The pilgrims were reportedly passed through temperature checks and no proper samplings were taken to determine the health condition. First, no proper testing kits were provided to the inspection centers and no proper training was given to the frontline staff. Second, many pilgrims succeeded in escaping the facilities. Third, due to limited space only a small portion were quarantined and the rest were transported to their home provinces.

The cosmetic measures of the government sparked serious criticism from all walks of life, the doctors, the provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab, the media and other stakeholders.

Lastly, misinformation also created a sectarian rift in Pakistan, especially in conflict ridden province. The virus was observed from the sectarian lens and was used to hide the governance failures. Some provoking statements were also made by the national political parties attacking a particular sect and an already marginalized community.



Covid-19 in Pakistan

The first half from March 11-19, 2020 is termed as the 'Outbreak'. The positive cases started to emerge from all over the country. The pilgrims returning from the Iran and the Saudi Arabia continued during this period which caused the cases to increase. Also, the people returning from the Western countries such as UK, Italy and Spain were also tested positive.

The second half of the month from March 20-31, witness the deaths resulting from the coronavirus. The first death was reported on March 18, in a village named Manga of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The early evidence showed an alarming trend of community spread in Pakistan, in which the 39 out of 46 were tested positive in the area and the deceased patient had a travel history of Saudi Arabia.

The situation started to reach a turning point and the time kept running out for the policymakers to develop a counter strategy to deal with the emerging crisis. The doctors deputed at the quarantine centers to inspect the pilgrims and foreign travelers also became vulnerable to the virus and a young doctor named Dr Usama Riaz was the first one

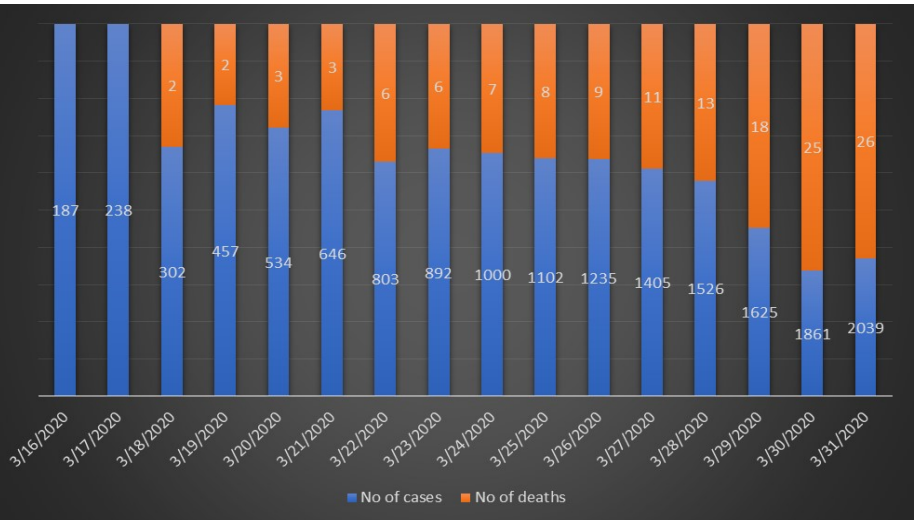


Figure 1: No of positive cases and deaths reported from March 16-31, 2020 by the

to die from the coronavirus. The findings later revealed that the doctor was serving at the Gilgit Baltistan and inspecting pilgrims without necessary protective gears.

The virus was now on the streets of the Pakistan and no one was safe from it. The huge demand for the sanitizers and the infection sprays, the lack of the protective gears and equipment was haunting the governments of the provinces and the Centre because Pakistan was importing all these facilities and the huge demand in the market required a timeframe for the companies

and the governments to meet the emergency supplies.

Sindh was the first province to report the positive case of this virus but with the passage of time no province remained immune to the spread of the virus. On March 16, 2020, Punjab reported its first positive case and on the same day the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan also reported corona cases. By the March 18, 2020 the region of Azad Kashmir region also witnessed early cases.

Punjab and Sindh remained at the top with the highest number of cases; KP and Balochistan were behind them.

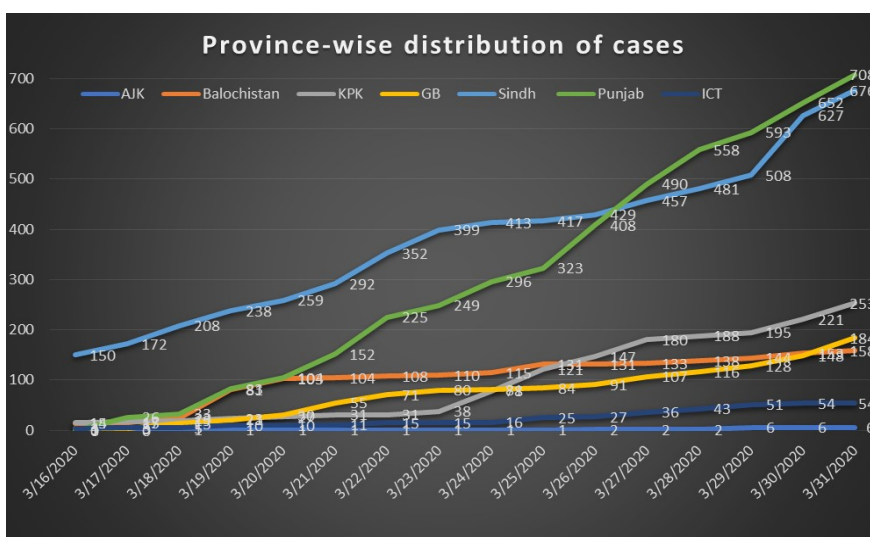
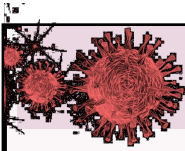
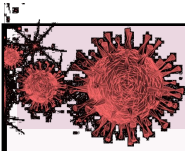


