

Total lockdown of the heart

The unspoken truth about post-Covid depression



NUHASH HUMAYUN

ON March 23, nearly two weeks ago, I tested positive for Covid-19. My symptoms are random and sporadic: dry coughs, intense fever, headaches, and a loss of appetite. It's surreal—not to be sick, but to be a certain kind of sick that the entire world is talking about. I have the very disease that's causing global lockdowns, tripling hand sanitiser sales, and shutting down schools. I caught the big bad virus.

The disease is real, the symptoms are real, but here's something they don't tell you—it's devastating for your emotional and mental health.

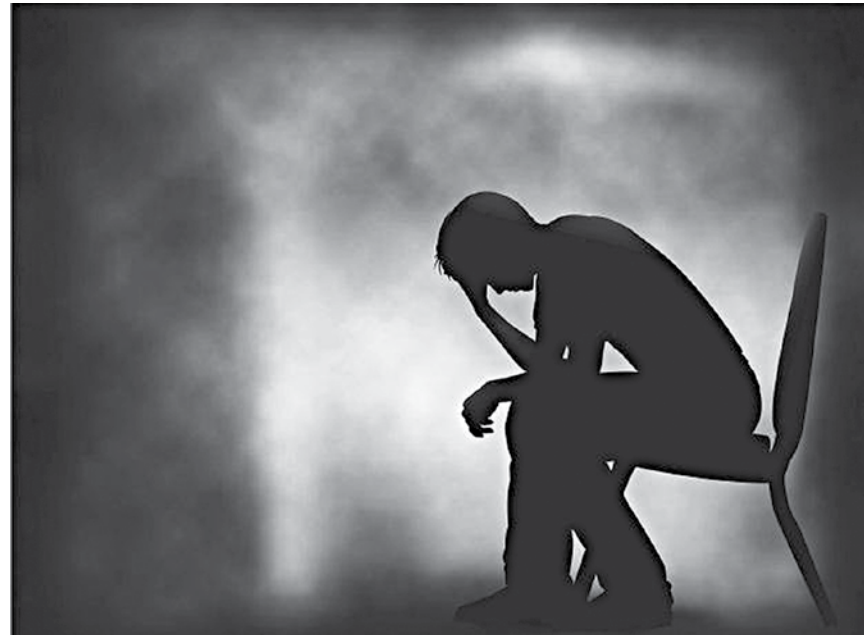
When I received the text message from Labaid stating that my Covid-19 result is positive, I was, well, overwhelmed. The realisation hit me that I would have to isolate myself for a very long time. Weeks, perhaps months. My small room in a Banani apartment would be my entire life—and the tiny adjacent balcony would be my great outdoors.

Yet this was hardly the most overwhelming part. It was the overflow of information. In the middle of a global pandemic, everyone is an expert. My family, relatives in Texas, best friend's cousin—everyone knows exactly what to do when you have Covid. They're not just sure, they're positive.

I was suddenly bombarded with lists of medicine, home remedies, and Covid-home-exercise plans. My inbox is littered with condolences as if I had already died as well as huge lists of vitamins to

take. Some of the lists overlap, others are wildly contradictory. One list mentions a glass of milk every day, another says avoid milk all together since Covid patients are lactose intolerant. Going on the Internet was worse: do I believe the CDC website which says I should self-isolate for a month, or the MIT one which says if I don't have symptoms for 24 hours, I should get re-tested? There was an age where medical information was hard to come by. Doctors were the only ones who really knew anything, and they'd consult heavy books before prescribing things. Before that were darker times when no one truly knew what to do when one was sick, suggesting ailments like cocaine or chopping people's limbs off for minor illnesses. I wondered if the current age of excessive information was truly any different from the age of no information at all.

You think you're used to the lockdown, but the entire perspective changes when you become the Covid patient. Suddenly, you're not staying home to protect yourself. You're locked up in your bedroom to protect the world—from you.



