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INDIA'S FIGHTS AGAINST COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

India is divided into 32 states or union territories with a total population of 1.3 billion. The country's economic development has led to the development of significant intra- and inter-regional mobilities. In addition to workers of the unorganised sectors who are currently stranded, metropolitan regions of India are at the centre of major daily flows that have significant consequences on pathogens diffusion such as dengue and COVID-19.[1]

With regards to this paper, it substantially focuses on the strategies undertaken by the Indian Institutions to fight Covid-19 and talks about its numerous impacts on various aspects of society, economy, technology, etc. It also describes the whole strategies undertaken by the government to fight Coronavirus and exhaustively explains how and why the steps were undertaken.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that India had no choice other than the lockdown to avoid the colossal toll the virus could take on lives, or at least buy time as the country, with our poorly equipped and historically underfunded health system, prepares to face it. However, the lockdown was poorly conceived and declared without preparation. Considering the time lag since the first case was reported from China (84 days), and the first case was reported in India (54 days) to the country-wide lockdown, the preparation. Considering the time lag since the first case was reported from China (84 days), and the first case was reported in India (54 days) to the country-wide lockdown, the preparation could have been much better. The sudden lockdown, including the closing down of a considerable number of private hospitals, essential medical services, and pharmacies, are causing and will continue to cause huge damage to demographic and health outcomes.[2]

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[1] Partha Mukhopadhyay and Shamindra Nath Roy, Mapping the lockdown effects in India: how geographers can contribute to tackle Covid-19 diffusion, THE CONVERSATION, April 22, 2020.

[2] Srinivas Goli, Coronavirus: The lockdown and its consequences, Deccan Herald, April 02, 2020.

It is undeniable and would be unjust to only mention the negative consequences of the Lockdown in India nut before that we would also have to understand in detail the whole strategy that was undertaken by the government in response to the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

The background or the sole reason behind the implementation of a Nation-wide Lockdown and taking other immediate tactical actions was due to the Global threat in the form of a Pandemic named "COVID-19" or Corona Virus. The said Virus had already taken thousands of lives before emerging in India. The dreadful situation of the whole world especially China and the USA alarmed Indian institutions enough to take an immediate effective step towards saving the lives of their people.

The moment Corona Virus started to spread its span in India, the Government immediately announced the Lockdown to avoid a miscarriage of lives in the nation. This came to be the most instinctively appropriate step in rescue as the situation at that time needed a quick plan that could be implemented instantly and effectively.

Before the implementation of Lockdown, the International Travel was under scrutiny and the Indian Nationals were stuck in the pandemic-effected nations were being rescued.

All of these were the circumstances in the nation when the world's biggest lockdown was decided to be undertaken in India.

ANALYSIS

Under this head, we will give a broad study to the policies and strategies that the Central Government undertook in relation to fighting the Global Pandemic.

Globally, as of May 23, there were more than 5,318,050 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 340,230 deaths worldwide.[3] India, a country of 1.3 billion people, has been able to manage and contain cases of COVID-19 to about 125,149[4] much below the global incidence rate, with negligible community-based infection due to well-executed plans and pre-emptive preventive methodology under the leadership of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

Planning and execution

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[3] https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?

[4] https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/india/.

- Taking guidance from the information available to the world since early January, India took many proactive measures. This ensured that India stayed away from the dreadful impact of the Global Pandemic. The Government of India organized a meeting of the Health Crisis Management Group on January, 8 and also constituted a Group of Ministers (GOM) whose primary objective was to outline, observe and analyse the situation daily and to secure proper inter-ministerial cooperation.

- States and Union Territories were provided with instructions regarding the surveillance and contact tracing, laboratory sample collection, packaging and transport, a clinical management protocol, prevention and control in healthcare facilities, and discharge guideline for passengers under quarantine.

The main areas of the plan of action and major actions were taken are as follows:

1) Surveillance at the country's points of entry

On 17th Jan, before the first case that was detected in India, the first travel advisory was issued and along with that screening on flights that were arriving from China and Hong Kong started to take place at 3 Major Airports. The screening process and other travel restrictions were increased slowly from the middle of January until March beginning, i.e. when COVID-19 was finally declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Later on at the starting of April, 1.5 million passengers were screened at the airports, more than 2 million at land borders, and 44 thousand at seaports.

2) Surveillance of all passengers through the Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) Network

Passengers were kept an eye on through the IDSP network on a regular basis. This ensured that none of the contaminated people that may be possibly positive of COVID--19 has been able to mix with the general population.

