

KASHMIR
OBSERVER

Printed & Published by Sajjad Haider on behalf of the Kashmir Observer LLP
Published from: # 5- Boulevard, Srinagar-190001
Printed at: KT Press Pvt. Ltd, Rangreth Ind Area, Srinagar.
RNI Registration No: 69503/98
Postal Registration No-L/159/KO/SK/2014-16
Editor-in-Chief: Sajjad Haider
Legal Counsel: Tasaduq Khwaja
Switchboard: (0194) 2106304
Editorial: (0194) 2502327
Email editorial: editor@kashmirobservers.net

K O V I E W

Lingering Covid challenge

In India, the Covid cases have drastically reduced after the third wave that swept the country in January-February. In the last twenty-four hours, just over 1000 new cases were reported and 26 people lost their lives to the disease. This at a time when there has been a fresh spread in some European and Asia-Pacific countries such as South Korea, Germany, Austria and New Zealand. Similarly, there has been a resurgence of the infection in China and Hong Kong, the two states which otherwise had reigned in the contagion. China which follows a zero-Covid strategy put nearly 30 million people under lockdown. The country used drones and robot dogs to force people to stay indoors.

Now there are reports that Omicron sub-variants are infecting people in developed countries like the US. The virulence and the transmissibility rate of this variant is still being determined. As a result, the US has extended the mask mandate through May 3 amid the Covid uptick. The US government has also renewed the COVID-19 public health emergency, allowing millions of Americans to keep getting free tests, vaccines and treatments for at least three more months.

So, it is premature to rule out more Covid waves and we have to be prepared for them. The world has been through several successive waves of the Covid-19 pandemic which have infected millions and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. With the abating of the Omicron wave which broke out early this year, there was a temporary sense of relief across the world. The economies have started re-opening in most parts of the world. There is a realization that the worst is over and the pandemic is gradually on its way out.

But fresh outbreaks have dispelled this illusion. It is not clear yet what would be the future shape of the Covid-19 virus that was unleashed on the world in February 2020 from Wuhan in China. Whether herd immunity will save us? More so, when some countries like China continue to follow Zero-Covid policy, something which is becoming difficult to achieve with more transmissible variants coming along. Whether the virus will become endemic in some milder form like our everyday cold. Or whether deadlier variants of the virus are on their way. Already there are reports of the sub-variants of Covid-19 rearing their head. And the fresh outbreaks across the world could be traced to them.

So far, Covid-19 has turned out to be a very stubborn virus. Despite full vaccination by a large mass of people across the globe, the outbreaks have not stopped. Here's hoping that the new Covid variants become milder so that people can live with them. But meanwhile, the governments and the people can't afford to let their guard down. There is a need to continue to follow Covid precautions in public.

O T H E R O P I N I O N

Inflation marks a new pain point

Retail inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), grew at 6.95% in March. The latest inflation number has surprised analysts. A Bloomberg poll of economists put this number at 6.4%. March is the third consecutive month when CPI has stayed above the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s tolerance band of 6%. Given the fact that the March numbers do not capture the full impact of fuel-price hikes, inflation is expected to gain momentum in April. To be sure, fuel is not the only factor driving inflation. Food inflation has breached the 7% mark and is expected to stay at elevated levels, given the global surge in food prices. Economists also expect core inflation to remain at high levels as businesses pass on the rise in input costs to consumers.

What does this mean for the Indian economy? The higher-than-expected inflation number will expedite the normalisation of monetary policy, not just on the liquidity front but also in terms of interest rate hikes. Given the fact that the inflationary surge is accompanied by a continuing slack in economic output — the Index of Industrial Production growth in February was 1.7%, a percentage point lower than the forecast by the Bloomberg poll of economists — this will lead to some pain.

There is a class aspect to the inflationary pain in the economy. Because the poor spend a bigger share of their income on food, higher food inflation also means a greater squeeze on their purchasing power. When seen in this context, the government's decision to extend the free ration scheme by another six months is a welcome move. Last, but not least, is the question of inflationary noise in government finances. Both taxes and government spending are measured in nominal terms and rising inflation will give an artificial boost to both these numbers. It is important that policymakers do not get swayed by what might be an inflationary upward bias in spending and revenue collection numbers — because this is not a genuine pickup in economic activity or fiscal boost.

