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Thu, 25 Aug 2022 Today's Paper

Onset of COVID-19 fourth Wave: An 'Existential Threat' demands 'Extraordinary Measures'

16 August 2021 01:55 am 0 - 657

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The facets of the human needs are linked to the concept of "security". As a result, eliminating the threat to human survival requires immediate attention. In the context of a pandemic, the spread of COVID-19 necessitates immediate action to control the spread and cure the patients. In modern discourses of security, it clarifies the movement of the "referent object" of security (According to current definitions, referent objects include not only the state but also individuals and non-state actors) can claim immediate safeguarding measures for survival-then, as a remedy, taking such immediate measures becomes of paramount importance.



Causing an "existential threat" to the lives of people

Sri Lanka, like many other small states, has been unquestionably vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. The COVID spread has now gone through three waves of occurrence since March 2020. The Delta variant surfaced in India, making it the 'epicenter' of COVID-19 in April-May 2021, and Sri Lanka began reporting Delta infected cases in June, not being an exception to cross-broader vulnerabilities of a virus spread. The country is now going through the highest reported deaths on a regular basis entering to the fourth wave. The death toll come to 5464 on August 12, 2021— realizing the deadly spread of the Delta variant across the country. COVID-19, according to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), is a "rainstorm" with catastrophic consequences. The pandemic has previously been identified as an "existential threat" by a number of recent multidisciplinary studies, making the security worry universal. It depends on how important it is to the country, and putting safeguards in place necessitates some specific measures.

In a nutshell about the discipline, during the 1990s, Security Studies enlarged their scope of analysis. The decision-making process involved in an "existential threat" (a threat to the survival of any object mentioned above) is demanded for exceptional resolution, as Robert Cox, a pioneer in Critical Security Studies, says.

As a result, the actors participating in the resolution are urged to make the necessary political decisions to "securitize" the threat by establishing a security perimeter. As a result of this political decision-making process, the threat becomes more obvious, and the public is evaluated in the context of "securitization". COVID-19 has been classified as a securitized phenomenon thus, requires cautious involvement. The virus is "existential" to the level of precaution taken by an individual, i.e., minimizing the risk of contracting and exposure to quick vaccination, which would reduce death-related complications. However, the COVID-19 declaration of an "existential threat" to humanity all across the world is accompanied by a slew of additional problems, for which simple safeguards are insufficient. That itself looks into more measures to avoid an individual from a threat situation.

The economic collapse

Despite the government's refusal to acknowledge it, Sri Lanka has entered the fourth wave of the COVID-19 scenario. The Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) claimed the first stage of the fourth wave of the COVID-19 a few weeks ago. People are experiencing an uncontrollable spread of the Delta variation triggering life and death struggles. Sri Lanka is in a vulnerable position not only because of the detrimental impact of the economic resources, but also because the single most powerful counterproductive measure – poor economic governance – has been the dominating imperative to society for many years. This would shift the state's focus, allowing it to adopt appropriate "exceptional measures" to defeat the severe spread of the virus. It is critical to make timely relevant computations and policy judgments.

The government has declared the country's (re)opening on August 1, after over two months of partial closure, and has relaxed the inter-provincial travel ban and restored government services. The logic is compelling. The declared "economic crisis," in which the government's revenue streams are jeopardized by the lockdown measures, would intensify if the country remains under lockdown. This reasoning is unrealistic in order to meet "extraordinary measures" to control the spread of a deadly virus.

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According to the World Bank, the COVID outbreak has had a "significant" impact on Sri Lanka's economy. In comparison to the year 2020, the second quarter of 2021 shows a 4.1% GDP increase, whilst the year 2020 shows the minus economic growth experienced for the second time since Independence. The other was in 2001, when the country was at the height of its war. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, continued to suffer from severe currency depreciation and a trade deficit. In 2021, the government debt as a percentage of GDP is 104.8%, up from 100% in 2020. The exchange rate declined by 6.5% from January to March 2021, due to a shortage of US\$ (foreign currency on the market). The investment and production industries suffered as a result. With daily challenges in the marketplace, labor, and manufacturing, the economic crisis has been worsening.