Figure 2: No of cases with respect to provinces reported by the Government of Pakistan



The Federal Government

- ◆ On March 14, the National Security Committee (NSC) decided the formation of a high level committee named National Coordination Committee to curb the spread of coronavirus. The committee would comprise concerned federal ministers, Chief Ministers, surgeon general of Pakistan Army and representatives of DG ISI, DG ISPR as well as DG military operations. Special Assistant on Health Services, Dr Zafar Mirza, would be its convener. The committee will evaluate the situation on day to day basis and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) will be the leading operational agency.
- ◆ The President of Pakistan Arif Alvi on March 16 arrived in China along with Foreign Minister, Minister for Planning and other key officials. The visit was seen as a gesture of the all-weather strategic cooperation between two countries.
- ◆ The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on March 17 postponed indefinitely the knockout fixtures of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) due to sudden spike in cases.
- ◆ The Islamabad administration announced closure of all the shrines within its jurisdiction.
- ◆ The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) called for keeping the Friday sermons short and urged children and elders to avoid visiting mosques. The decision came after consultations with ulema and scholars of different school of thoughts.
- ◆ On March 18, the Pakistan Ulema Council, Wafaqul Madaris Pakistan and ulema of various schools of thought in a meeting chaired by Allama Tahir Ashrafi issued a decree urging all the religious and political activities to be suspended/restricted in the country.
- ◆ On March 18, the PM Khan requested the developed nations of the world to write off the debt of the poorer countries due to the prevailing crisis.
- ◆ On March 19, over 60 clerics and another group of scholars affiliated with Sunni Ittehad Council issued edict that following government orders related to the virus is an obligation on believers.
- ◆ On March 19, the President Arif Alvi and others who visited China were tested negative in their corona tests.
- ◆ The PM Khan on March 19 and March 21 addressed the nation and detailed about the virus but refused to close offices and impose complete lockdown. He also visited the DG Khan quarantine centre to inspect the facilities.
- ◆ The government also sealed the Wagah border on March 20.
- ◆ The Chairman NDMA Lt General Muhammad Afzal announced that the government was working on securing PPE's and other resources for the healthcare workers. The NDMA also instructed all the four provinces including AJK and GB chief secretaries to setup quarantine facilities at three and four star hotels.
- ◆ The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) set it mandatory to obtain corona negative certificate to travel into Pakistan.
- ◆ On March 21, 2020, all international flights were suspended for two weeks along with all international passenger, chartered and private flights which led to many citizens being stranded in Middle East, Thailand and Malaysia.
- ◆ However, the Chaman border with Afghanistan was opened for crossing of trucks.
- ◆ The Railway Minister Sheikh Rasheed also announced suspension of 42 trains.
- ◆ The CII urged the Muslims to give zakat to the needy before the Ramadan due to the closure of economic activities.
- ◆ Strict directives were also issued for the federal government employees restricting non-essential staff for 15 days.
- ◆ On March 22, 2020, the health ministry announced that 42 metric tons PPE, thermometers, gloves and gowns had been dispatched to Pakistan.
- ◆ On the same day, the federal government offered the Sindh government \$10 million from the non-development funds of the World Bank for the fight against virus.
- ◆ The Islamabad city administration also imposed Section 144 for 15 days with little restrictions.
- ◆ On March 23, 2020, the Pakistan Day was celebrated untraditionally without parades and military marches. Prime Minister also reiterated that complete lockdown is not possible in Pakistan where poverty is very high. He also announced that 35 hospitals are setup with more than 118,000 beds to deal with the outbreak.
- ◆ Union Council Kot Hathial in the Bhara Kahu region of federal capital was sealed after the emergence of 11 coronavirus suspects.
- ◆ Finally on March 24, 2020, the Islamabad Capital Territory was kept under virtual lockdown in which closure of all markets, shopping malls, restaurants and private offices was notified along with complete ban on inter-city, intra-district and inter-provinces movement of people by public transport. However, essential services such as groceries, hospitals and banks were allowed to function.
- ◆ On the same day, the State Bank of Pakistan issued statement to provide disinfected cash to the banks for circulation and ordered that branches could be closed if any worker tests positive.
- ◆ On March 25, the Egypt's Al-Azhar institution issued an edict on the request of the President Alvi to suspend the Friday prayers to control the spread of virus.
- ◆ The government on March 25 decided to suspend all types of domestic flights till April 2.
- ◆ The management of Pakistan Railways also decided to suspend the operations of all passengers' trains in Pakistan.
- ◆ On March 26, 2020, Pakistan decided to seek another \$3.7bn more in loans from three multilateral creditors IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank to cope with the challenges posed by the virus.
- ◆ The Prime Minister announced the formation of a 'Tiger Force' which will coordinate the government's relief effort by supplying food at the local level, collecting data and all other relief activities.
- ◆ The law enforcement agencies across Pakistan presented the Guard of honour to the doctors and paramedics fighting coronavirus across the nation from March 27-29.
- ◆ The National Institute of Health (NIH) on March 27, 2020 decided to initiate district level training of high dependency ratio, isolation and quarantine staff across the Punjab.