3) Laboratory testing

A network of labs across the country has been set up to provide early and timely infection testing. The WHO has identified the National Institute of Virology in Pune as the referral laboratory for the entire Southeast Asia Region. India is also developing native testing kits to meet the increasing demands for more extensive testing.

4) Increasing the production and appropriation of medical supplies

The Indian private sector is involved in the attempt to make affordable local alternatives to fight COVID – 19 for both social and economic reasons. For example, there are now 32 Indian companies that have initiated working towards the quest to produce personal protective equipment (PPE) kits. More than six- times increase in the supply of oxygen has also been ensured, since Feb 1. Big expansions in the mass production of pharmaceutical supplies like antipyretic tablets and Hydroxychloroquine to meet domestic demands, and for export purposes.

5) Public communication

One of the best ways to prevent community spread of the infection is through cut off the communication. Press release about the basic do's and don'ts of COVID-19 management was showed, and other press ads dealing with more issues are under-making and will be released as the situation progresses. Many press conferences with the Health Minister are regularly being carried out, and daily updates regarding the same by designated officials are being issued across all media channels. Daily press releases about the number of cases, no. of deaths, people recovered, travel advisories, and other COVID-19 related information are being issued. Also, the Aarogya Setu Application has been launched that has been developed by the Government of India that gives the daily counts of statistics regarding Covid19 and also shows graphical representations thereof. It also connects essential health services with the people of India in our combined fight against COVID-19. It is shown in the app that how many contaminated cases are found lately within the radius of certain kilometers. It even shows how much risk a person has of getting contaminated based upon various factors and also enables a person to inform authorities if he believes that he is contaminated.

6) Ensuring the safety of Indians abroad

The government has undertaken all the possible steps to ensure the safety of its citizens. The government has also executed evacuation operations from Wuhan, Iran, Japan, (from a cruise), Italy and Malaysia. The evacuees were brought straight to quarantine facilities which were set up on a real-time basis so that they are properly tested before they are released to move between the general populations.

All of this proves how India has been fighting from the tooth to nail to make sure that the contamination of the virus is limited to the places it has already spread and also that no more people get infected from it. Moreover, it is also attempted that the people who are already somehow contaminated from the virus are given proper care and maximum lives can be saved.

<u>WORLD'S BIGGEST LOCKDOWN</u>

- ✛ By mid-March, there was a situation whereby the virus was substantially spread globally. On March 24, Prime Minister Modi announced a total nation-wide lockdown for 21 days until April 15. This lockdown was truly unprecedented and a decision that was never taken by any Government, not only in India but in the whole World. But this is probably because such a big threat to the world is never seen by India since its independence. The Lockdown had included a stoppage of over 13,000 railway passenger services a day and, for the first time in India's history as a Republic, stoppage of most of the public transports. Nevertheless, the supply of essential services like the supply of power, water, energy, food products, banking, and delivery of essential goods – was ensured to be continued for the smooth functioning of life.

International partnership

- ✛ The Indian prime minister invited all SAARC countries for a video conference to manage the COVID-19 situation on March 15 and set out a series of measures including a commitment to provide up to US$ 10 million toward health assistance. India has been able to deliver medical supplies and assistance to the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan, and it is in the process of preparing packages of medicine and other needed commodities for Nepal and Afghanistan. Medical commodities have also been provided not only to Myanmar, Seychelles, and Mauritius in our extended neighborhood but also to Italy, Iran, and China at the height of the crisis in those countries.

- ✛ And in keeping with India's standing as a major and responsible provider of pharmaceutical products to the world, commercial and aid supplies of key pharmaceutical products were made to the United States, Spain, Brazil, Israel and Indonesia, as well as countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.[5]

In the short run, lockdown is the best option for India as our health sector vis-à-vis those in other developed countries where the virus has spread rapidly is simply not equipped to manage the crisis.[6]

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[5] Aarogya Setu App.

[6] InShorts App.

From hospital beds and ventilators to doctors and diagnostics, there is no doubt that India is completely unprepared if coronavirus cases keep rising. India has only 7 beds per 10,000 people, whereas China has 42, according to WHO. India has only 8.571 doctors per 10,000 patients as compared to Italy that has 40, China that has 19.798, the US that has 26 and the UK that has 28 doctors, according to WHO.[7]

IMPACT

On Health

The main objective behind the whole strategy of the Government to fight COVID-19 including the Lockdowns that they put on was with the primary objective to prevent the spread of the virus by cutting the link. This was the whole concept behind the exercise of social distancing.