Hindustan Times



Ukrainian servicemen ride on a fighting vehicle in Kyiv. Photo by Vadim Ghirda/AP

Russia-Ukraine War Prolonged War of Attrition

Wajahat Qazi

Admittedly speculative, it appears that the war in and over Ukraine is a 'long haul' war. Russia may capture more territory, consolidate its gains and use these in negotiations and 'peace' talks. If this scenario pans out, then Ukraine will, to use a metaphor from elsewhere, become a 'moth eaten' Ukraine. To state the obvious, this status will galvanize and provoke Ukrainian nationalists to continue their resistance — skirmishes, guerrilla attacks and even combat of a limited nature — a condition that might be seen somewhat tolerable by Russia

Shorn of accretions, bombast and battlefield excesses or successes, the war in and over Ukraine appears to be the first militarized front in Cold War 2.0. This inference (or extrapolation if you may) accrues, in the main from the nature of weaponry given to Ukraine — mostly in the nature of ones that assist in dragging the war and not winning it) and the statements of the US president. So which way will the battlefield turn? Contrary to triumphalist commentary (which has propaganda value), the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not failed; it has stalled. But stalling can also be construed as failure, given the Russian military machine's optimistic assumptions about itself and Russia's sense of self.

What, at this stage, would stalling mean — both in narrow and broad terms?

Technically and tactically, the reasons for stalling are obvious: overstretched Russian supply lines and logistics are its key vulnerabilities. All that Ukrainian forces need to do, is to attack these vulnerabilities, and make Russian advances difficult. But this cannot be a long term strategy: Russia is a state that can galvanize its resources and oil its military machine to seize the initiative again. It can also indulge in feints and manoeuvres that addle the Ukrainian forces. For example, feints like lulls in fighting, withdrawal and reconfiguration of forces can confuse Ukrainians, making them believe in battlefield withdrawals. This can then be exploited by Russian forces to make fuller and more vigorous assaults on key Ukrainian vulnerabilities. The issue then becomes of attrition: who will be worn out first or in crude terms, who will blink first?

On the surface, if the merit and rationale of unprecedented sanc-

tions is to be believed, these will hit the centre of gravity of Russia's military machine, making it difficult for Russia to sustain its military campaign. Complemented by a quasi-hybrid fighting — guerrilla plus conventional campaigns against Russians by Ukrainian forces, Russia's 'will and resolve to fight' will be weakened. This then can become a predicate for negotiations and peace talks. If this is the dominant paradigm of thinking in the West, it is flawed. For Russia, the stakes are high; it is not merely about Ukraine and its status. The war aims are wider and deeper. Plus there is Russian prestige involved as well.

boxed into a corner and if pursuing the Ukraine war is viewed by Western strategists as also being a component of 'regime change' in Russia, the country, with its loose nuclear doctrines retains the ultimate weapon to force choices on the West. Or, if escalation, through advanced weaponry to Ukrainian forces that if not balance but blunt Russian weaponry is chosen as an option, then Ukraine actually becomes a clear and present theatre of war between the West and Russia. Yet again, it is attrition that becomes key.

Against this backdrop, what options are likely to be made operational?

Admittedly speculative, it appears that the war in and over Ukraine is a 'long haul' war. Russia may capture more territory, consolidate its gains and use these in negotiations and 'peace' talks. If this scenario pans out, then Ukraine will, to use a metaphor from elsewhere, become a 'moth eaten' Ukraine. To state the obvious, this status will galvanize and provoke Ukrainian nationalists to continue their resistance — skirmishes, guerrilla attacks and even combat of a limited nature — a condi-

tion that might be seen somewhat tolerable by Russia. What will tilt the balance of forces will be the kind and nature of support that the West will give to Ukrainian nationalists. I would surmise that, from a macro, broader perspective, the West will maintain the robustness and ferocity of sanctions on Russia and, at the same time, arm Ukrainian nationalists to the extent of bleeding the Russian military machine. It would appear, short of a full war, where NATO and even American forces get involved, but which risk the use of nuclear weapons by Russia, there might not be other options available (or usable) to the West.