- ◆ The lockdowns imposed by the provincial governments brought the goods transportation to halt which could bring food and medical shortages in the country so, on March 29, 2020 the Federal government decided to increase number of freight trains for the purpose along with opening the highways and roads for goods transportation.
- ◆ On March 30, 2020, the Higher Education Commission sought proposals from the researchers, scientists, technicians, manufacturers and other experts in the national fight against the coronavirus. A generous funding was offered if their idea is accepted.
- ◆ On the same day, Federal Minister for Inter Provincial Coordination Fehmida Mirza announced creation of a fund to cover all medical expenses of sports persons infected with the virus.
- ◆ The Federal government also decided that if a doctor or a paramedic died while treating coronavirus patients, they would be considered as martyrs and their families would receive the package that is given to martyrs.
- ◆ On March 31, a cell was setup to examine the trends of

coronavirus cases in Pakistan in order to take evidence based decisions.

The Federal government led by the Premier Imran Khan followed the policy of saving livelihoods instead of lives. The centre was of the opinion that the strict curfew or lockdown can endanger more lives than the coronavirus itself. The centre was criticized for not using the local government structures for the distribution of ration and corona testing. Also, the centre avoided imposing unpopular decision of strict lockdown and mass testing. The lack of coordination among the centre and provinces and absence of a national policy created confusion among the masses.

The action of obtaining edict from Jamiah-e-Azhar by the President Alvi was widely praised by the media. However, some sects refused to accept the edict. The government was successful in making ulema's of different schools of thought united on coronavirus SOPs, but it also failed to ban the congregational prayers for some time as was done in other Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Gulf countries.

The Provincial Governments

Government of Balochistan

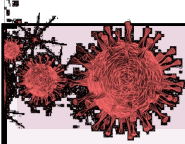
- The opposition parties on March 21 held the provincial government accountable for spreading the virus in the country due to the improper screening at Taftan border.
- On March 24, 2020, the Balochistan government imposed a complete lockdown in the entire province until April 7.
- Complete ban on going outside, all kinds of social and religious gatherings or public and private events, public and private offices were closed. Essential services such as medical, grocery, law enforcement agencies, laboratories, hospital, petrol pumps, banks, defence companies, auto workshops, welfare organizations, media persons and newspaper hawkers were allowed to function with minimal staff.
- Section 144 was imposed and a state of emergency was imposed in five districts bordering Iran.
- The government decided to ban the congregational and Friday prayers to maintain social distancing in the province on March 27.
- Fumigation was carried out at the central jail of Quetta on March 30.
- On March 31, 2020, the government released Rs500 million for upgrading, rehabilitation and establishment of quarantine centres in the areas of Quetta, Chaman, Taftan and other areas of Balochistan.
- The CM Balochistan also blamed the Federal government, NDMA and provincial governments for not providing the required financial support.

The frontline province of Balochistan became the centre of allegations by the other provinces. The provincial government was accused of improper testing of the returning pilgrims from the Iran. Many pilgrims were not tested and were allowed to proceed towards their native provinces. These serious governance issues questioned the preparedness of the Balochistan government.

Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

- ◆ On March 22, 2020, the KP government decided to ban all inter-districts public transport for seven days. However, intra-district passenger transport was allowed to continue.
- ◆ The markets, shopping malls and restaurants were also closed for three days.
- ◆ On March 26, 2020, the government also decided to hire 1,300 new doctors on contractual basis and 635 more doctors on permanent basis to join the provincial's health force.
- ◆ The screening teams were also deputed at all district entry and exit points for screening of visitors by March 27.
- ◆ The KP government on March 29 approved a relief package of Rs32 bn. Rs11.4 bn were to be distributed among 1.9 million deserving families, Rs 5bn was exempted from taxes for business community, Rs 8bn was to be given to the health department for the purchase of medical equipment and Rs6 bn was for the relief department.

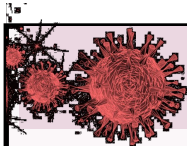
The KP government is the first and only government which decided to report the deaths from coronavirus according to WHO standards. The KP government also followed the federal policy of not enforcing strict lockdown. However, it took several measures for the social distancing.



