

It Is About Corona, Lockdown and Livelihood

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Abstract

The Novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease affecting the global economy and as per the recent updates almost one-third to half of the global population is now under some form of a lockdown. This has threatened an economic bloodbath, where practically all economic activities around the world are witnessing a closure. According to the International Labour Organization, nearly 25 million jobs could be lost worldwide due to the pandemic and would mean income losses for workers between \$860 billion and \$3.4 trillion by the end of 2020. This will translate into falling consumption of goods and services, impacting the businesses and in turn viciously affecting the national economies. The migrants may be provided with adequate money and food in the interim for survival and also be allowed to return to work post the lockdown period. The compensation may be given for the families of those migrant workers who have lost their lives in this period of crisis. Implement the strict norms for quarantine of Corona affected migrant workers.

Key words: *Corona, Lockdown, Migrants, pandemic*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The worldwide spread of novel corona virus infectious disease is severely affecting the global economy and as per the recent updates almost one-third to half of the global population is now under some form of a lockdown. This has threatened an economic bloodbath, where practically all economic activities around the world are witnessing a closure. According to the International Labour Organization, nearly 25 million jobs could be lost worldwide due to the pandemic and would mean income losses for workers between \$860 billion and \$3.4 trillion by the end of 2020. This will translate into falling consumption of goods and services, impacting the businesses and in turn viciously affecting the national economies.

The irony of the situation is that while there is an acknowledgement on the need for social distancing and self-isolation and the preeminence of human lives and well-being, there are growing concerns over adding to the severity of economic and social impact that the lockdown would have on the country. This would be especially embossed considering the already prevailing economic slowdown. Several economists have echoed apprehensions that failure to provide essential goods and services to the bottom 50 percent of the population could bring India to the brink of mass sufferings and social revolts. Cities as engines of growth have come to a grinding halt. The reason for this is that the ‘city-makers’ like the daily-wage migrant (seasonal and circular) labourers (estimated at over 50 million), street vendors, auto or rickshaw drivers, construction and utility workers are finding it onerous to survive amid no work and lack of social protection and rights, or proper inclusive policies is expensive and inconceivable. Similar is the plight of small businesses as well as freelancers and those operating in the gig economy, who have begun to bear the brunt of national lockdown.

II. COVID-19 AND NATIONAL LOCKDOWN

The national lockdown for the pandemic COVID-19 leads the problem of rural masses in India especially the stranded poor and migrants. Initially, the harshness of novel corona pandemic did not lay the impact on the ordinary fellow Indian citizens even though it is rapidly spreading over across the world. The spread of Corona virus from the epicenter of Wuhan in China to worldwide is attributed to migration and mobility of people. On the other hand, the medical professionals largely believe that the control of this infectious disease is possible through immobility and confinement like lockdown and social distancing. In a globalised world, the lockdown is likely to bring unprecedented breakdown of our economic and social system. Migrants are most vulnerable to urban disasters and epidemics. The first case of COVID-19 surfaced in India on January 30, 2020, and following the out-break the lock down in the entire country was announced on 24th March for a period of 21 days. Borders were sealed, transportation got stopped, factories, shops, restaurants and all type of the economic activities were shut, barring only the essential services. This proved to be a nightmare for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, who lost their livelihoods overnight and became homeless. The

immediate challenges faced by these migrant workers were related to food, shelter, loss of wages, fear of getting infected and anxiety. As a result, thousands of them started fleeing from various cities to their native places. Many migrants lost their lives either due to hardship on the way, hunger, accident or co-morbidity and some even committed suicide. A telephonic survey of more than 3000 migrants from north central India by Jan Sahas (2020) shows that majority of the workers were the daily wage earners and at the time of lockdown, 42% were left with no ration, one third was stuck at destinations city with no access to food, water and money, 94% don't have worker's identity card (Jan Sahas, 2020). Sudden lockdown also stranded many migrants in different cities of the country. Those who were travelling were stuck up at stations or state or district borders. Many were forced to walk hundreds of miles on foot to reach their home villages finding no public transport. Those who reached their native villages were seen as potential carriers of the infection and were ill-treated by the police and locals. In one of the instances a group of returnees were sprayed with chemicals to disinfect them for which the local administration apologized (India Today, 2020). This is one of the biggest streams of mass return migration in the country. The very effort to stave off the pandemic turned into one of greatest human tragedy in India's recent history.