The war in and over Ukraine then morphs into the first militarized battle front into what is now decidedly Cold War 2.0. China will draw its own conclusions from the saga and perhaps enhance and amplify its military and naval capability modernization efforts more vigorously. The world then becomes a more militarized place, divided into blocs defined by either balancing or bandwagoning by other states. In this world, diplomacy lest the fraught militarized world stumbles into a broader war assumes salience and precedence. All in all, a bleak scenario that belies the theories of progress and that of the 21st century. In this melee and recrudescence of the world, international relations and world politics into a zero sum game of war and peace, the highest price is being and will be paid by the people of Ukraine.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

The author is a writer based in Srinagar



OBSERVER
MAIL

All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name and address, even if a pseudonym is used. Letters are edited as clarity, space and accuracy of expression require. Our publishing a letter does not mean we agree with everything or even anything in it. -EDITOR

MAIL YOUR LETTERS

P.O. Box # 337, GPO, Srinagar-190 001
email: editpage.ko@gmail.com

Ramazan: A Lesson in Sensitisation Towards PWDs

THE religion of Islam preaches about equality and fairness. No human being is superior to another. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself stated as such on the Mountain of Arafat in His last sermon: "No Arab has superiority over a Non-Arab and no Non-Arab has superiority over an Arab."

The concept of charity was designed for the very purpose of helping those who cannot support themselves or their families. The needy disabled

and those who are in debt are one of the eight types of people who can receive Zakat donations. Some people with disabilities are often in greater need of humanitarian assistance.

There are persons with disabilities that are either in rest homes or their own homes who go long periods without any visitors, no one to ask about them or know about their hardships and requirements. They are living, but don't feel alive. One of the best things we can do is stop by and

visit these people, ask about them, their history, help them feel important again. Even if you spare only one hour a month, it will be time well spent for them.

One doesn't always need to donate cash. There are other ways we can help them. We can take care of their medical requirements, education, monthly financial requirements, necessary living assistive devices. We can pay their electricity and water bills, catering to home, home barrier

environment and improvement of residential evaluation.

On the other hand, one can simply contribute financially to either them or to the institutions which are designed to help them.

M Ahmad
Principal (I/C), Abhedananda Home
Higher Secondary Institution for
Specially Abled Children

Comparison Among Siblings: An Open Invitation to Mental Health Issues



Stills from the popular Hindi movie “Taare Zameen Par” starring Amir Khan. The film explores the smarter sibling scenario alongside the broader discussion on learning disabilities in children and challenges

“

The message that the child takes home is that “you are not good enough” — laying the groundwork for low self-esteem. What may appear to be a passing comment may become a verse in their minds. What a child or a teenager perceives to be true in childhood finds its way into the subconscious, which shapes an individual's personality even as they enter into adulthood

Wasim Kakroo

“Look at your younger brother, why aren't you like him,” “Look at your sister, she always gets first position in class,” and “Why can't you be more social like your older brother” are just a few of the remarks that parents frequently use for their children especially parents with authoritarian parenting style.

Comparison between siblings is so common in families that it isn't even given a second thought. In a competitive society, where parents frequently compare their children to those of others, the comparison is certain to follow them home. Siblings are typically remarkably different from one another, despite growing up in the same house, sharing comparable genetics, and having the same chances, problems, and experiences. Their habits, mannerisms, milestones, and adventures are contrasted starting in childhood, especially throughout their formative years. Report cards, teacher feedback, performance in extracurricular activities, social skills, and personal development are all scrutinized, with no guarantee that the comparison will halt once they grow up. Although it is human nature to compare, and while parents may have the best intentions, when they expect two siblings to behave and perform in the same way, they are likely creating more harm than good. After all, despite their commonalities and bonds, children are still distinct individuals with unique psychology, physical abilities, interests, and driving forces. When children are growing up and trying to find their place in the world whilst coping with obstacles at school and in society, they will have even more to worry about, if their parents compare them to their siblings.

What many of the parents don't realise is that such comparisons can have a negative impact on their children's confidence and self-esteem, and more importantly cause envy and jealousy among siblings. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Let's have a look at some of the reasons why comparing children is an unhealthy practice and should be avoided at all costs.

Comparing siblings is never a good idea because each individual is unique in terms of talents, abilities, interests, hobbies, strengths, weaknesses, and other characteristics. It's like weighing eggs

in kilograms; it makes no sense. Thus instead of focusing on what is lacking in their children, parents should focus on their strengths and good characteristics. Make a list of their strengths and identify activities that are appropriate for them. According to a well-known quote, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

No one is flawless. Comparing siblings will almost always lead to frustration. You can't expect everyone of your adolescents to be equally good in class, equally athletic, equally good at social interaction, equally responsible, and equally good at keeping the moral code you've set. You must be patient with them and set realistic expectations, or you will be disappointed day after day.