Government of Sindh

- ◆ The Sindh government on March 18 announced its plan to induct volunteers having medical background to support the government's effort.
- ◆ The Sindh Education Minister, Saeed Ghani, met leaders of Christian and Hindu community and other religious leaders and requested to follow the social distancing guidelines by avoiding large gatherings and events.
- ◆ On March 18, the home department issued a 15 day ban on non-essential activities.
- ◆ On March 19, the Sindh government demanded the Federal government to suspend the inter-provincial train services. The government also took the decision to suspend inter-city bus service.
- ◆ The Sindh government on March 19 released Rs7.21bn in which Rs6.9bn were given to health department for purchase of equipment and Rs310m to Commissioner Sukkur to prepare isolation centre.
- ◆ On March 20, 2020, the provincial government decided to setup field hospital at Karachi Expo Centre with the help of Pakistan Army because of increasing coronavirus cases.
- ◆ The Sindh Governor on the same day said that country cannot afford any lockdown.
- ◆ The Sindh government decided to hire 1500 doctors, 500 technician and hundreds of nurses on urgent basis.
- ◆ On March 23, 2020, the intra-city transportation was banned. An isolation and quarantine centre was established at Jinnah Postgraduate Medical College (JPMC) for free testing.
- ◆ The Sindh government decided to enforce lockdown for 14 days from the morning of March 24, 2020 and ordered the closure of all public transport, markets, offices, shopping malls, restaurants and public areas. However, vegetable, milk, meat, medical and general items shop were excluded within restricted time period only.
- ◆ The Sindh Minister for Education Saeed Ghani tested positive for coronavirus.
- ◆ The Sindh government also issued notification under Section 3 of Sindh Epidemic Diseases Act (2014) and other relevant labour laws that during the lockdown no worker be laid off and full salaries/remuneration/wages will be provided by the employers.
- ◆ The measures led by the government were enforced strictly by the military, rangers and police. Over 450 people were held on the first day of the lockdown in Sindh.
- ◆ There were, few complains about gatherings on beaches, opening of shops and restaurants and movement of passenger buses were also reported.
- ◆ On March 25, 2020, the taskforce meeting led by the CM Sindh announced stricter measures to challenge the violations. The IG Sindh was ordered to not allow the people to roam freely and the Commissioner Karachi was also tasked with the closure of large factories and industries. Only few branches of bank were allowed to continue operation.
- ◆ On the same day, the provincial health department began coronavirus case mapping which was later shared with the deputy commissioners to contain the outbreak in their areas. Also, 18 vehicles of Indus Hospital were set aside for collecting samples from home.
- ◆ A mobile service was also launched to provide ration to the needy and daily earners.
- ◆ The CM also ordered the release of Rs341m for carrying out administrative work under the district administrations and spending on facilities provided to pilgrims.
- ◆ On March 27, 2020, the lockdown was further strengthened and shops were allowed to conduct business from 8am-5pm only, from 8am-8pm.
- ◆ The government also decided to ban the congregational and Friday prayers in the province.
- ◆ On March 29, 2020, the CM Sindh also approved the release of 4,000 convicts from the prisons to avoid the spread of virus in the jails.
- ◆ An application named Sindh Relief Initiative was launched on March 30, 2020, to register the relief activities of government and non-governmental organizations to avoid duplicity.
- ◆ For the burial of corona patients, the Mayor Karachi Waseem Akhtar designated five cemeteries in which the burial can be performed with the prescribed SOPs.
- ◆ The PPP on March 31 opposed the plan of raising corona Tiger Force as it will politicize the fight against the virus and urged to form mohalla committees of political party members and NGOs for distribution of relief goods.

The Sindh government led by the PPP which is often accused of poor governance acted differently since the emergence of corona cases. The CM Sindh smartly utilized the ministerial talent such as Saeed Ghani, Murtaza Wahab and Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho available to him. Without depending on the federal government, acted independently and set a leadership example for the provinces and even the federal government to follow. Being the frontline province in the fight against coronavirus, Sindh government undertook several unpopular decisions and imposed a strict lockdown. The government was also criticized for being too strict and victimizing the vote banks of opposition. The Sindh government was successful in maintaining a strict lockdown by force but was unsuccessful in mass testing of the population. The opposition parties also blamed the government for lack of transparency in the distribution of ration. The Sindh government was the first to provide the legal cover to the corona relief efforts which was widely praised.

