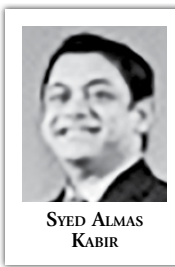


A new world after the coronavirus pandemic



SYED ALMAS KABIR

As the indomitable Coronavirus continues its reign over the world, the lifestyle of mankind has changed drastically. People have been maintaining social distancing, started

working from home, finding time to engage more with the family, and slowing down on business activities. This change in lifestyle will have a lasting effect even in the post-COVID-19 world. The fear in people's mind, the time they have now to themselves, the pause in the rat-race will create a different world for the generations of the future.

The home-office concept will be the most enduring practice in the post-COVID-19 world. Businesses will encourage their employees more and more to work from home whenever possible. This will not only save the overhead of space, utility bills and other resources, but will also enable business owners to negotiate with the employees regarding flexible remuneration. From a bigger aspect, this telecommuting will help lessen traffic congestion reducing air-pollution as a result. This will also change some social norms improving familial relationship. To make this remote workplace success, the demand for a robust internet infrastructure will be reinforced. Video-conferencing systems, collaboration tools, etc. will see an array of new features. The norms for meetings will change. Online meetings will not have refreshments, although they still may have remuneration/compensation paid to the attendees through electronic transfers.

We shall see an increased number of online courses in the post-COVID-19 society. Digital classrooms will help the students to stay at wherever they are and participate in the classes. Online courses with pre-recorded lectures will enable students to access the resources at their own pace. The assessment or exam system will also see a big change, where an examinee will have the option to keep books or notes open yet will have to answer using his/her knowledge.

The demand of skilled professionals in 2D & 3D animation will rise significantly. Online courses, remote discussions will need more digital contents. Video-editing and multimedia tools will see new demands. Digital graphics rendering and editing skills will be sought-after. AI will be omnipresent and be used in many applications, including home-appliances, automobiles, machineries, health-services, agro-processing and entertainment. Although AI gone rogue is a real possibility, businesses will increasingly use Artificial Intelligence for

efficiency and cost-cutting. IoT coupled with Big Data and AI will be used to monitor the environment, be it a factory premise or the national weather. Such applications will result in more effective early warning systems against adversities making us more prepared in advance.

The social-distancing practiced by all during the ongoing pandemic situation will teach us to use distributed systems ever more. This will bring Blockchain technology into the forefront of all transaction related activities. The cogency and transparency of this technology will make it the gold standard in maintaining

Health sector will experience a sea of change. The unpreparedness for tackling the COVID-19 will teach the health service providers a good lesson. Doctors, nurses, paramedics and most importantly the administrators will be extra cautious in the post-coronavirus era. Governments across the world will allocate a good portion of the annual budget for development of the health sector. Large corporates and philanthropists will come forward to build more hospitals. The healthcare workers will see an acute demand in countries like Bangladesh, where the patient-doctor or patient-nurse

also become a new normal.

The entertainment industry will flourish in the post-COVID-19 society, although theatres and movie halls may see decline in the number of their patrons. Although online streaming will be the standard, television may experience a small comeback as people will go out less in public places. Interactive movies and network games will take over the entertainment industry. Gaming consoles will see a sharp rise, with new features. State-of-the-art games powered by AI and correlated to movies will become the new thing. Interactive

this will be the new natural. While I don't foresee that in-person events will be changed entirely after COVID-19, I do believe event organisers will work out ways so that digital features can complement in-person events. I expect a sharp rise in hybrid events where portions of the event will occur in person, and others will happen online.

Popularity and acceptance of online shopping will soar big time. Consumables, such as medicines, groceries, etc. will be purchased mostly through digital commerce. AI and Big Data will play a big role in online selling catering to the choice and requirements of the buyers. 2D and 3D graphics will also change the shopping experience. Holograms will be incorporated to give a realistic view of the product people will be buying. People will prefer contactless methods of delivery too. Drones and robots will be incorporated in the delivery services. Courier companies will deploy more of these machines to do their job. Most brick & mortar shops will also have online channels to complement their businesses as more and more consumers will be preferring not to shop in-person.

