

3.90 Lakh Kanal State Land Reclaimed In Kashmir So Far

Auqib Javed

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir administration has retrieved around 3.90 lakh kanal of state and Kahcharai land from the "illegal occupants" across Kashmir in its ongoing anti-encroachment drive so far.

An official from the Revenue Department disclosed that men and machinery were on job to retrieve the remaining 2.70 lakh kanal of land from the encroachers.

The official told Kashmir Observer that most of the land has been retrieved from South Kashmir so far.

He said that nobody has been spared in the land eviction drive be it—bureaucrats, politicians and other influential persons. The government maintained that the retrieved land is meant for various public purposes like developmental projects, playgrounds, village centric amenities, industries, etc. by the revenue officials in consultation with concerned villagers/PRI and sign boards are also erected immediately after the eviction drives.

Notably, the Jammu and



Kashmir government had directed removal of all encroachment on land owned by UT, including Roshni land and Kahcharai land by January 31. However the drive continued as the authorities failed to meet the deadline.

The government action has met massive protest from the people and the regional political parties. While the authorities say that the drive targets influential people only, the people say that not only the rich but many commoners, small-time shopkeepers and business fraternity are also

being targeted.

The political parties maintain that the people are not being served prior notice and a chance of hearing is being deliberately avoided.

However, the official said that not a single active residential house has been demolished so far.

"We haven't demolished an active residential house so far. Even the active residents of influential persons have been spared as of now," said the official wishing not to be named.

On Monday, former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that due process **More on P6**

Police Stops Mehbooba's March To Parliament

Police prevented PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti from taking out a march to Parliament here on Wednesday to protest against an ongoing anti-encroachment drive in Jammu and Kashmir. Accompanied by scores of party workers, **More on P6**

Protest Held Against Eviction Drive In Srinagar

The JK All Alliance Democratic Party held a demonstration here on Wednesday against an eviction drive launched by the Jammu and Kashmir administration to retrieve state land from encroachers. **More on P6**

Azad Fears Return Of Hartal, 'Stone Pelting Culture'

Democratic Azad Party chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad on Wednesday cautioned the Jammu and Kashmir administration against its ongoing anti-encroachment drive, saying the 'hartal and stone-pelting' culture is likely to **More on P6**

Wet Spell Likely In Kashmir From Today

Agencies

Srinagar: The minimum temperature saw a fall at most places in Kashmir Valley with Srinagar and Qazigund too recording below sub-zero level on Wednesday.

Quoting a meteorological department official, news agency GNS reported that Srinagar recorded a low of minus 0.1°C against 2.7°C on the previous night. Today's minimum temperature, he said, was above normal by 0.3°C for the summer capital.

Qazigund, he said, recorded a low of minus 1.8°C against minus 0.4°C on the previous night and it was 0.3°C below normal for the gateway town of Kashmir.

Pahalgam, he said, recorded a low of minus 7.6°C against minus 5.9°C on the previous night and it was 1.4°C below normal for the famous tourist resort in south Kashmir's Anantnag district.

Kokernag recorded a low of minus 0.1°C against minus 0.7°C on the previous night and it was 1.9°C above normal for the place, the officials said.

Gulmarg recorded a low of minus 6.5°C against minus 7.0°C on the previous night and it was 0.2°C above normal for the world famous skiing resort in north Kashmir's Baramulla district, he said.

In Kupwara town, he said, the mercury settled at minus 1.9°C against minus 1.0°C on the previous night and it was 0.1°C above normal for the north Kashmir area. Jammu recorded **More on P6**

CRPF Trained 948 VDG Personnel In Rajouri So Far: Govt



Press Trust Of India

The CRPF is giving arms training to Village Defence Groups (VDGs) personnel in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir for their self defence against militant attacks and has given training to 948 of them last month, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand

Rai said on Wednesday.