As your friends and co-workers find out you "have it", their reaction is sympathetic, but you can tell there is another thought looming. They are ruminating and calculating the last time they saw you. They are wondering how many feet away from you they were. They are telling their other friends who were there too. There are WhatsApp groups and Messenger threads where you are already being talked about, parallel to them typing, "aww feel better" to you. You know this because within two minutes of you texting a co-worker, your entire office texts you asking how you are doing. Within one minute of texting a loved one, her roommate's friend is "randomly" checking up on you. Of course, this is rational and necessary, to retrace your steps and take safety

measures. No one is against you, they are just for themselves. They just want to feel safe, this isn't personal, right? Yet, why does it feel so personal? You feel like you let the world down. You weren't safe, you took the mask off at the restaurant and you didn't wash your hands for 20 seconds. Your family might be infected by you, your household help might get the virus. You feel like you're filthy, and anyone who is in touch with you is now scared of you. How do you know someone didn't contract the disease from you and die? Shame on you.

Then there's the isolation. You think you're used to the lockdown, but the entire perspective changes when you become the Covid patient. Suddenly, you're not staying home to protect yourself. You're locked up in your

bedroom to protect the world—from you. The isolation eats at you slowly, invading your thoughts. At first, you think you have all the free time in the world. You'll get some much-needed rest, get a little bit of work done every day—micro productivity. But being stuck in one room for over a week kills your perception of night and day, work and leisure. There is no work-life separation, there are no boundaries, not to mention your symptoms keep coming and going, leading you to wonder if the entire result was a false positive.

I wish there was a conclusive way to tie up all these thoughts and emotions, but there isn't one. I wish I could write, I can't wait to recover and test negative again, but it's not that simple.

See, while the isolation is killing me, its coldness also feels warmly familiar. I am almost nostalgic of March 2020, when the first lockdown started. The most terrifying realisation from my isolation was the emotional toll that my "normal" life had on me. As a filmmaker, a communications consultant, and a writer, my "normal" was a relentless hustle. I had no time to breathe, yet all the time to prove myself to a world where the only way to establish one's worth is to be constantly productive.

Yet, I am too tired, too isolated to have an epiphany about my lifestyle. All I know is, while my physical symptoms will hopefully soon wear down, the emotional burden of this experience will continue to be an invisible weight that I must keep lifting. And just like the physical symptoms, it makes it harder to breathe.

Nuhash Humayun is a filmmaker, writer and communications consultant.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The absent voices of development economics

ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN and DEVESH KAPUR

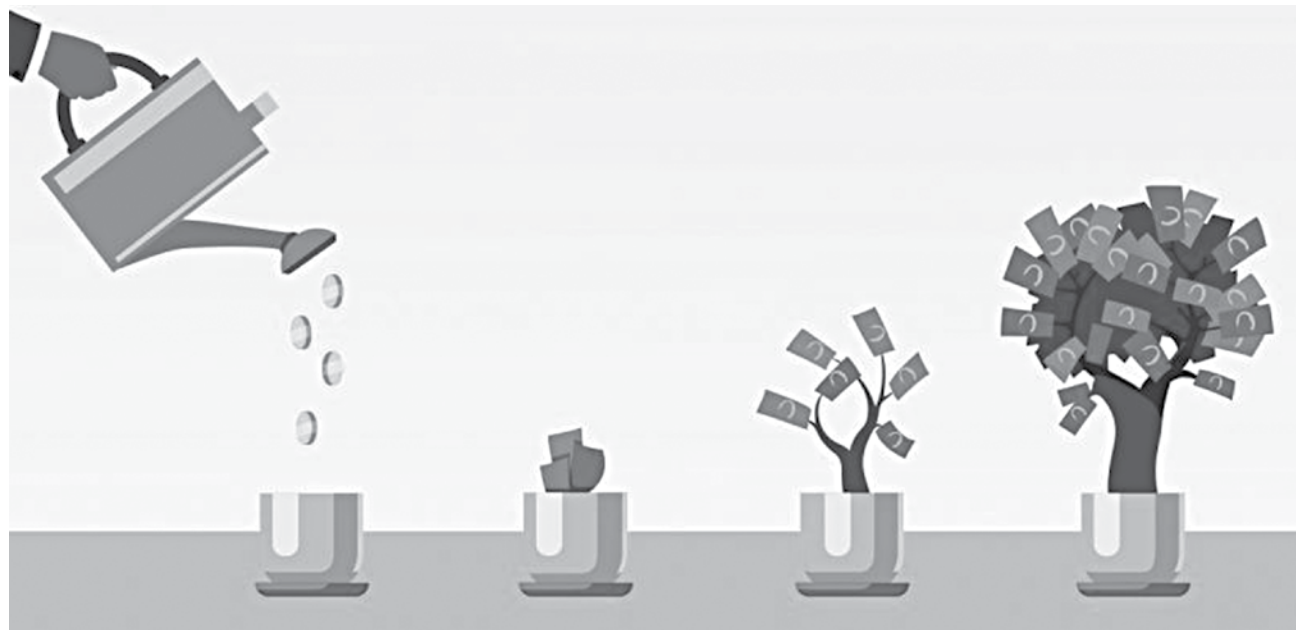
THE lack of representation of marginalised groups in the corridors of power—political, financial, and cultural—is a growing source of global concern. Knowledge confers power, so who creates it matters. As the Nobel laureate economist Paul Samuelson famously said, "I don't care who writes a nation's laws...if I can write its textbooks."

