

## EDITORIAL

**MYTHS AND MYSTERIES ABOUT COVID-19:  
LESSONS FOR PAKISTAN****Tehseen Iqbal**

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The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic. Although experts first identified coronaviruses in the mid-1900s, they have likely been circulating in human populations for thousands of years. The major countries have been accused by each other of spreading this virus in the world intentionally or by accident. Some studies reported that this virus has a potential to become a bioweapon. Professor Sachs said that origin of COVID-19 should be looked into. Sir Jeremy Farrar suspected that the virus was man-made. During this debate, origin of COVID-19 remains a mystery. The Sane Advice by World Health Organization is that countries need a public health system that can respond to the deliberate release of chemical and biological agents. Present day war is fought on many fronts. So, all sections of society should be vigilant and respond effectively when need arises.

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The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). This novel virus was first identified from an outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, and attempts to contain it there failed, allowing it to spread across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020.<sup>1</sup> As of August 25, 2022, the pandemic had caused more than 596,119,505 cases and 6,457,101 deaths around the globe, making it one of the deadliest in human history.<sup>2</sup> In Pakistan 1,550,298 cases and 30,467 deaths are recorded as on 23 July 2022 and cases are once again increasing in the country.<sup>3</sup>

**Myth about origin of COVID-19**

Although experts first identified coronaviruses in the mid-1900s, they have likely been circulating in human populations for thousands of years. Some coronaviruses, such as SARS, MERS, and SARS-CoV-2, have a greater impact on populations.<sup>4</sup> As the great development in the field of genetic technologies and the production of vaccines collided with the emergence of new pathogens, the latest of which is the emerging SARS-CoV-2 virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic around the world. The major countries have been accused by each other of spreading this virus in the world intentionally or by accident.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, these allegations have targeted research conducted at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan, China, funded through a subaward from NIAID grantee EcoHealth Alliance. The naturally occurring bat coronaviruses studied through this subaward were significantly, genetically different from SARS-CoV-2 and, therefore, could not have caused the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>6</sup> A renowned Economist Jeffrey Sachs from America

claimed that the SARS-CoV-2 that caused the Covid-19 pandemic did not break out of natural reasons, instead came 'out of a US biotechnology lab'. He negates WHO and also claims that COVID-19 virus was not a natural spillover.<sup>7</sup> As on August 25, 2022, Covid-19 cases reported from China were 6,224,767 and deaths reported were 24,557. While from USA Cases reported were 92,615,784 and deaths reported were 1,031,062.<sup>2</sup> If it were from China, cases and deaths would have been more in China. Possibly, infection affects the most the area where infection starts!

**Mystery: Is Corona virus a bioweapon?**

Why was this virus studied in laboratories of different countries? Answer given was 'for its vaccine development.' But the next question is that before COVID-19 pandemic, who knew that its vaccine would be required. So, another theory is that this virus was being studied to develop a bioweapon. Some studies reported that this virus has a potential to become a bioweapon. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define bioterrorism as 'the intentional release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs that can sicken or kill people, livestock, or crops.'<sup>8</sup> Many viral agents have been studied and/or weaponized, including some of the Bunyaviridae (especially Rift Valley fever virus), Ebolavirus, many of the Flaviviridae (especially Japanese encephalitis virus), Machupo virus, Coronaviruses (SARS-Cov-2 that causes COVID-19), Marburg virus, Variola virus, and yellow fever virus.<sup>9</sup> Washington Times in its January 26, 2020 issue said, "Coronavirus may have originated in lab linked to China's biowarfare program." Famous US economist Jeffrey Sachs, who led a two-year probe into the pandemic's origins, said he was 'pretty convinced' the virus was the result of 'US Lab Biotechnology.' Professor Sachs admitted 'We don't know for sure. But there's enough evidence that it should be looked into

and it's not being investigated —not in the US, not anywhere.'<sup>10</sup> Sir Jeremy Farrar, an eminent British expert admitted in a private email in February 2020 that a 'likely explanation' was that the virus was man-made. But the British scientist was shut down by his counterparts in the US who warned further debate about the origins of the virus could damage 'international harmony'. Now, as per new evidence, fever carrying mosquitoes that were studied in Ukraine biolabs were used to spark dengue pandemic in Cuba. Despite not denying its involvement in the Ukrainian laboratories' cooperation, Washington did not acknowledge that it had conducted biological weapon research there. Moscow asserted that Washington and Kiev (Ukraine) had planned to develop biological weapons components near Russia with the purpose of using them to attack the Nation (Russia).<sup>11</sup> During this debate, origin of COVID-19 remains a mystery.

### Lessons for Pakistan

The sane advice by World Health Organization (WHO) is that countries need a public health system that can respond to the deliberate release of chemical and biological agents. Regrettable though this message may be, the use of poison gas in the war between Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 1980s, the recent anthrax incidents in the United States, and the attack with sarin nerve agent, 6 years earlier, on the Tokyo underground, illustrate why it is necessary to prepare.<sup>12</sup> Present day war is fought on many fronts. So, all sections of the society should be vigilant and respond effectively when need arises. Attention of the readers is drawn towards a few incidents in Pakistan: Dengue causing mosquitoes, Cotton pest attack, and Lumpy Skin Disease in Cows

may be bio-attacks. On the economic front, loss of agricultural land for housing schemes, and mango trees cutting for developing housing projects are alarming. Mangoes export earns us foreign exchange. All of the above may harm our country economically. Medical field has also been a target for economic strangulation of Pakistan as doctors send remittances in large amount.

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