

## Special Brief on COVID-19



## COVID-19 and India: Response & Impact

April 18, 2020



*India Study Center (ISC)*  
**Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad**



## CONTRIBUTORS

Asadullah Khan

Mahwish Hafeez

Muhammad Abbas Hassan

Shahroo Malik

## 1. Covid-19 and Overall Scenario in India

Covid-19 also known as Coronavirus initially originated from the wet market of Wuhan, China and then gripped the whole world bringing daily life to a standstill. As the world goes into a lockdown, Covid-19 has severely started to impact national and global economies. Economies are shrinking and it is expected that half a billion people could be pushed into poverty due to this pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, India is also facing severe socio-economic challenges in its fight against Covid-19.

The first case of Coronavirus in India was reported on January 30, 2020 by Ministry of Health, but the concerned authorities showed little interest by saying that since the patient was a student from Wuhan so no local transmission has taken place yet. But the ongoing situation is quite different as the nation of 1.3 billion people is under complete lockdown in order to curb the rapid spread of the local transmission of the fatal virus. On March 24, Modi stated in his speech that a lockdown would come into force from midnight and be in place for three weeks. The decision was made overnight without any robust policy due to which the common man had to suffer badly. Poor Indian men and women travelled hundreds of miles to reach their native villages as the public transport system was stopped. As of April 09, 2020 the Indian Health Ministry had confirmed 5734 coronavirus cases and 166 deaths.

### *Situation in Kashmir*

Similarly, the situation in Indian occupied Kashmir (IOK) is even worse. According to the international media, the doctor to patient ratio in (IOK) is one of the lowest. "Compared to the doctor-patient ratio of 1:2,000 in India, Jammu and Kashmir has one doctor for 3,866 people. An internet connection, especially in a pandemic, is like an eye to the emergency physician. Indian government ignoring the health emergency has banned internet in IOK. Indian government is continuously ignoring the region when it comes to fight against Coronavirus and this will make the situation far more complex in the upcoming days.

## 2. Impact of Covid-19 on the Economic Sector

According to recent estimates by Asian Development Bank, it is expected that India's economic growth would slow down to 4 per cent in Fiscal Year 2020-21.<sup>2</sup> Aviation, hospitality and tourism sectors are most hit by the current crisis. Construction and services sector are also being gravely affected by the Covid-19. The lockdown is impacting the supply chains leading to supply shortages. Industries that rely on imported goods such as automobiles, electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, etc. are facing raw material shortages. Indian Stock Market has also been hit by the Coronavirus as on March 12, the market crashed by more than 8% in a single day. As 90% of India's labor force is employed in the informal sector, about 0.4 billion people

---

<sup>1</sup> Kaamil Ahmed, "Coronavirus could turn back the clock 30 years on global poverty", *Guardian*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/09/coronavirus-could-turn-back-the-clock-30-years-on-global-poverty>

<sup>2</sup> "Covid-19 impact: ADB expects India's economic growth to slow down to 4 per cent in FY21", *The Hindu Businessline*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/covid-19-impact-adb-expects-indias-economic-growth-to-slow-down-to-4-per-cent-in-fy21/article31243955.ece>

are at a risk of falling into poverty. Unemployment in the urban centres (mainly daily wagers) has increased by more than 22% till April 5.

In order to help the low-income families, Indian government has announced an economic stimulus package worth \$1.7 trillion rupees (\$22.5 billion) in order to provide food assistance, direct cash transfer, food assistance, health insurance and employment aid to farmers. The Reserve Bank of India has cut the interest rates and has given a three-month moratorium on loan repayments to give some relief to small scale enterprises. Coronavirus has further crippled the frail Indian economy.

### 3. Impact of COVID-19 on the Social Sector

#### (i) Health

In the health sector, the Modi government has taken number of measures to contain this epidemic. On March 12, India invoked a more than 100 year old “Epidemic Act 1897,” where all the states and Union Territories of India were advised to invoke the provisions of section 2 of the Act. The Act empowers the government to fine or imprison any person for violating rules and regulations that are brought about to contain the disease.<sup>3</sup> Currently, there are 114 laboratories across India that have been approved to conduct tests.<sup>4</sup> As India spends around 1.4% of its GDP on health, it is obvious that the Indian health system would be under severe pressure as the virus spreads across the country. As per one media report, there are total 1.2 million beds in government hospitals and that too mostly in urban areas. Since patients infected with Coronavirus need special care, India has only 70,000 ICU beds which cater to 5 million patients admitted to ICU each year. There is severe shortage of ventilators throughout Indian hospitals. Similarly, the healthcare sector also lacks Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and N-95 masks.<sup>5</sup> With its high population density, the country is facing difficulty in practicing social distancing.

