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**A matter of trust**

Around the world, we continue to hear stories of people who refuse to get themselves vaccinated against Covid-19, despite measures taken to demand certificates of vaccination in order to travel, in order to enter restaurants, or to carry out other activities, which we once considered normal.

The problem also continues in Pakistan, which has so far been able to vaccinate barely two percent of its population. And now questions are beginning to arise as to how many of these people are actually vaccinated. There have been accounts in the media of people entering vaccination centres, collecting the initial forms, filling them in, then bypassing the counter where the jabs are actually delivered into the deltoid muscle, and proceeding simply to the counter which fills out the paperwork required for NADRA certification. This is nothing short of disaster. In the first place, it means we will end up with more unvaccinated people than we know about. And in the second place, it will mean that nations around the world will no longer trust certification issued by Pakistan, no matter how many official stamps and QR codes are affixed atop the document.

These anti-vaccination sentiments in the country are in some ways an extension of trends we have seen before. After all, according to official figures, during each polio vaccination drive, there are some 200,000 children whose parents refuse to allow them to be vaccinated. The phenomenon is especially visible in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but has also spread to major cities, including Karachi. It is not only the illiterate or the poor who follow this line of action; even white-collar workers and others from educated backgrounds have been known to refuse the amber drops, which could prevent polio.

In the same light, the only way to stop the Covid-19 pandemic is to ensure maximum vaccination around the world. It is perfectly true that even this will not bring the virus to an end immediately. People will eventually have to learn to live with it, and as health experts are warning, it will become endemic leading to the requirement of a yearly shot as a booster each year, covering new variants which have emerged, and being administered in the same way as the influenza shot that is received by people around the world at the start of the winter or flu season. While people may think of influenza as nothing more than a bad cold, the fact is that it is an illness that can have serious repercussions. And the influenza jab is widely recommended by doctors, notably for those who are elderly or suffer lung problems of any kind.

The reason for mistrust in the Covid-19 vaccine in our country is of course linked to fake news on the media, notably social media and, to word-of-mouth insistence that people who receive the jab will die within a few years or other such bizarre notions. These are of course, completely invalid and this has been proved by science. In fact, the decision by people to hold up vaccination, not only in our country, but around the world, is helping give rise to the new variants we seem to be seeing on an extremely regular basis, with the Lambda variant now joining Delta as one of the most feared variations of the original Alpha Covid-19 virus.

Vaccination is essential to create a safer living space for the human race. In our country people do not trust the government. It is one of the reasons why people are reluctant to pay taxes to the government or carry out other official procedures demanded of them. The official marketing of the Covid-19 vaccine, of course for the right reasons by the NCOC and other members of government, simply makes people suspicious. The link between government and society broke down a long time ago in Pakistan as a result of the misgovernance we have suffered and the frequent accounts we hear of wrongdoing.

We need to address all these matters and ensure a far higher rate of vaccination before we have a situation similar to the situation faced by India and now Indonesia as well as other countries where the pandemic continues to take its hold and, in the process, churn out new variants which are harder to combat.

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