



Online Conference Report

"Suggested Measures for Lifting the Lockdown: What can be the Phases"



 Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

Online Conference
15th April 2020
1100 - 1300 hrs

Suggested Measures for Lifting Lockdown: What Can be the Phases

Organized by

Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

15th April 2020

BRIEF OF THE EVENT

On 15th April 2020, CGSS organized an “Online Conference” on the topic **“Suggested Measures for Lifting the Lockdown: What can be the Phases”**. The session aimed to discuss the recommendations that can be fruitful for uplifting the lockdown. The Conference was attended by 30 participants. The panelists comprised experts of different fields including the following:

- Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd), President CGSS
- Major General Farooq Ahmad Khan,(Retd), Former DG NDMA
- Mr Nadeem ul Haq, Vice Chancellor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
- Brigadier Mansoor Saeed (Retd), Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS
- Mr Amir Zafar Durrani, Financial & Economics Expert
- Brigadier Akhtar Nawaz Janjua (Retd), Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS
- Dr Basharat Hassan Bashir, Specialist, Public Health Engineering & Member Advisory Board CGSS
- Lieutenant Colonel Ather Sultan (Retd), Logistic Expert
- Mr. Amir Ghauri, Editor The News International
- Dr. Samia Altaf, Public Health Specialist
- Dr. Durre Nayab, Joint Director Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)
- Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad, Assistant Professor, IR Department University of Sargodha
- Mr. Tauqeer Ahmad, Member Advisory Board CGSS
- Mr. Mehmood-ul- Hassan, Member Advisory Board & Regional/Geopolitical Analyst
- Brigadier Muhammad Aslam (Retd), Member Board of Advisors CGSS
- Air Marshal Azher Hassan (Retd), Member Board of Advisors CGSS
- Mr. Shakeel Ramay, Member Board of Advisors CGSS & Director SDPI
- Air Marshal Saeed Khan (Retd), Member Board of Advisors CGSS
- Lieutenant General Masood Aslam (Retd), Member Board of Advisors CGSS

Current Nature of the Lockdown

Panelists of the session stated that we are in a selective lockdown and there is no practical implication of lockdown as 70% - 80% activities are open. There was never a complete lockdown, only those who could afford it followed the orders, moreover, due to lack of public obedience, a complete lockdown in our society is not possible.

The announcement by the Government regarding the extension of the lockdown on 14th April needs further clarification. The Government is incrementally opening certain businesses which is a right and cautious step but the connected issues must also be resolved, for example if you open the workshops, the spare part shops are closed. In the rural areas, it is now time of harvesting the wheat crop, but people there are facing a lot of problems as the machinery there keeps requiring maintenance. Also in rural areas there is a serious concern and issue of COVID spreading because social distancing in such a narrow space is not possible, these all are connecting issues which needs to be addressed.

The vaccine of COVID-19 may not be available before 2 years, therefore the lockdown will have to be implemented for a minimum of 18 months so that the vaccine can be developed and the population can be saved, which is not possible. Main purpose of lockdown is to flatten the curve. A complete lockdown in our society may not work, therefore, graded and rolling lockdown can be effective. An efficient lockdown is when it is utilized to make a nationwide policy for infection mitigation and prevention, but unfortunately we have not done any preparations during the lockdown. People are scared to get tested and hospitals are empty.

Pakistan is a state where no one dies of hunger due to our social system, one can survive for a month . However, many people in lockdown came out to help the poor and needy.

Strategic Planning for Lifting the Lockdown

Currently, there is nothing concrete in our national action plan to combat COVID-19. We must opt for a smart lockdown keeping in view our organizational capabilities and devise a 14 day strategic plan while clearly defining SOPs of all activities. In this way, less people will be effected. There has to be much more information than we have now. We can use our local leaders to spread awareness.

The lockdown must be lifted in phases to quickly assess the results and address if there are any negative outcomes. Phase one can be termed as pre-lifting phase, during which necessary assessment and identification must be done by dividing Pakistan into two zones i.e. clear zone and red zone. There should be no risk at all as COVID is very lethal and has caused harm to many. Therefore, calculations must be very accurate. Provision of equipment must be made proficient.

After efficient zoning comes the phase two which can be termed as lifting phase, during which after proper scrutiny, lockdown must be lifted only from the clear zones, however, the lockdown must be maintained in the red zones. Moreover, all schools, colleges, parks, temples, churches must remain close.

Measures during the Lockdown

During the lockdown a mechanism is required from union council level to Muhalla which already exists in Pakistan. We have various community level registered organizations that have complete networking. These organizations can be utilized for delivery and logistics.

Government needs a clear strategy. There is a disconnection between the federation and the provinces. Government must take a centralized command and declare health emergency. Certain fractions are not following governmental orders, hence, state must enforce its writ.

Provincial governments hold great responsibility. We need immediate restricting of the district and tehsil headquarter hospitals which were functional 40-50 years ago but are inactive now.

Health Safety Measures and Testing

The use of masks and gloves must be made mandatory by the Government and it must opt for mass production of safety gears including masks, gloves and sanitizers which must be distributed amongst the general public and make sure whosoever is going out must use these two things through which the spread of COVID-19 can be controlled.

We are entering the phase of community transmission, we must declare a health emergency and clearly define our strategy before Ramadan. We are facing health and economic crises. The second phase is very crucial and need to have more testing facilities. We are testing people at a very late stage, we need to conduct more aggressive testing.

We do not have denominators to determine the actual infection rate which is the bigger hindrance in developing a good sound policy. There has not been much infections in children, but now the data coming back worldwide shows that children are getting infected. That is how the epidemiologists are saying that the strong immunity in the population is required. We are not sure that the deaths in Pakistan are happening due to corona virus or in combination to other factors. The hawkers have also been given permission which are also spreading the virus. The beggars can also be carriers and can spread this virus.