#### (ii) Education

With the rising cases of Covid-19, the Indian government on 16 March, 2020 decided to shut all schools. The governments of Delhi and Maharashtra decided to promote children from class 1 to 8 without examination. The exams of students of class 9 to 11 were also postponed throughout the country. There are 300 million children and some 1.4 million schools. Additionally, there are 51,000 colleges across India. The schools, 70% of which are owned by the government, are trying to impart education through video apps and other technological

---

<sup>3</sup> “Centre invokes ‘Epidemic Act’ and ‘Disaster Management Act’ to prevent spread of corona Virus,” *The Hindu Businessline*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/centre-invokes-epidemic-act-and-disaster-management-act-to-prevent-spread-of-coronavirus/article31049161.ece#>

<sup>4</sup> “Coronavirus update: Here is a list of 114 COVID-19testing labs in India,” *Livemint*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/coronavirus-update-here-is-a-list-of-114-covid-19-testing-labs-in-india-11584946092240.html>

<sup>5</sup> “Coronavirus: Shortage of PPE, masks easing, says govt”, *Times of India*, April 6, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/shortage-of-ppe-masks-easing-says-govt/articleshow/75000703.cms>

means.<sup>6</sup> However, this facility is not available to every child. As a result, children belonging to the lower rung of the society are left out and are finding themselves in a vacuum. Needless to say, that the facility of imparting education through video apps is altogether missing in rural areas school. To facilitate 37 million college students, number of online learning platforms has come forward like Coursera, Next Education Pvt Ltd and British Council, connecting students with live classes.

### ***(iii) Psychological Impact***

Epidemics also leave a deep mark on the psychological health of the people. It generates a sense of insecurity with regard to not only the physical well-being of oneself and the loved ones, but also related to loss of livelihood. With professional and social life in disarray due to lockdown, people find themselves exposed to misinformation and fake news that is spread through social media resulting in increased stress, and in some cases, hysteria. Indian society which is already divided across religious and social lines, the Coronavirus has been another addition. People, who are confirmed cases of Covid-19, are not only being marginalized but also stigmatized. Those put in quarantine may also feel as being treated like criminals. Daily wagers or those responsible for their families may feel extra pressure if put in quarantine. Already, there have been number of corona virus related suicides. Thus, in order to keep its people healthy, mentally and psychologically, the government released a guide “Minding our minds during Covid-19” to help its people deal with the psychological stress during these uncertain times.<sup>7</sup>

### ***(iv) Social Well-being***

As more and more people become unemployed, poverty will increase and living standards will fall; hence reversing the development gains that India made in the last decade. This will also increase the crime rate in major cities. The discovery of Covid-19 in Asia’s largest slum, Dharavi, rings an alarm bell for the whole nation. Around 1600 patients are believed to be suspected carriers of Covid-19 in Dharavi. Majority of Indian elites and Bollywood celebrities are giving large amounts of charity. Mukesh Ambani of the Reliance Industry Ltd. has donated 20 billion Indian rupees to the government. In addition, he has also announced a 100-bed dedicated coronavirus hospital in Mumbai, manufacturing 100,000 masks per day, 5,000,000 free meals to the needy through NGOs and fuel to emergency vehicles carrying Covid-19 patients. Similarly, TATA industries has pledged 1500 crore for dealing with Covid-19. Despite these efforts, the Modi government continues to ignore the fundamental human rights of its minorities including non-discrimination, respect for religion and human dignity. It is pertinent to note here that the Hindu nationalists are blaming Muslims for Covid-19 crisis and there are reports of mob attacks against the Muslims. Instead of creating an environment of understanding and cooperation, Coronavirus has further increased Islamophobia in India and has exposed Muslims in India to more violence and discrimination at a time when they were already suffering from extremist Hindutva policies of BJP government.

---

<sup>6</sup> “Every house a school, every parent a teacher as Covid-19 impacts education of 300mn students”, *Livemint*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/every-house-a-school-every-parent-a-teacher-as-covid-19-impacts-education-11585140662556.html>

<sup>7</sup> “Minding our minds during the COVID-19,” Ministry of health and family welfare, *Government of India*, <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/MindingourmindsduringCoronaeditedat.pdf>