The move came after two back-to-back terrorist attacks in the district last month. Seven people were killed and 14 injured as terrorists attacked Dhangri village in Rajouri on January 1. While five people, including two brothers, were killed after the terrorists opened fire at some houses, **More on P6**

Police Announces Rs 10L Reward For Info On Assailants

The Jammu and Kashmir Police has said that militants involved in the Dhangri village attack are hiding in the upper reaches of Rajouri district and announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh for anyone providing information about them. In an advisory issued on Tuesday **More on P6**

Peace Has Returned To J&K: Thakur

Insurgent activities in the Northeast have come down by 89 per cent and cases of civilian deaths declined by 85 per cent during the last eight years, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said **More on P6**

Panun Kashmir Welcomes Anti-Encroachment Drive

An organisation of migrant Kashmiri Pandits has welcomed an ongoing anti-encroachment drive being carried out by the Jammu and Kashmir administration to retrieve state land and demanded the formation of an SIT to probe the role of the NC and the PDP in the alleged promotion of

separatism in the Union Territory. A statement to this effect was issued by Panun Kashmir chairman Ajay Chrungoo on Wednesday. It came at a time when several political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir, including former chief ministers Omar Abdullah of the National Conference **More on P6**



Manoj Sinha
Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir



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New Geopolitical Competition

In his second State of the Union address, the US president Joe Biden struck a more aggressive tone on China saying if China threatened US sovereignty, they will act to protect their country. The statement came in the wake of the growing tensions with Beijing over a suspected surveillance balloon. However, Biden added he was committed to working with China where it can advance American interests and benefit the world. The US president also slammed his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin for his military aggression. He termed the invasion of Ukraine by Russia as a test for the ages, and a test for the world.

China and Russia have emerged as the biggest security challenges for the US as also reflected in Biden's address. It has also been one year since Russia invaded Ukraine and war has since been dragging on with no side closer to declaring victory.

Meanwhile, the human tragedy is unfolding in Ukraine on a vast scale in terms of the deaths of civilians. The war has rallied western nations and many other countries from around the world behind the US. And all we are hearing is a predominantly western narrative on the war. Social media companies have censored Russian state-sponsored media so there is little in the public domain that can be called an alternative discourse. And this is creating a situation we are all so familiar with. The West has again put on a moralistic lens on the war: a conflict between flawless virtue and pure evil.

It is a familiar script that has earlier played out in US-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and in the case of the US-backed Saudi war in Yemen. In the case of war in Iraq, it was the cooked up intelligence about the then Iraqi president Saddam Hussain possessing the Weapons of Mass Destruction that became the basis for war. And western media acted as cheerleaders for the destruction of Iraq.

The point is that it is not the reality on the ground but the west's core interests that determine what is good and what is evil. Otherwise, the reality of Russian invasion of Ukraine is very complex. It is rooted in Russia's legitimate fears of being encircled by the west and the NATO military bases reaching its doorstep. Many of the Eastern European countries that were once a part of the USSR-led Warsaw Pact have become members of the NATO, heightening Russia's insecurity. Now the growing likelihood of Ukraine also joining NATO became the last straw for Putin. While it is nobody's case to countenance the invasion of a sovereign smaller country by its powerful neighbour, the solution to the evolving fraught situation can be resolved if the US-led West and Russia sit down and work towards addressing each other's grievances and fears.

OTHER OPINION

RBI and Inflation

In its first meeting of this calendar year, the monetary policy committee of the Reserve Bank of India has voted to raise the benchmark repo rate by 25 basis points, continuing its efforts to bring down inflation. Since the beginning of this tightening cycle, the MPC has cumulatively hiked rates by 250 basis points. The repo rate now stands at 6.5 per cent. Alongside, the committee has also retained its stance, deciding to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation. The tone of the policy was decidedly hawkish. The MPC noted that policy action was required to keep inflation expectations anchored, and "break" the persistence in core inflation. However, the decision of the committee was not unanimous. While the growing dissensions within the committee suggest that the terminal rate — the rate at which the central bank will stop hiking rates and take a pause — is approaching, there is a possibility of further tightening if the situation warrants. As RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has pointed out, adjusting for inflation, the policy rate still trails its pre pandemic level.