The lockdown has already disproportionately hurt marginalized communities due to loss of livelihood and lack of food, shelter, health, and other basic needs. The government does have a responsibility to protect the health and well-being of the population, but some of these steps have left tens of thousands of out-of-work migrant workers stranded, with rail and bus services shut down. The blanket closing of state borders have caused disruption in the supply of essential goods, leading to inflation and fear of shortages. The Indian government is facing an extraordinary challenge to protect over a billion densely packed people, but ramped-up efforts to prevent the spread of the corona virus in India.

We could not utterly say that the policy and plans are not concentrated the rural masses. Governments announced some stimulus packages such as provision of additional rice or wheat, some pulses and oil free of cost with Rs.1000 cash for the purchase of other essential commodities and it tried to stop the people with starvation for want of food, but it is merely not enough to them. In this juncture, we could see the situation of stranded migrants. The worst affected by the lockdown are migrant workers. Their conditions are abysmal and the hungry migrant workers were determined to trudge hundreds of kilometers to reach home without adequate arrangements. But it seems that the problems of migrant are entirely different in compare the people who permanently settled in their hometowns. However, we are seeing the untoward incidents took place during the exodus of migrants on the way to reunite to their families. It remembered the time of the partition of India which unprecedented lost the lives as well the affected income of many.

The country forever politically and geographically divided into many such as region, development, infrastructure and it's diverse of people. Huge of Indian population have been moved towards the unorganized sector for their employment and livelihood in the annals of the 73 years of Indian independence. The government declared war on the novel corona virus is turning out to be an undeclared war against the workers of India, treating them as non-citizens. The union government gave a tentative estimate of there being 10 crores migrant workers in India but admitted to many being largely undocumented and unregistered as workers. The government has not clue as to social composition of this large labour force. The sudden announcements of the countrywide lockdown on March 23, 2020 left the migrants are stranded with no way to return home and no money. Indian society is sadly seeing with tear in their eyes on the mass exodus of their fellow Indian citizens with their children, elders and physically challenged. The disappointed migrant workers started to move from all sides to reach their home on foot. Some became died on the way due to heat by scorching sun and tired and taking vehicles found one the way without following any social distancing. In fact that the desire to go back to their home states, to join their families, and to be among their own language-speaking people is an overwhelming desire that we cannot be suppressed by governments for too long in the name of a lockdown.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

India's ongoing nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the corona virus pandemic, considered the severest in the world, has led to massive retrenchment and loss of output. India's economy is in a severe slowdown that is only going to get worse in a pandemic-stricken world. Three months after Finance Ministry mandarins prognosticated that India's growth slowdown had bottomed out; the latest economic data has belied that prediction. Crucially, the GDP growth estimates for the January-March quarter and the full fiscal year barely reflect the impact of the public health crisis and the stringent lockdowns, which were imposed nationwide only from March 25. The NSO's estimates show fourth-quarter and fiscal 2019-20 growth slumped to 3.1% and 4.2%, respectively, the slowest pace in 11 years. The government says the lockdown impacted data flow, and with statutory reporting timelines extended the estimates would likely undergo revision. However, the fact that Gross Value Added numbers for the first three quarters have been revised significantly downwards shows that the economic malaise was deep and widespread even before the novel corona virus landed on Indian shores. Four of the eight industry sectors that together comprise the GVA are now revealed to be in far worse

shape than was reported earlier. This includes manufacturing, which contracted for a third straight quarter and shrank by 1.4% in the fourth quarter; construction, a major job generating activity that continued to weaken and contracted 2.2%; and the two largest services categories. The revisions in the trade, transport, hotels and communications, and financial, real estate and professional services sectors have cut third-quarter growth figures by 1.6 and 4 percentage points, respectively.

