

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Our sudden and decentralised restart is hard to fathom



ZAHID HUSSAIN

Bangladesh's restart is happening, whether science supports it or not.

Justification for the hurry is sought by referring to reopening in other countries, especially China, Germany, Spain, Italy, Denmark, India and several Arab states.

A quick web-search of what these countries have done suggests we may be missing the key lessons -- health system preparedness, gradualism, selectivity, hygiene and social distancing compliance -- from how they are reopening.

Wuhan -- the birth city of the pandemic -- reopened after 76 days of lockdown.

Residents with a government-assigned green Quick Response (QR) code on their mobile phones -- certifying they are safe -- are allowed to go back to work.

In residential communities where no new cases have been reported for 14 days, one person per household with a green QR code can leave the compound two hours per day.

On March 25, public buses started to resume service; three days later, underground trains began running. Businesses and shops have gradually reopened.

Germany acted early and aggressively to roll out comprehensive testing. A lot more people with no or mild symptoms got tested, helping to slow the spread.

The government coordinated all lockdown measures, straightforwardly communicated information to citizens and officials, consulted with experts and used data to guide decisions.

Spain lifted some of the restrictions, allowing businesses whose employees cannot work remotely to reopen.

Manufacturing, construction, and some service workers have been allowed to return subject to strict safety guidelines. Their rate of new infections has been falling.

Italy allowed a narrow range of firms to resume operations at the end of April. In Denmark, schools and daycare centres reopened on April 15. Other restrictions, including a ban on gatherings of more than 10 people, remain in place.

India's nationwide lockdown was one of its strictest. It started reopening with manufacturing and farming in rural areas and neighbourhood convenience stores to provide

relief for small, cash-strapped businesses.

Small retail shops could reopen with half their staff, and with the expectation that people physically and socially distance wearing masks.

Quarantined towns and hotspots across the country remain locked.

Iran reopened mosques in areas consistently free of the coronavirus.

Jordan lifted all restrictions on economic activity, allowing businesses, industries, public transport to resume operation with safety guidelines. Universities and schools remain closed and a night curfew continues.

Malls in Abu Dhabi have reopened at 30 per cent capacity after installing thermal inspection devices. Shoppers are required to wear face masks and gloves at all times.

Saudi authorities have allowed wholesale and retail trade to resume for just two weeks (from April 29 to May 13).

not produced the desired results.

The number of infected cases is rising exponentially.

People find ways to follow their normal routines to engage in activities that provide daily sustenance and togetherness.

Individuals estimate they can go out, meet friends and enjoy the contained virus spread if everyone else is staying home, avoiding social contact.

The problem is when everyone makes the same estimate, all end up going out. Seeing all going out breaks the last straw for those still hanging in, completing the vicious circle.

Compliance with public health orders happens when people share a widespread belief that everyone is complying, as pointed out by the former World Bank Chief Economist Kaushik Basu a few years ago.

Bangladesh has, for all practical purpose, left it to the market to decide when and how

Workers are exposed to health risks in factories with inadequate occupational safety and health measures.

Their health risk is exacerbated by their often extremely crowded and unhygienic housing conditions.

Workers have been stigmatised by the people in their local communities as well as in their home districts.

Economics is supposedly driving the de-facto surrender of the most potent weapon, in the absence of vaccines and therapeutics, against the spread of the virus: social distancing. Have business leaders done their calculus right?

The latest evidence casts doubt.

A Consumer Pulse Survey by the Centre for Enterprise and Society has just assessed consumer sentiments in the context of the pandemic, upcoming Eid, and beyond.

They find consumers most concerned

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RASHED SHUMON

Cars are slowly taking over the streets again after staying off for a good five weeks for the ongoing countrywide shutdown, enforced on March 26 to flatten the curve on coronavirus that has so far infected 13,770 and claimed 214 lives since the first confirmed cases were announced on March 8. The photo was taken from the Mohakhali flyover on Thursday.

Many business owners in Lebanon have not reopened because they thought they will be losing more money if they operate under restrictions in a faltering economy.

Authorities everywhere have reopened selectively after the infection cases started declining (except India) and with a no-nonsense caution that the threat of further infections is far from over.

Staying home is highly encouraged while physical distancing and hygienic practices complied. An adequate network of hospitals and primary health care facilities exist in all these countries.

In Bangladesh, the basic pre-conditions are missing.

Public health professionals say the official figures do not capture the virus spread reality on the ground. Testing rates remain low.

There are concerns about significant "false negatives".