Recent data does signal that retail inflation has begun to ease. Inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, was below the upper threshold of the central bank's inflation targeting framework for the last two consecutive months. However, much of the decline was driven by a fall in food inflation, especially vegetables. However, core inflation continues to remain a source of concern: It remains elevated, signalling that price pressures are fairly broad-based. The RBI's forecast projects inflation next year at 5.3 per cent, with the fourth quarter at 5.6 per cent. This implies that inflation will continue to remain above the central bank's target.

On growth, the central bank is optimistic in its assessment. It expects the Indian economy to grow at 6.4 per cent in 2023-24. While this is broadly in line with expectations of the Economic Survey, projections by independent analysts suggest that the economy is likely to grow at a slower pace. Considering that the effects of monetary policy are felt with a lag, the committee should now assess the impact of the cumulative hikes so far on inflation and the economy. As the Governor's statement notes, the rate hikes since May 2022 continue to work their way through the system.

Indian Express

Calamities Strike The Poor First

Belén Fernández

And yet things are getting more precarious by the minute, as capitalism breaks new ground in the field of obliterating any and all aspirations toward a common humanity or planetary wellbeing — and the "disaster relief" industry concerns itself with maintaining its own viability while poor communities lurch from one disaster to the next

On February 6, massive earthquakes struck southern Turkey and northern Syria, inflicting ghastly damage across a geographic region that has already borne a great deal of earthly devastation in recent decades. The ongoing war in Syria has produced millions of refugees, many of whom have now found themselves victims of seismic activity in the Turkish south.

The death toll from Monday's quakes quickly jumped into the thousands and will no doubt soar to far more macabre heights. An untold number of people remain buried beneath the rubble. Traumatized survivors contend with frigid temperatures and aftershocks; refugees contend with the loss of any semblance of refuge.

The natural disaster has served to underscore what should hardly be earth-shattering news: that life for the global poor is extremely precarious and plagued by multiple, simultaneous crises from which recovery is often futile.

To be sure, the dwellings inhabited by the have-nots of the earth can be structurally less reliable and potentially more vulnerable to tectonic tumult — as was seen, for example, in the Peruvian earthquake of 2007, when homes collapsed across poor neighbourhoods in the province of Ica. But in a world structured upon capitalist foundations, precarity goes much deeper than shoddy construction materials or disregard for building codes.

For starters, capitalism's insistence on acute inequality and the tyranny of an elite minority means there are major global fault lines between rich and poor — ones that are becoming ever more pronounced in the era of climate change and attendant ecological calamity. And while aid pledges inevitably come pouring in after high-profile disasters, they often only exacerbate the divide by lining the pockets of the aid industry rather than benefitting the disaster-stricken themselves.

There is also the reality that, for much of the world's precarious population, life constitutes a more or less continuous disaster, but one that generates no attention. In June, The New Humanitarian news agency noted gross disparities in disaster relief, with almost half of all emergency funding for 2022 "going to only five protracted — and largely conflict-driven — crises". Citing a recent United Nations estimate that the number of annual disasters will increase to some 560 by the year 2030, the agency described how victims of under-the-radar disasters are often forced to remain in unsafe locations — thereby setting the stage for new crises.

Take the case of Afghanistan, where an ongoing dependence on aid has done nothing to make the country safe. In August, floods killed more than 180 people, just two months after an earthquake had killed more than 1,000. In May, the NGO Save the Children reported that the country was suffering its "worst hunger crisis on record", with nearly 50 per cent of the population going hungry on account of a raging drought and continuing economic breakdown.

Such are the toxic legacies of two decades of a United States-led "war on terror" that devastated the lives, livelihoods and futures of millions of Afghans and sucked in billions of dollars of "recovery funds".