Additionally, children who are continually compared to their siblings or other children, particularly in terms of academic performance, have severe mental disorders, which they carry into their adulthood. Do you want your children to be stressed, anxious, depressed, or suffer from any other mental illness? If the answer is an unequivocal no, then stop comparing them.

Tens place a huge value on what you say, so be careful with what you say. Repeatedly telling one of your children that she is less intelligent than her siblings or that her handwriting is poor in contrast to others will only make her feel inadequate. Comparison begets competition. Jealousy among siblings might be a result of comparison, which has an impact on the household environment. Not only this, but it could harm your relationship with your children if they think you prefer one sibling over the other.

Moreover, comparisons may set a stage for self-criticism. Self-criticism may then lead to perfectionistic tendencies in such children which may lead to discontentment with almost everything such children do in their life.

Comparisons may sometimes have a reverse effect, when a child unable to cope with the pressure, results in rebellion. Some children may purposely perform poorly in school or stop studying if they realize their worth is dependent on their sibling's achievement. When a child's performance isn't up to par due to a higher standard set by a sibling, the child may feel like giving up completely

and rebel instead.

When youngsters are expected to follow in the footsteps of a sibling, they may be unable to explore the vast array of options and standards accessible. A child is free to set his or her own objectives, milestones, and choices when there are no comparisons, providing him or her greater opportunities to explore and choose. A younger child should not be compelled to follow in the footsteps of an older brother who excelled in music classes, science, or the arts. Limiting a child by comparing them to others is limiting their endless opportunities and possibilities in terms of what they can do.

When teenagers are judged by those who are supposed to support and protect them, they naturally begin to wonder what is wrong with them and why they can't be like their siblings. As a result, the message that the child takes home is that “you are not good enough” — laying the groundwork for low self-esteem. What may appear to be a passing comment may become a verse in their minds. What a child or a teenager perceives to be true in childhood finds its way into the subconscious, which shapes an individual's personality even as they enter into adulthood. Such children begin to believe that they are incompetent. Low self-esteem leads to a lack of motivation and confidence. All of this occurs only as a result of your judgments and comparisons, even if they are made with good intentions and for constructive purposes. Thus, a comparison intended to assist the child do better does more harm than good in the long term.

You can't stop the world from comparing your children, but you can surely stop doing it at home. More than solving, comparison worsens the problem. Accept your children for who they are rather than what they should be like. Setting goals is vital, but so is understanding and nurturing the uniqueness of children and adolescents.

WHAT PARENTS/CAREGIVERS SHOULD DO INSTEAD?

1. Parents must make a conscious decision to avoid unhealthy comparisons. Make a note of their strengths and limitations, and assist them in flourishing in their own way. When they follow a different path than their siblings, resist the desire to

compare or correct them.

2. Allowing your pride in one sibling to cause disappointment in the other is not a good idea. Take care to strike a balance between the two. Children always watch closely and draw their own opinions. Thus, labeling your children is not a good idea. Giving your children titles like ‘smart one,’ ‘childish one,’ or ‘creative one’ not only limits their options to explore, but also gives the message that the other sibling lacks what ‘the one’ contributes, or instills in their minds a sense of inferiority.
3. Maintaining open lines of communication within the family would encourage children to speak up when they believe they are being compared to others. This is critical in order to avoid harmful assumptions or disagreements with the children, as well as among them. Also, inform the school of your expectations, as teachers frequently make comparisons between siblings if they attend the same school.
4. Rather than forcing your children to be similar, celebrate their differences. Communicate the value of having an independent identity so that they don't compare themselves even if no one else does. Encourage your children to work ‘alongside’ rather than ‘against’ one other. While your children battle comparisons and competition outside, make your home to be the safe zone against it, rather than an extension of it. Being a sibling does not have to signal the end of a child's individuality, and it is up to the parents to draw the line.

Parents, as primary educators and caregivers, must make conscious efforts to avoid making comparisons between their children. Parents must keep track of their children's strengths and shortcomings and help them to thrive in their own unique way. Every child looks up to his or her parents, so if the parents appreciate each child's unique identity, the child will feel confident and learn to believe in himself or herself.

The author is a licensed clinical psychologist (alumni of Govt. Medical College Srinagar). He can be reached at 8825067196