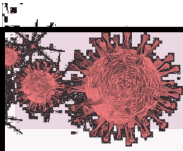


Government of Punjab

- ◆ On March 17, the CM Punjab assured the clerics that the mosques won't be closed.
- ◆ The Government of Punjab on March 22, 2020 decided to close down shopping malls, markets, parks and public gatherings for two days. It was announced that a thousand bed hospital will be setup in Lahore and five hospitals would be reserved for corona patients across the province.
- ◆ The Secretary Home Department also wrote a letter to the Ministry of Interior for the assistance of military under Article 245.
- ◆ The call of lockdown fell on deaf ears as the people continued to visit public places, parks, markets and other venues. This made the police and district administration to act forcefully.
- ◆ The Chief Secretary Punjab on March 18 formed a corona crisis management body to monitor the emerging situation in the province and to check the demand and supply of essential items.
- ◆ The apex committee on March 19 decided to setup a field hospital in Taftan for screening pilgrims along with converting Haj terminal at Lahore airport into quarantine facility.
- ◆ The government also donated Rs 1bn to the quarantine facility in Taftan on March 21.
- ◆ The nonserious attitude of the public led to the strict enforcement of the 14 day lockdown on March 23, 2020 in which all markets, shopping malls and public places were closed and pillion riding was banned. The public buses were also suspended temporarily.
- ◆ The local government and rescue services also started disinfecting the towns and cities.
- ◆ The government also started setting up quarantine centres at Agriculture University, Faisalabad and also in Multan at Multan Industrial Estate to isolate large number of returning pilgrims from Iran. Also, a 50 bed hospital was setup to aid the centre.
- ◆ The minorities in Punjab announced on March 24, the voluntary closure of worship places.
- ◆ On March 24, Governor Punjab Chaudhry Sarwar launched the Punjab Telemedicine Centre of Excellence Call Centre at King Edward Medical University and announced that more than 25 telemedicine call centres would start functioning across Punjab in a week.
- ◆ On March 25, the Punjab cabinet chaired by Usman Buzdar decided to postpone the local government elections for nine months; allowed the induction of 10,000 doctors and paramedics, issued the SOPs for mosques and approved 'Corona Ordinance 2020' to control the movement of the people.
- ◆ The mobility was also restricted by closing regional motorways except for private vehicles with up to two passengers per vehicle on March 26.
- ◆ On March 27, the centre decided to restrict the congregational prayers by reducing the number of worshippers and staff but avoided a ban.
- ◆ On March 29, 2020, the Punjab government laid out the plan to fight the coronavirus. About Rs10bn relief package for financial support of 2.5 million families; removal of provincial taxes up to Rs18bn and 90 day imprisonment rebate to prisoners in jails which will benefit 3,100 prisoners across the province.
- ◆ The Punjab Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control Ordinance, 2020 was implemented to allow civil administration and health department to implement government measures with complete ease and under the cover of law.
- ◆ The CM also stated that laboratories across the province would test 3,200 people every day. Also, one month extra salary would be paid to the healthcare workers and the hiring of 10,000 doctors and paramedics for the virus.

The Government of Punjab led by the CM Buzdar carried its impression of weak decision making and poor governance. The province was among the last to consider lockdown which was weak in enforcement. It was observed that the Punjab government was not independent or was not capable to follow its own policy against the virus. That's why, it waited for the Federal government to give instructions or waited for some adversity to happen. The political uncertainty was further aggravated by the release of initial 'Sugar Commission' report. The already weak provincial government was not able to focus on the emerging crisis when it was faced with political crisis.





The Regional Governments

Government of Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir

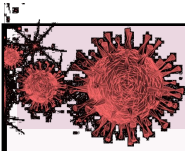
- ◆ The GB government imposed Section 144 on March 21.
- ◆ On March 22, it was also decided to put the entire region on lockdown for indefinite period with the suspension of inter-city transport services. The paramilitary forces assisted the administration in imposing the lockdown.
- ◆ The Chinese government on March 27, handed over five ventilators, 2000 N95 masks, 200,000 face masks, 2000 testing kits and medical protective kits to the GB government. The GB government also decided to test all suspected travelers coming from Taftan border for Covid-19.
- ◆ The local government announced the closure of educational institutions till April 5.
- ◆ The AJK government on March 21, suspended the inter-provincial transport for three days and violators were warned of punishment under Epidemic Diseases Act.
- ◆ On March 23, the PM AJK announced three week lockdown in the region. Movement was restricted and special passes were issued for journalists. Only one person from family was allowed to go out to get food essentials.
- ◆ The two virology labs in Muzaffarabad started PCR testing for covid-19 on March 30.
- ◆ The World Health Organization (WHO) staff got involved in the region's handling of the outbreak by providing support for data management at district level on March 31.

The governments of AJK and Gilgit Baltistan undertook strict measures after the reporting of cases. The Gilgit Baltistan remained vulnerable due to the return of pilgrims. Whereas, AJK was lucky in having the lowest number of reported cases. The two regions were supported by the generous Chinese donations and international technical support.

