



PIDE

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No. 3

Pakistan's Struggle with COVID-19 Quarantines

COVID-19 has virtually shut down the world.

Pakistan has been slow in response but seems to be catching up as Coronavirus spreads in the country. At the beginning, officials were somewhat casual about people entering Pakistan from overseas. In particular, lack of proper quarantine facilities and inappropriate screening procedures resulted in several infected people reaching the community from various international borders.

Yesterday we recommended that we should immediately consider a phased lockdown (i.e., curfew without movement) in cities and localities across Pakistan (PIDE COVID-19 Bulletin No. 2). Today we are going to focus on quarantines.

The Chinese Approach

How did China manage quarantines? The Chinese moved in the following phases:

Phase 1: Complete lockdown of businesses, and no human interaction at all levels in a **phased** way across the country. Authorities considering the spread of the virus, shut down cities and localities for a period of a week to 15 days strictly imposing no movement. During this period administrative arrangements were made for logistics and support for the needy. The idea was to maintain distance among people as well as populations for a stretch of time to prevent the virus from spreading.

Phase 2: Intra-city movement remain strictly controlled even after the lockdown as determined by the spread of the virus. If someone desired to travel to another city, he/she was supposed to stay in a quarantine for 14 days. Initially, the cost of quarantine was paid by Chinese government but later by the traveller himself/herself. If someone could afford it, there was an option to quarantine in a hotel.

Phase 3: Even when the intra-city travel ban was lifted, quarantine for 14 days continued for those who were travelling from abroad, and were placed in a quarantine facility or hotel, depending on his/her affordability.

Quarantine also followed certain methods and rules to both make it convenient for the sick as well as contain the cost of running the quarantine. These were:

- Self-quarantine, where health officials saw that facilities were adequate, and enforcement was possible. Enforcement meant use of monitoring mechanisms (locks and devices to see if doors had been opened) and strict (fines and possible sentences).

- Quarantine at own expense for those who could pay.
- Forced quarantine with 3-4 hour monitoring by trained nurses with adequate protective gear.
- Ensuing adequate testing and medication to minimize quarantine time and cost.

On the supply side, the strategy included the following measures:

- They were quickly able to assess all spare capacity for housing people with the seizure of economic activity. They found spaces like university dormitories, sports stadiums, community centres, hotels and several other spaces that with quick effort they could convert to a quarantine space. These were seen as overnight hospitals developed by China.
- These places were converted to a reasonable level of sanitation and living standards before people were moved in.
 - Hygienic sanitation was guaranteed so that the toilet water was not contaminated.
 - Clean water and food provisioning was prepared for.
- Provision of lunch and dinner boxes in a hygienic environment to all those quarantined.
- Nurses were deployed in these quarantine facilities to have regular temperature check of patients 3-5 times a day.

An Approach to Develop Pakistan's Quarantine Policy

It is imperative that the government develops a quarantine policy that is cost effective and efficient. Certain principles need to be followed.

1. Ensure that the infected are separated and properly taken care of while minimizing costs. Let those who can buy their own quarantine:

- a. Do not stress the system with people who can afford to pay. Let people who can and have resources self-quarantine. But self-quarantine should be adequately regulated, monitored and sanctioned.
- b. Hotels and private hospitals should be encouraged to set up quarantine centres for those who can pay. This has the added advantage of keeping some business going

2. Mass quarantine: Mass quarantine with appropriate hygienic environment, with complete provision of washrooms, meal boxes, nurses and paramedical staff, and hygienic sanitation. The mass quarantine facilities should be appropriately managed to minimise contagion exposure because of herding. (see Table 1 to 4 for the total number of people who can be accommodated in stadiums and educational institutions in Pakistan). These can be of the following types.

- a. **Using hotels:** Hotels can be used as quarantines, just like China, if the patient can afford it.
- b. **Use of educational institutions and similar public facilities:** Utilise educational institutions, national sports stadiums, forts and expo-centres as quarantines across the country with minimal resource base.

3. Gender sensitivity: Maintain cultural sensitivity in managing quarantines, especially those linked to females by providing female staff and honouring their desire for segregation.

Other guidelines include:

- **Costs can be contained by involving private contractors and owners:** However, this will mean the government will bear the cost of monitoring and for success this will have to be good monitoring.
- **Quarantine policy must be effectively costed:** Quarantine facilitation will reduce the cost by concentrating resources to specified quarantine places. Initially the government can bear the associated cost (rent of a place, meal, nurses, paramedical staff, and sanitation charges), later transferring it to those quarantined if he/she can afford it.
- **Coordination:** It is no secret that coordination remains a huge problem everywhere in Pakistan. Managing the pandemic including the quarantine will be a huge effort. If poorly managed it will neither be cost-effective nor contain the epidemic. Decision makers and those implementing it are required to cooperate to cope with this pandemic.
- **Monitoring and sharing of information and developing regular reports to some situation room which coordinates and pushed effective implementation will be critical.**
- **Budgeting the quarantines:** If a quarantine facility is shifted to educational institutions, or to a national sports stadiums, the allocated budget transfer across the line institutions should not be a problem. Block budget can be allocated for this purpose to deal with pandemic.
- **Involvement of LIAs:** Involve law-enforcing agencies in maintaining the protocol of the quarantines and strict monitoring.
- **Coordinated Awareness:** Awareness mechanisms and stakeholder engagement (businesses, politicians, and the public) at all levels is necessary.

Table 1: Number of Stadiums Across the country

	Province	No. of Stadiums
1.	Punjab	23
2.	Sindh	10
3.	KPK	2
4.	Balochistan	3
5.	Islamabad	3
	Total	42

Table 2: Stadium Capacity for Quarantine

Average area	Average Area (sq.ft)	Total No.	Average Total Area (sq.ft)	Carrying Capacity for Quarantine (if 20 sq. ft per person is required)
Football Stadium	57,600	16	921,600	46,080
Cricket Stadium	1,350	20	27,000	1,350
Hockey Stadium	16, 327	6	97,962	4,898
	Total Capacity			52,328

Table 3: Number of Educational Institutes in Pakistan

	Educational Institutes	Total No.
1.	Primary	172,200
2.	Middle Education	46,800
3.	Secondary/ High School Education	30,900
4.	Higher Secondary / Inter Colleges	5,200
5.	Technical & Vocational Institutes	3,700
6.	Degree Colleges	1,657
7.	Universities	186

Table 4: Educational Institutes' Capacity for Quarantine

Educational Institutes	Total No.	Average Classrooms	Classrooms × total no.	Average Area (if average classroom is of 900 sq. ft.)	Carrying Capacity for Quarantine (if 20 sq. ft per person is required)
Primary	172,200	5	861,000	4,305,000	215,250
Middle Education	46,800	10	468,000	4,680,000	234,000
Secondary/ High School Education	30,900	15	463,500	6,952,500	347,625
Higher Secondary / Inter Colleges	5,200	20	104,000	2,080,000	104,000
Technical & Vocational Institutes	3,700	20	74,000	1,480,000	74,000
Degree Colleges	1,657	40	66,280	2651,200	132,560
Universities	186	60	11,160	669,600	33,480
Total Capacity					1,140,915

Data sources:

1. <http://www.worldstadiums.com/asia/countries/pakistan.shtml>
2. Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19

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PIDE COVID-19 Bulletin is an initiative by the Institute in response to the current pandemic, which is bound to have serious consequences for the country, specifically for its economy. The Bulletin would carry research that would aid in an informed policymaking to tackle the issue.

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