Development economics focuses on improving the well-being of billions of people in low-income countries, but the Global South is severely underrepresented in the field. Unfortunately, a small number of rich-country institutions have appropriated it, with serious consequences. And the problem appears to be getting worse.

Consider the *Journal of Development Economics*, a leading outlet for research papers in the field. Neither the journal's editor nor any of its 10 co-editors are based in a developing country. Just two of its 69 associate editors are, with Africa and Asia completely unrepresented.

Then there is the World Bank's prestigious Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics (ABCDE). The 2019 event celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Bretton Woods conference that established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, but none of the 77 participants were from an institution located in a developing country. And our analysis of the ABCDE's three-decade history shows that just 7 percent of those authoring conference papers have been from developing-world institutions.

The long-standing problem of underrepresentation is being amplified by the growing use of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to test the effectiveness of specific poverty-reduction interventions in low-income countries. Although the RCT movement deserves immense credit for highlighting the need for evidentiary rigour in



development economics, it has had exclusionary consequences.

By virtue of their well-deserved academic reputations, RCT-oriented economists now work at the world's most prestigious universities and research institutions and serve on the editorial boards of top economics journals. This crucial gatekeeping role gives them agenda-setting power. Two decades ago, for example, there were virtually no RCT-based papers in development economics; in 2020, according to our analysis, they accounted for about 40 percent of the articles in the leading journals.

And exclusion characterises the RCT movement itself. At the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), the most influential global centre for development-related RCT research, about 5 percent of the nearly 225 affiliated professors are based in developing countries, with no representation from institutions in East Asia. Moreover, conducting RCTs is expensive, which means that poverty-

reduction research—and funding for it—is increasingly concentrated in the richest universities (J-PAL was established at MIT).

Indeed, the cost of carrying out RCTs can run into millions of dollars per paper, making it difficult for developing-country researchers to study their own countries without genuflecting to wealthy institutions' academic orthodoxies. If these researchers cannot do RCT-based studies, they have little chance of getting published in leading journals, and risk being consigned to second-class status. Even on a generous interpretation of authorship, our analysis suggests that developing-country institutions accounted for less than 10 percent of RCT-based papers in the top six economics journals in 2020.

A subtler cost concerns prioritisation of research. There is an inherent power imbalance between relatively weak developing-country governments and reputationally and financially powerful researchers, as well as tension between what policymakers in lower-income

economies consider important and what academics deem worthy of publication in top journals. These factors surely privilege research that yields high private returns to researchers based in rich countries but meagre public returns to developing-country decision-makers.

True, scholars from developing countries in these elite institutions make important contributions to development economics. But the incentives and priorities of the institutional cultures they inhabit play a powerful role.

The final cost relates to the type of knowledge that is ignored. Several highly successful economies—including South Korea, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, Mauritius, and Botswana—did not rely on RCTs to change their destinies and lift their large populations out of poverty. Yet, academics from these countries generally do not sit on the editorial boards of major journals or participate prominently in development economists' conferences and seminars—an omission that is particularly telling in the case of China, with its

historically unprecedented economic transformation. It is as if these countries' development successes have no lessons to offer.

To preempt the Global North's monopoly of knowledge creation in development economics requires, first, recognising that the Global South has ceded dominance as much as the North's elite institutions have appropriated it. Many developing countries have severely undermined their own universities and knowledge-production systems both through lack of funding and political interference, with the latter being especially pernicious in the social sciences. Unless they remedy this, they will continue to suffer the consequences of the global imbalance.