The Political Parties

- ◆ On March 18, Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) demanded the government to waive off the utility bills for the low income groups in wake of the pandemic.
- ◆ The PTI Sindh leadership on March 18, praised the efforts of the Sindh government in handling the facilities for pilgrims. They also reminded the government that after 18th Amendment the health sector is the sole responsibility of the provinces and federal government can only assist the provinces.
- ◆ Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairperson, Bilawal Bhutto suspended unnecessary political activities and all mobilization activities including annual gathering on April 4 to pay tribute to ZA Bhutto in the wake of virus.
- ◆ The PPP demanded parliamentary leaders meeting on Covid-19 on March 19.
- ◆ On March 19, the MQMP announced that all its members of parliament, provincial assembly and local representatives will donate one month salary to corona fund. Also, KMC offered its facilities to the Sindh government for corona patients and relief activities.
- ◆ The National Party (NP) on March 19 announced to call off all the political activities in the country.
- ◆ The BNP-M leader Lashkari expressed dissatisfaction on the provincial government's measures to contain the outbreak.
- ◆ The opposition parties PMLN and PPP urged the government to take immediate actions instead of giving speeches.
- ◆ The PTI Karachi leadership on March 20 asked the Sindh government to review its stringent measures.
- ◆ On March 20, Bilawal Bhutto demanded countrywide lockdown and avoided to criticize the federal government to express unity in fight against virus.
- ◆ Other opposition parties including JUIF, JI and PMLN also suspended or limited their political activities and asked their workers to join relief work.
- ◆ On March 22, the PMLN President Shehbaz Sharif returned home from UK before the closure of international airspace in Pakistan.
- ◆ The JI also announced the conversion of its offices and clinics into the corona help centres.
- ◆ On March 25, the opposition parties held a Multi-Party Conference and called for devising a national action plan with mutual consultation so that political forces can join the battle against virus.
- ◆ The JUIF President Fazal Ur Rehman on March 28 endorsed the government's ban on congregational prayers.

The political parties from all over the country realized the sensitivity of the situation. That is why, it was observed, that many parties having welfare wings or organizations were actively engaged in helping the affected populace and their voters. The opposition was united in terms of their demand for the parliamentary committee to monitor and implement the decisions. Also, they wanted all parties conference on the national issue.



The Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies

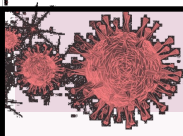
- ◆ On March 17, the Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Interior Rehman Malik demanded the government to handover all the designated hospitals to Army's Medical Corps to combat virus.
- ◆ The KP provincial assembly session was summoned on March 30 due to postponement of March 16 session. The purpose of the session was to discuss coronavirus situation.
- ◆ On March 19, the PML-N deferred the decision to submit a requisition sessions of both houses of parliament after cold reply from other opposition parties especially PPP.
- ◆ On March 20, the government decided to form a joint parliamentary committee of treasury and opposition to seek opposition support.
- ◆ On March 21, the Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaisar, contacted the opposition leaders to form the panel on coronavirus issue.
- ◆ On March 22, all the MPAs of the Punjab assembly donated their one month salary to the corona fund.
- ◆ On the same day, the Senate Chariman, Sadiq Sanjrani, nominated 15 senators from treasury and opposition to oversee the government's effort of coronavirus.
- ◆ The PMLN President Shehbaz Sharif offered their family hospitals for corona patients.
- ◆ On March 25, 2020, the Speaker, Asad Qaisar, summoned a meeting of the parliamentary leaders of the Senate and the National Assembly to discuss the role of the parliament in containing the virus outbreak.
- ◆ The next day, in an official notification, a joint parliamentary panel was formed having representation of all political parties. It included 12 members of National Assembly and 13 senators and was headed by the Speaker NA.
- ◆ The PTI MPA from KP was tested positive for coronavirus on March 28.

The parliamentary business was almost suspended in the centre and the provinces because of the precautionary measures. This was seen as a constitutional crisis where no national forum existed for the elected representatives to recommend policies and decisions. The treasury was not in favour of any joint decision making forum but due to immense pressure from the opposition accepted the demand of a parliamentary committee.

Role of Institutions

- ◆ On March 18, the Army Chief directed all the commanders to take necessary steps to assist the civilian administration in the fight against the virus. All the medical facilities of armed forces have been operationalized and geared up to meet the needs.
- ◆ On March 24, 2020, the Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, ordered the deployment of the troops and military medical resources in all of the four provinces along with Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan under Article 245 (functions of the armed forces) of the Constitution and Section 131(A) (power to use military force for public security and maintenance of law and order) of the Criminal Procedure Code.
- ◆ The summaries forwarded to the Centre by the provinces and the autonomous regions were approved after the surge in the cases.
- ◆ The Islamabad High Court (IHC) crisis management committee on March 16 decided to stop hearing of regular cases in IHC, districts and special courts till April 5. Only cases of immediate importance such as bail and remand of prisoners were to be heard.
- ◆ On March 17, the Federal government also requested the Supreme Court and the provincial courts to not schedule cases of civil nature for three weeks.
- ◆ The Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Gulzar Ahmed called an urgent meeting of the National Judicial Policy Making Committee (NJPMC), on March 19, to discuss the coronavirus issue and devise effective strategy for the courts.
- ◆ On March 17, all courts in GB were closed till April 5 due to coronavirus.
- ◆ On March 17, the SHC ordered screening of all prisoners across Sindh.
- ◆ On March 18, the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) announced that the lawyers will appear in urgent nature cases only, till April 5.
- ◆ On the same day, the dining facility at Lahore High Court was suspended till April 5.
- ◆ The Sindh High Court Bar Association (SHCBA) also advised its members to avoid court proceedings for two days.
- ◆ The Sindh High Court (SHC) Chief Justice ordered to hear cases of urgent nature only and instructed IG Prisoners to not allow any prisoner into the prison without coronavirus test.
- ◆ On March 19, the SHC Hyderabad circuit ordered NDMA to coordinate with Sindh government regarding the facilities and equipments.
- ◆ The CJP Justice Gulzar Ahmed rejected the calls to close the courts and criticized the government's inability to contain the virus.
- ◆ The Lahore High Court (LHC), on March 20, heard the plea questioning the government's effort in the wake of virus and expressed its dissatisfaction in this respect.
- ◆ On March 20, IHC granted bail to under trial prisoners accused of minor crimes.
- ◆ The IHC, on March 21, in the case of return of students from China told the parents that children are safer in China than back home.
- ◆ The LHC, on March 23, decided to hear only urgent cases.
- ◆ On March 24, 2020, the Peshawar High Court decided to shut all courts in the province until March 28. Only essential staff was allowed in the court with no more than one official in the office.
- ◆ The Supreme Court of Pakistan on March 31 restrained all the high courts and provincial governments including ICT/Gilgit Baltistan from ordering the release of under trial prisoners.

