**Lessons from coronavirus!**

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February 5, 2020

It is regretfully noted that despite having crossed 70 Pakistan has yet to have a proper and effective infra-structure for meeting human challenges from the fall-out of natural or un-natural disasters. Not only that, to meet consequences of such eventualities like floods and earthquakes, there are hardly any preparations. Remember last earthquake in Pakistan that hit Islamabad and CDA was searching in private sector for giant bull-dozers and excavators to carry out the rescue operations from the debris of multi-storied buildings. One recalls that while authorities were desperately on the lookout for bull dozers to enable the then President General Pervez Musharraf put up his mock show of leading the rescue teams. On the other hand, described as miracle, a British rescue team managed to pull out alive from deep down the debris, victims lying buried for days.

The irony of the situation as we see in Pakistan today following the massive outbreak of [coronavirus](https://dailytimes.com.pk/552304/misconceptions-related-to-coronavirus/) in China with threatening fall out consequences for Pakistan and other neighbouring countries or international travelling community– is the deplorable inadequacy of medical facilities at home to meet the eventuality. At least 300 people have died in China while several thousands are being treated in time to save them from the dreadful epidemic. It is creditable to the Chinese and their healthcare system to have successfully minimised the fatal consequences of the tragedy of such a vast magnitude. How gigantic is the Chinese effort to meet the challenge that it managed to construct a multi-storied block in matter of days to cater to the emergency medical needs in Wuhan-epicentre of epidemic. That single instance shows how great Chinese are.

Obviously the Chinese situation is one which only the Chinese could meet effectively. In our case-although PM’s Adviser Dr Zafar Mirza-ran into immediate action, the medical/trauma/emergency infra structure that he has available could suffice only to meet a few cases of coronavirus. He did manage to import virus detection kits from wherever they were available. Now one believes, as he claims, he has the internal situation under control as he has enough virus detection kits to scan cases of suspects. His teams of paramedics are diligently carrying out airport scanning of passengers travelling into Pakistan. Good news! One hopes, he is keeping into consideration cases of people having weaker flesh such as the one of his officials of the Polio eradication team found making money by selling expired vaccines. Besides, one must emphasise the need for in hand arrangements to meet challenges emanating from such natural and man-made calamities.

Indeed, this brings us to the over-all medicare system in the country. It must be regretfully stated that despite tall claims of success of “sehat” cards etc. Pakistan does not even have a rudimentary healthcare system to cater to the needs of country’s large population especially in the rural areas where we don’t even have basics of Chinese barefoot doctors. It is surely an irony-often underscored on occasions such as earthquakes/floods/epidemics-that despite Pakistan being seventh nuclear power in the world, having one of fifth biggest armies, and whole lot of richest generals-does not have state of-the-art-hospitals where complicated cases could be treated successfully with confidence, patient assured of first class professional and para-medic facilities. Take the case of Pakistan’s former Prime Minister. His heart condition is such that he has to be abroad to be satisfactorily treated. Similarly one comes across various cases where Pakistani nationals suffering from chronic heart, lung, cancer or needing transplant of organs-have to seek favours for special visas to travel to India for treatment. We don’t even have iota of facilities that could match with India.

Whenever we are caught up on the wrong foot, we write editorials and articles such as these, urging upon our government-to have a proper sense of direction and set of national priorities but to no avail. Remember how the whole Islamabad administration ran helter-skelter when the federal capital was hit by earthquake in 2005. It was an irony to note that Asia’s two nuclear powers were just nowhere in first aid operations when two of their major public places-such as Islamabad’s Marriott Hotel and Mumbai’s prestigious Taj-were set to burning for days by suicide bombers. It knocked the authorities off their senses when they learnt-both in Islamabad and Mumbai-two modern cities-they did not have fire tenders to put off the raging blaze. In Islamabad’s case, its Capital Development Authority (CDA) did not have fire tenders that could hose the inferno at the top floors since their machines had not enough water or strength to throw it up.

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Situation at that while we found an over active health Advisor to the PM doing the monkey trick of jumping from one tree to another to show performance, we were lucky to have some government functionaries who grasped the Chinese situation in its correct perspective. One such person is our Ambassador to China Naghmana Hashmi put the record straight when Dr Zafar Mirza had announced in panic that the government would evacuate Pakistanis from Wuhan. Ambassador Naghmana took the bold stand to declare on Sunday that Pakistani students would not be evacuated from the virus-hit Chinese city of Wuhan as medical facilities in Pakistan do not meet the standards required to treat a patient diagnosed with coronavirus. In a conversation with Geo News, Hashmi acknowledged that China has the best medical facilities to handle the patients suffering from the disease.

The statement from the envoy came a day after a senior health official in Islamabad announced that the government will not bring its citizens despite multiple requests from the students and their families for immediate evacuation. Earlier speaking to media Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Zafar Mirza said that no Pakistani will be allowed to travel back to the country from China till they complete a 14-day observation period-a statement contrary to his original view in which he had said that government was considering to carry out massive evacuation of Pakistanis medically stranded in Wuhan.

It was, however, our envoy Naghmana who assured Pakistani students in Wuhan that they were safe, adding that the four who had been diagnosed with the virus were also making speedy recovery. She conveyed to their parents that there were no problems regarding food and water in Wuhan. ‘Our Chinese hosts are going out of the way to take care of their essential needs.’ Hashmi said that some students were worried about the shortage of food and other issues in Wuhan, but the embassy is fully aware of their concerns and is in constant touch with Chinese authorities in Hubei province.

“I want to assure our citizens that Pakistani Embassy and Chinese government are working jointly to make sure their problems are immediately addressed. Currently, the province is quarantined and no one is allowed to go. As soon as the retrictions are lifted, we will be the first to be with our countrymen,” she assured. She also dismissed the reports that the Pakistani embassy was not receiving phone calls. She clarified that it might be possible that the phones of the mission may have been busy at that time. In the end she acknowledged excellent co-operation that both the Chinese and Islamabad are extending for the alleviation of the sufferings of their citizens.

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