We also must heed the novelist Kazuo Ishiguro's 2017 Nobel lecture, in which he urged a broadening of "our common literary world to include many more voices from beyond our comfort zones of the elite first-world cultures." That means searching "more energetically to discover the gems from what remain today unknown literary cultures, whether the writers live in far-away countries or within our own communities," while taking "great care not to set too narrowly or conservatively our definitions of what constitutes good literature."

Substitute "development economics" for "literature," and Ishiguro's injunction yields a constructive agenda of corrective action for intellectuals in the Global North. It also suggests that diversity and broader representation are the best safeguards against intellectual narrowness resulting from elite capture.

Arvind Subramanian, a former chief economic adviser to the government of India, is author of *Eclipse: Living in the Shadow of China's Economic Dominance*. Devesh Kapur, Professor of South Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, is the co-author of *The World Bank: Its First Half Century*.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2021. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

QUOTABLE Quote

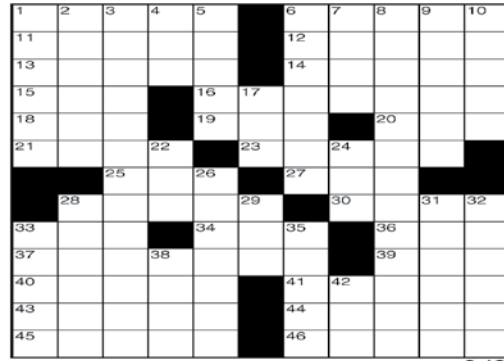


EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886) American poet

You can gain more control of your life by paying closer attention to the little things.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Supports
 - 6 Grating sounds
 - 11 One of the Barrymores
 - 12 Paintball cry
 - 13 Avignon's river
 - 14 Fancy wrap
 - 15 Cut off
 - 16 Do well
 - 18 Little devil
 - 19 Blasting stuff
 - 20 Sewing aid
 - 21 Diamond of music
 - 23 Beer holder
 - 25 "Street Dreams" rapper
 - 27 Hold title to
 - 28 Libya neighbor
 - 30 Quiche base
 - 33 Rickety boat
 - 34 McKellen of "X-Men"
 - 36 Match part
 - 37 Magic setting
 - 39 Be a snoop
 - 40 "A Confederacy of Dunces" writer
 - 41 Fable ending
 - 43 Florida attraction
 - 44 "Skyfall" singer
 - 45 Creates
 - 46 Actions
- DOWN**
- 1 European capital
 - 2 Relaxed
 - 3 Cusp of elimination
 - 4 Writer Follett
 - 5 Sacked out
 - 6 Tuscan dish
 - 7 Quantities: Abbr.
 - 8 Mall outing
 - 9 Load, as a van
 - 10 Exacting
 - 17 Hosp. workers
 - 22 Place down
 - 24 Ram's mate
 - 26 Small pianos
 - 28 Moon of Jupiter
 - 29 Wee bit
 - 31 Jimmy's predecessor
 - 32 Modes
 - 33 Clan symbol
 - 35 Wanderer
 - 38 Tissue additive
 - 42 Exalted poem



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

C	O	M	B	S	H	R	U	B
A	L	O	E	A	T	E	A	S
L	E	O	N	P	E	A	P	O
L	O	N	E	S	T	A	R	
S	A	N	I	T	I	M	S	T
W	R	O	T	E	G	A	P	E
A	G	E	A	R	I	S	E	S
P	O	L	E	S	T	A	R	
I	B	E	R	I	A	H	U	L
R	E	V	E	L	S	I	B	E
K	E	A	T	S	P	A	C	E

BEETLE BAILEY



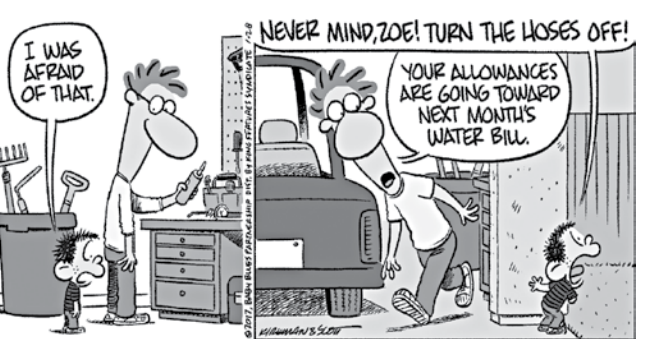
BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.