The Pakistan Army was called upon by the provinces to assist the government efforts in wake of the virus. The military also deployed its medical apparatus for the support of civil institutions. The Supreme Court after the NJPMC decided to undertake steps for the prevention and safety of the courts and judges. The high courts also undertook decisions of hearing cases of urgent nature in order to avoid congestion and maintain social distancing. Several under trial prisoners were released by the high courts and the provinces. Their released was later stopped by the order of Supreme Court.



Conclusion

- ◆ Crises like the one that came in the form of Covid-19 has taken states by surprise, but the states that are organized on strong footings do not take time to adjust themselves to address the challenges brought about by such eventualities. Whereas, states which lack strong organizational basis respond poorly in such crises. Pakistan, unfortunately, falls in the latter category. The present corona crisis has very clearly exposed Pakistan's historical fault lines: misappropriation of budget between different segments of socio-economic life; the centre-province dichotomy; an ill-advised prioritization of national needs, etc.
- ◆ When the present crisis started the Federal government was totally unprepared. This inability to address the pandemic created a vacuum. The business class, educational sector, medical professionals, and the religious class all presented their perspectives. In these circumstances, the Sindh government took some bold initiatives. It took on board the health professionals, WHO representatives, and, at least in the beginning, various political parties' representatives. A strict policy of lockdown, following the Chinese experience in Wuhan, was chalked out. The Federal government, however, gave different signals simultaneously. It objected to the idea of complete lockdowns suggesting that it would enhance the misery of the poor and particularly the laborers earning their wages on daily basis. Along with this the Federal government also kept on talking about the dangers of the spread of the virus.

This report as well as the previous fortnightly has shown this constant in conflict of approaches between Federal and the Sindh government. The other three provinces, led by the PTI, suffered the biggest confusion because these governments realized the importance of lockdowns but their party leadership at the centre was not very convinced and clear headed in this respect. With reports on rising Covid-19 cases, one hopes that in the days to come wiser councils would prevail.

Reported Version of Prime Minister Imran Khan's first televised Address to the Nation on COVID-19

Prime Minister Imran Khan asked Pakistanis to prepare for a coronavirus epidemic in the country but ruled out locking down cities to fight the disease.

"I want to tell all of you, this virus will spread," the premier. He was seeing a "state of panic" taking hold of the country but asked people to take precautions instead.

Seeking to reassure the public, Prime Minister Imran noted that while COVID-19 spreads rapidly, 97 per cent of its patients make a full recovery. Of these, 90pc people experience a mild illness similar to the flu, he added.

But he said even if 4-5pc of coronavirus patients out of thousands get critically ill, it will be a huge burden for healthcare facilities.

The premier said the government had been in contact with the Chinese and Iranian governments since outbreaks occurred in the two countries. He lauded the Balochistan government and the Pakistan Army for their efforts to quarantine Pakistani pilgrims who returned from Iran "in very difficult conditions" and then dispatching them to various provinces.

He said the government had decided to take action to deal with the disease on January 15, after it was feared that infections would enter Pakistan from China. Screenings were started at airports thereafter and so far, 0.9 million people have been screened for the virus, he noted.

Prime Minister Imran said a meeting of the National Security Committee was called after 20 cases had emerged in Pakistan, and it studied responses of various countries to fight the virus.

He said it was suggested that Pakistan should follow some other countries in locking down its cities, but he said "Pakistan's [economic] situation is not the same as that of the United States or Europe. There is poverty in our country, with 25pc of the people living in extreme poverty."

He said the national economy is recovering from a "very difficult time" and so it was decided not to lock down cities as that could result in people "dying from hunger".

Instead, the government banned public gatherings, closed education institutions and formed a national coordination com-

mittee, the premier said.

He added that the government had activated and provided funds to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and tasked it with importing necessary medical equipment from abroad, including ventilators.

Meanwhile, a core committee of medical experts is monitoring the world's response to the pandemic and giving its advice to the government. President Arif Alvi, too, is visiting China to learn from Beijing what measures Pakistan can take if the disease spreads here, the prime minister said.

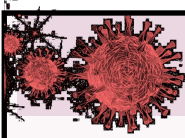
"First of all, there is no reason to worry," he told the nation, urging them to take precautions.