Contactless payments will see a new surge in the Post-COVID-19 world. People will prefer not to touch physical money anymore following the bitter experience of contamination. Digital transactions, mobile financial services and touchless biometric solutions will be introduced by banks. Voice commands will eliminate the need of pressing buttons of an ATM. All biometric scanning for authentication will be contactless to save the user from possible contamination.

Besides all the above predictions, is this the end of capitalism? Capitalism that isn't engrained in moral values is untenable. In this current pandemic situation, governments all over the world are planning stimulus packages involving large-scale cash distribution—not very different from what a socialist country would do. It is also ironic that in the ongoing election campaign in the most capitalist country in the world—the US, democratic socialism emerged as an alternative. So, is socialism our future?

The COVID-19 contagion might be challenging on our lifestyle and our work habits, but it is also making us more resilient. As the saying goes, "necessity is the mother of invention", we shall see new innovative ideas and systems in all aspects of our life. I earnestly hope that the lessons we are learning from combatting the coronavirus will help us create a better world for the future.

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Visitors walk through temperature scanners at the Singapore Airshow, amid fears over the spread of the new coronavirus, in Singapore on February 13.

PHOTO: ROSLAN RAHMAN/AFP

all databases.

The travel industry will see a big shift in the habits of the travellers and adventure-seekers. The practice of traveling to multiple cities in a week will stop. People will be using cars more for domestic travels to avoid crowd in an airport terminal or train station. Large cruise-ships may not be very popular anymore. Travelling in small groups will become more common. Trekking and other adventure sports may thrive as not many tourists are into it. Brick and mortar travel agencies will go out of business, while online travel sites may not be able to pull through the losses they will encounter during the current lockdown, unless they diversify and start offering customised packages. Larger hotels and hospitality industry in general will also see a slowdown. Although, smaller hotels may stand resilient to this change of behaviour of the travellers.

ratio is quite poor. It may be mentioned that, for every 10,000 people, Bangladesh has only 3 doctors and 1 nurse. The nursing profession will see a rise in social acceptance and become a sought-after occupation. The health-equipment manufacturers will invest in R&D and will come up with lost-cost solutions. The hospitals will invest in more sophisticated equipment in detecting illnesses.

Telemedicine will thrive in the post-coronavirus days. People will take medical advices from doctors remotely more and more. To avoid the crowd in the hospitals or at a doctor's chamber, patients will seek virtual consultations from doctors over video-chats. Physical pharmacies may see less and less customers, as they will prefer their medicines to be delivered at their doorstep. With recurring orders or subscriptions, delivery of medicines will

reality TV will be a new standard. In the post-coronavirus world, people will be hesitant to use touch-screens. Therefore, other methods of inputs, such as voice commands or gestures, will become more and more popular. This will apply to computers, tablets, phones, kiosks, remote-controllers—anything that requires touching or pressing buttons. Voice-recognition and text-to-speech and speech-to-text technologies will improve and will be able to function correctly across languages and dialects.

We shall be attending many events digitally. Celebrations, felicitations, award ceremonies, concerts, prayer congregations, even weddings will be happening online through various industry-standard interactive collaboration tools. Digital events will have no issues regarding physical capacity. Participants from all over the world will be joining these events, and

Will there be light at the end of this darkness?

TANWIR NAWAZ

Is there light at the end of this COVID-19 darkness? In a world reeling from the unexpected and unrelenting hit from COVID-19, this is an apt question. The whole world including some 2018 countries so far are in shock from a strange virus that seems to have originated from the Wuhan province in China and have spread to far ends of the world, sparing neither class, nor religions, rich or poor, caste nor ethnic groups. In ferocity it has hit such diverse countries like Iran, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Other countries like South Korea, Japan, India and Pakistan and Bangladesh have not been spared either. The scale and the speed of spread and the inflicted numbers have varied. But the end game is not anywhere in sight. No one knows when and how this will end. It is as if the world is in an abyss with no end in sight. But surely there has to be and there will be an end to this storm, this despair and sufferings. Humanity has to survive. It has to survive with faith, determination, technology, research, will and cooperation and mostly love and care. We need each other.