The economy is visibly mired in a demand drought that is unlikely to abate any time soon. Private consumption spending, which accounts for 55-60% of GDP, extended a downtrend as growth slid to 2.7%. Investment activity contracted for a third consecutive quarter and shrank 6.5%. Data coming in for the current fiscal are revealing the devastating impact that the lockdown has had. Output at the eight core industries which represents 40% of the Index of Industrial Production are contracted by an alarming 38% in April 2020. Merchandise exports shrank 60% in the same month. The RBI, which cut interest rates on May 22, was categorical in its assessment that a recovery would likely start only from the October quarter. For even that to materialize, the Centre must act. Its package so far has been focused on credit enhancement measures that ease supply side constraints and structural reforms that may bear fruit over a longer horizon. But the imperative now is to bite the bullet and opt for a massive fiscal stimulus that actually puts cash in the hands of consumers and the millions of jobless youth in order to help revive demand.

NEED THE MINIMUM CARE

Under democratic norms of equality living on charity is demeaning and lower self- esteem. The migrant workers invisibly helps to our economy as cultivate the grain, harvest the crops, feed us, clean streets, run factories, build roads, work in brick kilns and construct our house. Between 100 to 125 million leave their villages, families and homes to find their work wherever find across the country. The poor migrant workers have lost their jobs during lockdown. They have exhausted their meager savings. Many are standing in line for food and seek the support of NGOs, civil society organizations and generous donors. They are being neglected even by governments. In this place, we cannot omit the question is that was the government of India treated them are Indians?. They are not a part of the so called mainstream cultures, are even more vulnerable to the general hostility towards the poor displayed by the state agencies, particularly the police. They are not allowed to get assistance and despairing of any free travel to home. Living away from home, village, relations and acquaintances is never easy for anybody especially for migrants. A regime of social policy, pivotal for a minimal welfare state must be installed to address the basic needs of all Indian citizens, not only during pandemic but for all times, to meet any contingency. Politicians, officials, educationalist, policy makers were lies as mute spectators and not do anything to stop the adverse incidents and not making even any alternate arrangements to migrant to back to their home, though the oppositions appeals the government for taking care of migrant workers and find the way back of migrant workers to their hometowns. Government supposed to give priority to the innocent poor migrant workers as like as in bringing back the resident Indians in abroad through aircrafts with maximum safety and comfort. Government has gradually resumed the train service after the three quarter of the total migrant workers to return their work places while lockdown has become hassle-free.

III. CONCLUSION

We urge the government to find the way to full exit strategy for lockdown and ensure the livelihood of poor migrant workers. It is the necessity of framing a policy under which migrant workers who wishes to return to their home without inordinate delay. Government should insist the local governments to ensure to provide employment to the migrant workers through MGNREGS. Government should also ensure the food through public distribution system at their respective place those who are settled. Migrant workers may be allowed to travel under strict conditions of safe health. The migrants may be provided with adequate money and food in the interim for survival and also be allowed to return to work post the lockdown period. The compensation may be given for the families of those migrant workers who have lost their lives in this period of crisis. Implement the strict norms for quarantine of Corona affected migrant workers. There is a need to strengthen the database on migration and migrant households through Census, National Sample Survey (NSS) and NFHS and Migration Surveys. The available data are very old and also not available on time. As migration and migrants has affected the households in almost all dimensions in both rural and urban areas, an effective inclusion of migrants in our official statistics and access will be helpful in formulating robust and inclusive policy and programmes in the country. The authorities in governments at centre, state, even at the local self government should take all necessary steps to ensure that everyone has access to food and quality medical care, and that the poor and marginalized are not battered. The government must ensure that those at sensitive risk, including sanitation workers, community health staff, anganwadi workers, and midday meal workers and other frontline workers are provided protective equipment, medical benefits, and timely wages even up to lifting lockdown. We need relaxation of Biometric system in Public Distribution system, must not be extended in giving free rations to

poor and migrants. In some place returned migrant workers were not allowed to enter the village, government should address these issue to provide safeguard to the migrant workers especially at villages. As asserted by the opposition party that ‘just like as lives are important, livelihood of the poor is important’.

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