

coronavirus. The country which is able to take the lead in this matter will be able to survive any future crisis compared to the countries that lag behind in these aspects. A global regime under the auspices of the UN should be launched to effectively and forcefully counter the pandemic instead of countries making individual efforts in this regard.

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Brighter Side of the Global Threat

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The world is currently gripped by a massive crisis of a nature and gravity that it finds difficult to tackle for a number of reasons. Firstly, the source and nature of the pandemic is yet to be identified with certainty. The most severely affected areas of course are the quantum of economic growth and functioning of the industries, businesses and trade that contribute to economic growth, employment and provision of livelihoods. Without getting into the detailed review and analysis of these factors this article will focus on highlighting the benefits resulting from both the reduced demand for energy due to lockdown as well as from falling energy prices in the world market. This leads to lowering the country's import bill and reducing corresponding pressure on foreign currency reserves. This study will also identify some small employment opportunities created by Covid-19. The other areas covered are environment, education, health, social and sociological benefits.

Employment Opportunities

While the rest of the world is in the process of rebooting their economies, China has shown a way for utilizing the opportunity offered by the global demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical equipment to counter Covid-19 by producing large quantities of face masks including N-95, test kits and ventilators. In Pakistan also, in a short time, a major hand sanitizer manufacturing plant has come up in Karachi and a face mask cottage industry has sprouted up in the country. There is also news of development of an indigenous low-cost ventilator, though it is still at the prototype stage. The government has also given certain incentives and allowed the reopening of construction industry in the country. These developments have created some employment opportunities.

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Energy

Our main users of energy are industry, power sector, transport and agriculture along with the commercial, institutional and household sectors. Except for agriculture and household all other sectors have suffered large-scale closure due to lockdown and thus resulted in substantially reducing demand for energy. Educational institutions and business establishments have largely been closed whereas transport has been operating at a much smaller scale. Just to give a rough idea of reduction in demand, our petroleum imports fell by more than 37 percent from PKR 170 billion in February to PKR 106 billion in March. This reduced the burden on our foreign exchange reserves as well as the government's budgetary expenditure. Logistical problems in international trade and shipping caused by Covid-19 disruption pose a considerable risk to our energy supply line in an emergency situation. This should act as a motivating factor to expedite development of domestic sources of renewable energy and oil/gas.

Environment

Prolonged lockdown and large-scale closures of industry and transport have already brought about a decrease in emissions of greenhouse gases worldwide and resulted in visible environmental improvement and logically an improvement in global temperatures. Reports from various sources are already indicating a return of aquatic and atmospheric wildlife to their natural habitats due to lower pollution levels and improved marine and atmospheric ecology. This environmental improvement would likely reduce our projected expenditure on mitigation and adaptation measures. It may also reduce our dependence on international environmental funding for adaptation which was already in jeopardy due to United States' (US) withdrawal from its commitments to Conference of the Parties (COP-21) made in November 2015. Hopefully humanity would learn a lesson for future from this episode and reduce the level of anthropogenic activities damaging our planet. They should also plan short, periodical lockdowns for repairing the damage already caused.

Education

The educational system and teaching methodology have already undergone a fundamental change during the lockdown and closure of educational institutions. All educational activities are now being conducted online. This change would now be long term and perhaps permanent for a number of reasons. These include cost reduction, time saving, flexibility, and convenience for both students and teachers. This

should also make quality education affordable for a large section of students who are unable to afford it presently. It would also allow greater parental supervision and control over children resulting in better grooming and character building, the opportunities for which are very limited in the existing schooling environment.

Health

Diseases of the modern age like hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and various psychological problems are largely the result of stress caused by economic rat-race, unhealthy lifestyles, overwork and lack of rest and sleep, etc. The Covid-19 pandemic will likely bring about a major change in work systems by promoting work from home and flexible timings. This would not only reduce stress and give relief from stress-related ailments, it would also provide more time for family, friends and leisure. This change will bring about an improvement in the working population's health and reduce their own and their employers' health bills.

Family and Social Life

The modern lifestyle has badly affected the family structure and social norms and values. Mobile phones and internet, while providing valuable tools for acquiring knowledge, information and communication, have also made people self-centered and unsocial, creating many problems within the families and the society at large. Hopefully huddling together with the family during long lockdown periods will lead to a re-bonding of the family, restoring stronger family structure and better social etiquette and courtesies, thus leaving a positive impact on the family members' temperaments and behavior with each other as well as the outside world.

Sociological Benefits

A large part of humanity has drifted away from spirituality, God and religion, thus creating a myriad of problems in society. Extreme fear generated by natural calamities beyond human control inevitably prompts people to turn to religion and God to seek help and protection. Covid-19 has also caused people of almost all faiths to turn toward God and seek forgiveness and deliverance from the calamity. A sort of large-scale spiritual revival has been witnessed on social media as well as places of worship. A general revival of higher levels of spirituality in life should logically result in the society adopting higher moral values. This should also bring down crime levels in the society.

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