But the question put forth hereby is whether all this has been able to put a brake on the spread of Coronavirus?

It is imperative to state here that on 24 March, the date on which the first edition of Lockdown was brought into action by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, the total number of coronavirus cases were 564 while the Death toll was recorded at 10.[8] On the other hand, on May 16 the total cases in India crossed the mark of that in China. On the said date, total cases in China are 82,941 with the death toll of 4,633 whereas India stands on 85,940 cases with 2752 deaths.[9]

This shows that although the Indian institutions planned an immediate and appropriate strategy in the form of Lockdown due to date it has not been able to serve its full purpose. It is necessary to mention here that the Lockdown strategy cannot be said to be useless and the whole effort went into vain. It is very much possible that if Lockdown was not brought into effect, the situation could very much worse. India ranks 11th in the lists of most effected nations. There is a possibility that if Lockdown was not practiced, India could have raked much higher.

So, it can be said that though the strategy has not been able to serve its full purpose at the same time it cannot be denied that it contaminated the spread of the virus at large.

On Economy

It is undeniable that Lockdown has a very big impact on the Economy. Moreover, in the coming future, the whole global economy is going to suffer rigorous consequences. The whole economy

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[7] India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Embassy of India Jakarta.
[8] Why Lockdown Is The Best Strategy For India To Fight COVID-19? By-S.K. Saha & Akshita Bindal.
[9] Ibid.

is locked and no production is taking place at all. This is disturbing the whole demand & supply chain and relatively the production possibility frontier is showing a decrease at the same time.

According to a new report by international management consulting firm Arthur D Little, the worst of COVID-19's impact will be felt by India's most vulnerable in terms of job loss, poverty increase and reduced per-capita income, which in turn will result in a steep decline in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[10]

The report titled "India: Surmounting the economic challenges posed by COVID-19: A 10-point program to revive and power India's post-COVID economy" said the 'collateral damage' of the forecasted GDP slowdown, will be felt most acutely in employment, poverty alleviation, per-capita income, and overall nominal GDP. "Unemployment may rise to 35 percent from 7.6 percent resulting in 136 million jobs lost and a total of 174 million unemployed. Poverty alleviation will receive a set-back, significantly changing the fortunes of many, putting 120 million people into poverty and 40 million into abject poverty," the report said.[11]

But at the same time, it should be taken into consideration that it is likely to happen that post to this pandemic, most countries may withdraw from any trade with China. If this happens, then it may come up as an opportunity for India. India can try to produce as much as possible domestically and export more in order to fill the international needs of other economies as Chinese products always held a big sector in the International market and if countries avoid Chinese products, Indian Products can fill that space in International markets. So this should be seen as an opportunity.

The aforementioned report further suggested that the government should launch "Make in India 2.0" to capture global opportunities, build 'Modern India', accelerate Digital India and Innovation, strengthen global investment corridors with the US, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and the UK, debottleneck land and labor and transform banking and financial markets in a bid to secure a sustainable economic future for 1.3 billion Indians.[12]

Also, the Prime Minister, in his 20 minutes speech, has released relief package worth 20 lakh crore rupees on 12th May 2020 at 20:20 IST. Although, a lot of economists and scholars have

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[10] Sunday Chronicles, 135 million Indians may lose job due to coronavirus impact, Deccan Chronicles, May 17, 2020.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

debated upon the fact that whether it will prove itself effective on the ground or not, nevertheless if it gets implemented successfully, it will probably be very beneficial for the Economy.

On Society

The impact of the Lockdown on the Indian Society has been multi-fold and it has arguably deprived many different sections of their Human Rights. This section, therefore, needs to be discussed as classified accordingly.

Migrating Labourers

As the Lockdown was put in the whole of India, the labourers, who rely upon their regular earnings to bring food and shelter to themselves and their family became destitute flesh overnight. This was one of the major negative impacts of the sudden step taken by the government of locking the country down. This really pulled a string and gave the opposition parties a very valid and brutal question over the governance of the Government.

The destitute labourers had no place to live as they couldn't pay the rent anymore, neither they had any food to eat. Moreover, there were workers who were stuck in one city whereas their family was dying of the pandemic or even of hunger at some other place. It devastated the whole society to their gut when these homeless hungry lives started to walk miles barefoot to meet their natives. They resorted to every possible way to reach their hometowns so that at least they don't die alone.

The government took some steps to transport these workers to their homes and many facilities are still under process but the pain that these migrant workers went through and are undergoing is scarcely conceivable and it clearly undresses the reality that the decision of lockdown was rash and undeniably negligent.