If we analyze the current data, it seems that our mortality rate is low but we must not betray ourselves by believing that our immunity system is strong as WHO has stated that Pakistan may become the next epicenter of coronavirus. People in Pakistan have tremendous capacity to elevate the problems we are facing, yet they are not coming at the forefront, hence people must also volunteer in this regard.

We don't have abilities for aggressive testing and do not have sufficient ventilators, we lack health care facilities and our doctors, paramedics and nurses are also getting infected. Arrangements for treatments also need restructuring and boosting. Protection of our forces is also necessary including the Army, Police, welfare workers, and health professionals.

History of pandemics tell us, the first wave hits the poor but the second wave hits the rich. Poor gain some kind of immunity in the first wave when the rich are isolated at home.

There is a huge hidden figure of infected cases and deaths being happen in rural communities. People with comorbidities die of COVID 19 without being noticed by the family members, specially the old people in our context.

We have to create awareness amongst the public about corona which is a deadly virus and if someone is exposed to it, they are not only vulnerable but also a potential threat to their family and others.

This is a war footing and we need to make the strategy at war basis. If proper steps are not taken then our health system will collapse and it will become very difficult for us to get back to the road of recovery.

Economic and Industrial Aspects

We must not keep social distancing and a functional economy mutually exclusive. No political system can afford to pay the price of continued lock down for prolonged unspecified periods. Our economy is based on a labor intensive model. People are not in a lockdown instead the businesses are at lockdown, so certain sectors must be opened but with proper digital monitoring, tracking and testing.

We need to mobilize our production and reduce our exports. We have to mechanize our supply chain and wheels of the internal market must keep spinning in a controlled manner.

This is a golden opportunity for us and civil society must also push for occupational health and safety standards in the factories. We need to reassess the working hours and working space provided. There must be medical dispensaries on the sites also. The captive population coming to factories can be tested and those who are tested negative can be then allowed to work.

Recommendations

- The lockdown must be lifted in phases with geographical mapping of cases to quickly assess its results and address if there are any negative outcomes. This can be done through accurate zoning after assessment and identification of various areas. After proper scrutiny, lockdown must be lifted from the clear zones and must be extended in the red zones. Risk has to be mitigated prior to the relaxation of the lockdown as it is a lethal virus and will not spare anyone and any miscalculation might not be affordable.
- The Government must bring a sound strategy about the future discourse to the people of Pakistan. This strategy must be short-term, mid-term and long-term. Government must come up with certain do's and don'ts which must be implemented immediately. A pandemic response demands national response which must be unified under federation. Center-provincial coordination is critical to the successful implementation of national pandemic strategy.
- Only food, health and defense related sectors must be allowed to open during the lockdown. Army, police and NGOs can help provide food and essentials to general public which is doable. Scouts, teachers and Election Commission staff must also be involved in this process. A roadmap must be developed for its effectiveness. In this way, the spread of the virus can be contained.
- We need to gear-up in formulating short-term and long-term policies which have backing of the complete leadership. This is a war footing and this battle can be won innovatively and intellectually. We need subject specialists including epidemiologists, virologists and economists to devise a sound strategy with their input. We need innovation and innovative ideas which can be achieved through experts and specialists.
- If certain industries are being opened then the connected issues of the downstream industries must also be addressed because most of the industries are interconnected with several other businesses.
- The issue must be addressed at mohalla level in cities and villages in rural areas with the approach to save our society and individuals with precautionary measures. In this regard, vigilant teams can be established. Person acting as observer must report any person who is infected,

reporting the case from village to the tehsil level and then the district level. At district level we should have centers to look after effected persons.

- As a core principle, one can only defeat the enemy if we know how big or minor it is, its resources, strengths and weaknesses. We can plan effectively only when we collect the figures beyond the usual procedures and use innovations in addition to testing live and dead both for COVID 19. Testing Kits are not available to ensure the availability of accurate data of the positive patients. Flattening the curve can only be achieved if we have proper data and statistics. We are doing negligible tests and the data is not representative. Therefore, more aggressive testing needs to be conducted.
- Even when the controlled lockdown is gradually opened, nobody should be allowed to come on work unless his/her without proper precautions. . This shows whether a person is immune to the virus or not, and it happens when he has the natural immunity in him/her after being exposed to virus.
- After the strategy is devised, the Government must ensure writ of the state as certain fractions are not following Governmental orders. Proper lockdown with strict implementation is required in this country where literacy rate is low and public obedience is also lacking.
- We are taking examples of developed and resource rich countries and we want to implement or replicate those experiences in Pakistan, which is not possible keeping in view our limited resources. We talk about China and take it as an example, but we do not have the institutional mechanisms like China nor do we have resources like China. Even SMEs in China could not survive a one month lockdown. Therefore, we must devise a policy keeping in mind our resources and mechanism. We need to focus more on the management of the supply chain.

Conclusion

This is a bigger war than 1965 and 1971 but unfortunately our response has been less than required. We took six weeks to establish National Coordination Committee. This can become a National Security Risk if proper measures are not adopted. This is also a war between the rich and the poor. The privileged are in favor of lockdown however, the poor are against it as they are most affected. Confusion, dubiety and the difference of opinion among political parties and religious scholars are the biggest hurdles to deal with the epidemic. The vividness of Government and society is the first prerequisite to go for any practical step to deal with the subject disease. This is the time to unite and rise above the political, religious and ethnic affiliations and talk about Pakistan and its citizens first.