- Not to attend large gatherings of more than 40 people.

- To avoid shaking hands and wash them with soap frequently.

Prime Minister Imran also urged ulema to "continuously counsel" people on what precautions to take and how to go through this "difficult period".

(Dawn, 17 March 2020)



Hard times ahead

By Zahid Hussain

The country is now effectively in a state of lockdown as the battle against the coronavirus outbreak enters a critical phase. A curfew appears imminent in parts of the country, given the exponential rise in the number of cases. The military has been deployed in aid of the civilian administration to maintain law and order. But flattening the curve of the infection requires a much greater effort and more resources.

Containing the global pandemic at home is undoubtedly one of the most serious challenges this country has ever confronted. It is not just about winning this battle, but also what lies in the aftermath. The economic and social impact of the outbreak is huge for a country that has been lurching from one crisis to another.

The fight against the pandemic has also exposed the various fault lines. A broken healthcare system is now being tested for a crisis beyond its capacity. Despite the warning, we have been caught unprepared. It was either a state of denial or false hope that the virus would die in the hot weather that prevented timely action.

Initially brought from outside, the virus has now spread to communities largely because of our failure to take timely measures to contain its spread. Then there is the lack of awareness and certain social practices that have led to a spike in the number of cases. Religious congregations continued, despite the warnings. Such gatherings are the biggest source of spread of the infection.

The fight against the pandemic has exposed the various fault lines.

Given our limited resources, not every infected individual can be tested and thus unknowingly transmits the virus to members of his or her family and community. The number of cases being reported is just the tip of the iceberg. Not surprisingly, the number of cases is multiplying each day.

Surely one must not get panicky, but it is always good to have a clear picture in order to handle the situation better. It is going to be a long battle and one expects the government to be prepared for that and not remain in a state of denial.

There is some degree of coherence in

the federal government's strategy to deal with the problem now, but it is still not enough, given the enormity of

the crisis. The lack of coordination between the federal and provincial government is pronounced and can worsen the situation. The reasons for this are political and are also linked to the existing confusion over the distribution of power. But the issue could have easily been resolved had there been a show of greater political maturity on the part of Prime Minister Imran Khan. So far, a failure of leadership has been evident in this crisis.

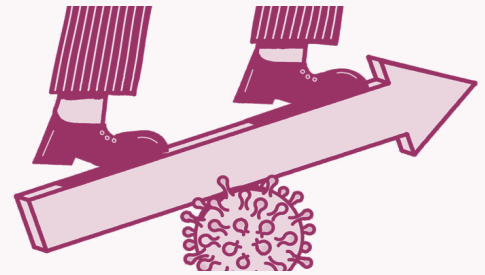
When a crisis arises, the first thing that people do is look towards their leader — but the response in this case has been lacking. This situation is not very reassuring in such testing times. An impromptu address to the nation on Sunday left a large section of the people confused as the idea of a lockdown to stop the spread of the virus was criticised. It appeared that this criticism was directed at the Sindh government that had already announced closing down the province.

The provincial administration took this measure after a spike in the number of victims of the virus. Sindh has the highest number of confirmed cases and there were clear danger signs that the situation would spiral out of control if restrictions on the movement of people were not enforced. But it seems that the prime minister did not recognise the emergency situation prevailing in the country's second most populated province, leading observers to note that this was because Sindh was being ruled by his opponents.

The prime minister declared that he would not impose restrictions that carried huge economic costs, particularly for the poor. But many refused to buy his argument that if Pakistan had the kind of resources which Italy, France, the US or UK had, he would fully lock down the country.

Interestingly, hours later the Punjab government, led by the prime minister's party, announced its decision to enforce a partial lockdown. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have done the same and now much of the country has practically shut down. Who then took the lockdown decision?

That makes one wonder what the prime minister's ire was all about. Would it not



have been better had a meeting of the Council of Common Interests been called to evolve a common strategy and a national narrative to fight a battle that represents the biggest threat to national security?

No battle can be won without uniting the nation and taking all stakeholders on board. One must say that both the PPP and PML-N have shown political maturity by offering the government their full cooperation. An acknowledgement from the prime minister is still awaited.

It is generally the ruling party that takes the initiative in seeking the opposition's support on national issues, but not in the PTI's case. The prime minister should have learnt some lessons from the Sindh chief minister who took all opposition parties on board while announcing the decision to impose the lockdown. Interestingly, the PTI, which is the main opposition party in Sindh, was also included in the deliberations. That helped in the implementation of the restriction more effectively.

This is, perhaps, the worst crisis that the country has faced. While measures like lockdowns are indeed essential to contain the infection, they come at a huge economic cost. The suspension of almost all economic activities and the transport system will have serious economic consequence.

It will affect not only the poorer sections of the population, but also the middle classes, putting greater strain on an already troubled financial situation. The resultant unemployment and displacement could have serious social implications.

Indeed, the federal government has announced a financial support package to minimise the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown, but we must be prepared for more hardship. That makes it imperative for the prime minister to create a national consensus. It is the handling of a crisis that makes or breaks a leader.

Published in Dawn, 25 March 2020)