Health crisis impacts lives

Pandemic histories as well as the experience of major health crises are not new to the world. According to reports, the Spanish Flu caused about 15 million people deaths between 1918 and 1919, while H2N2 killed 2-3 million people between 1957 and 1958. HIV/AIDS is said to have caused 32 million people's death worldwide. Researchers contend, however, that none of these global viruses has had a greater impact on human resilience than COVID-19. Certain significant flaws, such as the global impact of the present epidemic being caused by unhealthy globalized behaviors, disinformation leading to unnecessary decisions, and the breakdown of the environment and political governance.

A month later, Sri Lanka began the first lockdown in 2020, titled "revitalizing the COVID-19 crisis," in which I focused on the "vulnerabilities" of the new-normal which necessitate resilience measures. Every wave is worse than the one before it, and the question is whether Sri Lanka has learned from its lessons. For more than a year, the health sector has been undergoing the 'test-trace-treat' regulatory procedure. At present some nation's teaching hospitals declared "emergency preparation". The actions were performed as a proactive step. However, the reality is that health-care resources are rapidly dwindling, including doctors and nurses, who are becoming infected with the virus, and auxiliary services are also in jeopardy. With the inflow of infected patients, hospitals are running out of critical equipment. The reality is that the health-care system will soon be confronted with a spillover effect that will render the COVID-19 fourth wave no longer combatable.

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Unlike in the previous months, Sri Lanka has adopted a vaccination roll-out policy, with the goal of vaccinating all people above the age of 30 with at least the first dose by September. However, the country must take a few stringent efforts to track down unvaccinated individuals. With the first dosage, some provinces report a relatively low population. People were afraid and anxious, as they would be if they had never experienced a health catastrophe of this magnitude before. As a result, corresponding actions for health, social and economic sustainability are required.

Risk of deteriorating 'extraordinary measures'

Sri Lanka, once again, is not immune to the tangle of parallel crises that arose as a result of the pandemic. They are intricately related and work in concert. Having a robust database for assessing the lesser and larger hazards is one technique to measure the situation. These dangers can be in various forms i.e., financial, health-related, or economic. Manipulation of data and undermining the reality of the virus's

spread are two major criticisms. As previously stated, the COVID-19 attack on human survival resilience also satisfies the definition of an "existential threat." As a result, there is no excuse for the government to deviate from the actual danger and only focus on superficial component of the dilemma.

The research also demonstrates that when the lockdown is lifted, the economic drop does not quickly rise into a 'V shape' recovery. If we don't stop the virus from spreading, the structural causes will have a severe influence on society. When they see a higher number of infected after being vaccinated, some industrialized states have already gone beyond the "vaccine-only approach." When half of the population is fully vaccinated with the second dose, the United States will become the epicenter of the highest number of infected cases in August 2021. China, for example, recognizes the Delta variant's dangerous character and has taken extraordinary measures to combat it. As a result, the long-lasting "extraordinary measure" remains a universal guideline, and the ideal measure is "no-infection spread," where some unique intrusive measures are still applicable along health measures being paramount in a deadly pandemic situation.

The author currently serves at the Department of International Relations, University of Colombo and former Consultant to Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration.

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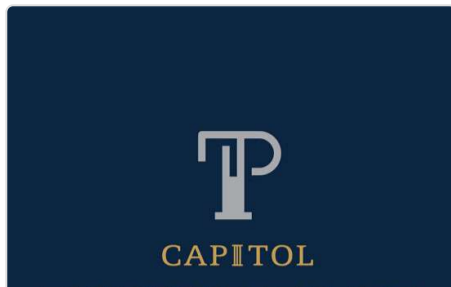
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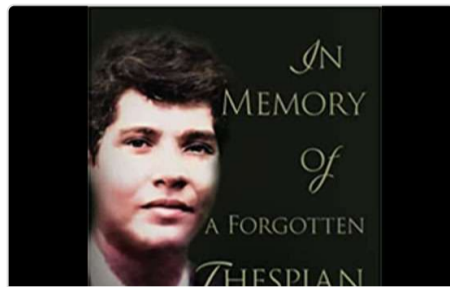
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