Today on the second week of April, over 1.4 million people have been affected; more than 72,000 people have died. 335,000 people have been deemed to have recovered worldwide. The worst affected people have been USA where the effected numbers are the largest, over 365,000, and over 9,000 dead, Italy next with more than 17,000 people dead, Spain with more than 13,000 people dead and UK with more than 7,000 people dead.

In lesser developed countries where it has not peaked yet, 155 people are dead in India and 20 people in Bangladesh where the confirmed people as of April 7. Many areas of Bangladesh including Narayanganj, parts of Dhaka are now in lockdown. Other parts of Dhaka and rest of the country are in what is being called



People trying to board a truck at Mawna intersection in Gazipur on April 4 in a bid to return to Dhaka.

PHOTO: STAR

partial lockdown.

More countries all over the world are getting infected and those infected are getting worse. The only good news so far has been from China, where no new cases have been reported for the last three days and the lockdown in Wuhan is gradually being lifted. Where and when the whole Pandemic will end nobody knows for sure, or how far it will go before it ends. We are praying for its end.

Bangladesh, where its impact initially was moderate, is beginning to pick up the infected count. In numbers infected it has trebled in only the last three days. It is also suffering, both from its impact and fear. Schools, colleges, universities and businesses have been closed. People have been asked to isolate and quarantine themselves and to stay at home, except for hospitals, pharmacies, and kitchen groceries. On declaration of the closedown, people have left Dhaka in hordes for their

villages and rural homes. Some people on returning from abroad have been asked to quarantine themselves in their homes for a period of two weeks. It is not known how many have obeyed and how many have neglected. There was and is a potential danger that some of the returnees from abroad who may have been infected and came back to Bangladesh and were allowed to return to their homes unsupervised, might have spread the virus among their families and friends. We will not know how badly the situation is for at least another two weeks.

On the economic front and on the commercial side, the effects are just beginning to be felt. Large numbers of garment industry orders are known to have been cancelled or postponed. By this time approximately USD 3.2 billion worth of orders may have been lost. But the industry will recover in time, with will and determination. Small and medium business have been badly

hit. We shall not know the extent of the damages until later. Day labourers, rickshawpullers, slum dwellers have no job, no income and are left bewildered from the shock. Many are crowding the roads and alleys in hope of food assistance. Some social relief have been provided by the government and other people.

As an Urbanist who has been working in the areas of urbanisation, migration and urban transportation in Bangladesh for over 25 years, I am very scared when the controls on movement will be lifted. Greater Dhaka is a metropolitan area of 20 million plus people (worldometer). The density is one of the highest in the world. Because of Corona fear more than 12 million people left in a hurry. As of now the return date deadline is April 16. This should be extended to April 30. The gestation period will give us time and a much wider and deeper picture of the situation and a means of tackling the issues. Once the restrictions are lifted,

those who have moved out of Dhaka on March 27 through March 30, will start pouring back in through launches, trains and buses in huge numbers breaking all the good work of social distancing practiced in the past three weeks.

The close proximity and (GadaGadi) mingling will definitely bring in close physical contacts with those incubated in the interim (both in the city and those returning), but still showing little or no signs of diseases with those not yet affected. We must avoid this by staggering the returns over at least two further weeks to lessen the overcrowding. The lifting of restrictions on travel may be done district by district over a period of two weeks. Factories should be opened in stages; offices should be opened in phases. Schools, colleges and universities should remain shut till after Eid. Mosques should not lift ban on gatherings till after Eid. All prayers including during the Ramadan should be performed at home and not in close gatherings. There will be financial and economic losses. However, lives are more important than financial and economic losses. We shall recoup the financial losses in time. The nation will be better for it.

In the end small and large powers must end all biological experimentations worldwide. SARS MRAS, Ebola have caused the world immense sufferings. The world must learn a lesson from COVID-19 disaster and must come to an agreement to end these kinds of biological experiments. Otherwise, we will all die at some point in a bigger disaster.

The people in this nation should come together spiritually. The nation must come together in love. We must see the end of this thing through together, as we have seen the end of many a disaster. The world will see this thing through, through mutual cooperation, determination and simple doggedness. There shall be an end to this nightmare. There will be light at the end of this darkness.

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