The capacity to test, isolate and treat patients is restricted by fragile public health infrastructure and vastly inadequate personnel.

Enforcement of social distancing through official holidays, restriction on movements, local lockdowns and public advisories have

to open, unlike any other country.

In fairness, the restriction on activities came under increasing strain as millions struggled to make ends meet.

Macro-level collective action problems can quickly surface when a public good is left upon the market to provide without effective central guidance and regulation.

Chaotic return to an elusive normal is a natural outcome.

Garment factories started production, allegedly to avert loss of business to competitors such as Vietnam and China, flouting social distancing and hygiene.

Shop owners have the discretion to open for Eid sales.

Informal sector small operators are naturally responding.

The millions rushing to Dhaka and other virus hotspots could emerge as new vectors of the pandemic. The workers are travelling between home and the workplace. Labour unrest for wage payments is adding fuel to fire.

According to a report by the Brac Institute of Governance and Development, the trade union leaders report a lack of awareness among workers and owners.

about personal and family safety, income and business. A large majority are unsure about the country's ability to recover from the economic shock. At least 84 per cent are cutting back spending.

Eid spending is likely to be deeply depressed, with restaurants and hotels hardest hit.

Except for spending on pharmaceuticals and online learning, all other spending is likely to decrease, the least for groceries, beyond Eid.

Consumer confidence is ebbing.

The fear of contracting the virus underpins the erosion of confidence. This fear, in turn, is rooted in a lack of confidence in the health system. With COVID-19 cases doubling every 5 days, the country is experiencing steepening of the curve.

Nobody can predict the health and economic consequences of such a rapid and uncoordinated reopening of the economy. Faith in herd immunity does not help much in alleviating this radical uncertainty.

A lack of coordinated effort to mitigate the health and economic risks has deepened anxieties.

The 3.5 per cent of GDP stimulus package is inadequate when the economy requires at least 5-6 per cent to support families and firms.

In Bangladesh, the basic pre-conditions for reopening are missing.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Education
Secondary and Higher Education Division
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Secondary Education Sector Investment Program
www.sesip.gov.bd

Memo: DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-438/PVIP(GD-50/a)/2019/967 Date: 09 May, 2020

CORRIGENDUM No. 3

This is being notified to all concerned that the following amendments are made to the Invitation for Bids and Bidding Documents of Tender Package: GD-50a for procurement of equipment for Pre-vocational and Vocational Program (PVIP) (Lot 2: General Electrical Works; Lot 3: General Electronics; Lot 4: General Mechanics) (Invitation ref. no. DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-438/PVIP(GD-50/a)/2019/910; Dated: 12 March 2020).

This Addendum is being issued pursuant to ITB Clause-8 of the Bidding Documents:

SL	Subject to be Amended	Current Contents (Including corrigendum no.2)	Amended Contents (Contents to be read as)
1	Tender Last Selling Date and Time	12.05.2020 up to 17 Hrs. BST	09.06.2020 up to 17 Hrs. BST
2	Tender Submission Date and Time (ITB 24.1)	13.05.2020, at or before 14:00 Hrs. BST	10.06.2020, at or before 12:00 Hrs. BST
3	Tender Opening Date and Time (ITB 27.1)	13.05.2020, at 14:30 Hrs. BST	10.06.2020, at 12:30 Hrs. BST

NOTE: All other Terms and Conditions shall remain unchanged. This CORRIGENDUM No. 3 shall form an integral part of the Bidding Document.

Professor Dr. Shamsun Naher
Joint Program Director (R.C.)
Secondary Education Sector Investment Program
Tel. 01816316842

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Memo: DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-439/PVIP(GD-50/b)/2019/968 Date: 09 May, 2020

CORRIGENDUM No. 3

This is being notified to all concerned that the following amendments are made to the Invitation for Bids and Bidding Documents of Tender Package: GD-50b for procurement of equipment for Pre-vocational and Vocational Program (PVIP) (Lot 1: Civil Construction; Lot 4: Refrigeration and Air Conditioning; Lot 5: Plumbing and Pipe Fittings) (Invitation ref. no. DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-439/PVIP(GD-50/b)/2019/911; Dated: 12 March 2020).

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3	Tender Opening Date and Time (ITB 27.1)	14.05.2020, at 14:30 Hrs. BST	10.06.2020, at 15:00 Hrs. BST

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Professor Dr. Shamsun Naher
Joint Program Director (R.C.)
Secondary Education Sector Investment Program
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