Prisoners

There is a saying in our Indian Justice System that "a person is innocent until proven guilty". But in reality, this saying got no say when the prisoner's rights were flushed in the toilet during the execution of the lockdown.

Under trial prisoners are those persons who are facing trials in the competent courts. They are technically under judicial custody but for all practical purposes are kept in the same prison especially in India.[13] The under trial prisoners are always subjected to judicial custody wherein they are presented before the court at every fourteenth day and they can apply for bail. But

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[13] Shodhganga, Human Rights of Undertrial Prisoners, Chapter 6.

during the Lockdown, as the Judicial Proceedings for the Lower Courts are fully on hold for an indefinite period, all the accused persons are compelled to stay in prison till the time this Lockdown ends. This practice is totally against the spirit of Law and treating the accused like a convict is a grave miscarriage of justice.

Another serious miscarriage of Justice happening in the Prison Authorities due to this Lockdown is the way prisons are being flooded with humans who apparently are not subjected to Human Rights anymore. When the whole world is practicing social distancing, prisons are swamped with people including convicted and the under trials.

Though the convicted felons are considered to be the scum of the Earth they are still humans, Moreover, under trials are deemed to be innocent. Therefore the way the prisoners are treated during the Lockdown is purely Inhumane. Although there are some states whereby undertrial prisoners who are accused of petty offences, are given bail somehow but yet, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Environment

It would false to say that all the impacts of this lockdown have been negative on society. It has been seen not only in India but globally that the ecosystem has been benefited by it very much. There have been many instances in India where animals that were very rare to be seen anywhere were caught sight of. One of the most famous of that is the glimpses of dolphins in the river Ganga which advocates the purity and cleanliness of Ganga.

Also, it has been very famously noted that the Ozone Layer which got a hole due to all global warming during many years recently started to heal itself. This came to be a very glorifying benefit of the Lockdown and the ecologists seem to be very pleased by this measure.

On Institutional Functioning

This whole Lockdown was initially, for a few days, taken as some sought of the holiday. But, the motto of "work from home" came and since then all the work that could possibly be done while being in isolation. The artists kept working in their own homes with their tools. All the professionals also worked on Laptops and phones. Particularly the courts have been taking up cases of urgent hearing via video conferencing. Many Educational Institutions are also practicing online classes so that students keep learning.

All this directs us to a question if this is leading us to some I.T. revolution and is it possible that this is giving us a direction following to which internet can be the place where all the national or even global institutions can function?

Being a Law student I would like to bring into the working of courts during Lockdown. *Though the Judiciary is under a Lockdown the administration has unlocked the door to Justice.*

Even before a national lockdown was declared on March 24, the Supreme Court of India had already announced the suspension of its normal working via a circular dated March 13, directing that "the functioning of the court shall be restricted to urgent matters with such number of benches as may be found appropriate" and thereby virtually shut down the courts.[14]

After some days, they allowed hearing of some urgent matters by video conferencing which started on March 25. However, the process of oral mentioning before any judge/officer who has decision making power for urgent listing of cases was done away with, with the result that even very urgent petitions – such as the one filed by Jagdeep Chhokar on April 17 seeking the return of migrant workers, stranded and helpless in shelter homes or other cities across the country, back to their home towns or villages – was not listed and seems now to be slated April 27, 10 days after filing an application for its urgent listing.[15]

The functioning of the Supreme Court in this highly truncated manner has a domino effect on the high courts across the country, some of which have also adopted similar practices. Most lower courts are not functioning at all, with lawyers unable to file even bail applications for people who have been arrested during the COVID-19 crisis.[16]

CONCLUSION

Lockdown has been like an allopath medicine, it was very much necessary to be implemented, but at the same time has had its side-effects, whether they be positive or negative. As it is said that every coin has two sides, I would like to conclude this paper on a neutral note. I would once again say that it was necessary to bring this Lockdown into effect but adding up to it I can say that it could have been possibly better strategized first as we had some time and global examples of countries like China, USA, Italy, etc.

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[14] Prashant Bhushan, The Supreme Court Is Locked Down and Justice Is in 'Emergency' Care, The WIRE, April 28, 2020.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

Nevertheless, it has been a very acceptable move and we still have to follow the Lockdown till it is taken over by the government and even after that we have maintained social distancing as all these steps were taken for Human welfare itself and even if we are not in a compulsion we must protect ourselves from contamination.

For the time being…

Stay Home,... Stay Safe,…