For another illustration of how politics, greed and mismanagement overlap with and compound environmental catastrophe, we need look no further than the Caribbean nation of Haiti, where in 2021 a devastating 7.2 magnitude earthquake was followed by a deadly storm and landslides. More than 2,200 people

were killed and 130,000 homes destroyed, in addition to a number of schools and hospitals.

This came just over a decade after a 2010 earthquake killed some 220,000 people and rendered 1.5 million homeless. Only a smidgen of the billions of dollars that flowed in to "rescue" Haiti actually reached poor Haitian earthquake victims, going instead to aid organisations, international security forces, and other supposedly competent folks — like the UN peacekeepers who promptly unleashed a cholera epidemic upon the nation.



In ensuing years, US support for official corruption in Haiti would make the terrain extra fertile for political crisis, while further eroding the country's ability to respond to earthquakes and other disasters.

As for me, my own personal experience with earthquakes includes a tremor in southwestern Turkey in 2010 and the magnitude 7.4 earthquake that rocked Mexico's Oaxacan coast in June 2020. I can safely say that the latter episode was akin to feeling my world combust — but only momentarily, as it entailed no lasting damage to my house or person. In other words, it was a far and privileged cry from the experience of the latest earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria, many of whom — displaced by war — had undoubtedly already felt their respective worlds combust even prior to the quake.

Following the news of Monday's cataclysm, I spoke here in Oaxaca with a working-class Mexican man who, in September 1985, assisted in extracting bod-

ies from the rubble of the Mexico City earthquake that officially resulted in the deaths of 10,000 people but probably killed many more. Shaking his head, he professed to still think regularly of three bodies in particular: a humble mother hunched in vain over her two children, dressed in school uniforms.

And as if the poor needed any more reminders as to the negligible value assigned to their lives, the perennial tremors of the earth in Mexico mean that earthquake-related psychological trauma is easily revived.

As for things not easily revived, in September 1986, one year after the Mexico City quake, the Washington Post reported that no fewer than 80,000 people remained homeless. Indeed, the city never quite fully recovered from either the physical damage or the disaster mismanagement. Precarity is nothing new.

And yet things are getting more precarious by the minute, as capitalism breaks new ground in the field of obliterating any and all aspirations toward a common humanity or planetary wellbeing — and the "disaster relief" industry concerns itself with maintaining its own viability while poor communities lurch from one disaster to the next.

While the rich insulate themselves from the fallout, the poor bear the brunt of military conflict, economic upheaval, climate-related havoc, and the coronavirus pandemic — which has left the earth's have-nots on even shakier ground.

As with all other present earthly afflictions, Monday's quakes in Turkey and Syria will hit the poor the hardest. And the only way out of a world where profit for the few means precarity for the many would be a total seismic shift.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published by Al Jazeera



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Methane Pollution Escalating in India

Methane is a colourless, odourless gas. However, the increasing presence of methane in our atmosphere is threatening multiple species of wildlife by hastening climate change. According to studies, this pollutant from oil and gas facilities has an impact on our climate, communities, and wildlife. One must speak up now to help reduce meth-

ane emissions and ensure a healthy environment for vulnerable wildlife. It is critical to keep super-pollutant methane under control, as it can be especially harmful to most terrestrial species. To protect biodiversity, we should do everything we can to protect wildlife like these social, herbivorous creatures and other diverse wildlife species in the country. Pollution from the oil and gas industries

endangers human health. Methane is emitted in conjunction with toxic pollution, which can cause asthma-inducing smog or even cancer. To continue protecting frontline communities and wildlife, cutting methane emissions from the oil and gas sector must be as stringent as possible. Regular inspections and repairs should be required at all oil and gas facilities, particularly those

with methane leak-prone equipment. It's important to eliminate unnecessary gas flaring and establish community monitoring programmes. A healthy environment is a right, not a privilege, and strengthening methane rules will have positive wildlife and human health impacts for decades to come.

Vijaykumar H K

Need to Reassess Composite Nationalism

Asad Mirza

Composite Nationalism as espoused by Hussain Ahmad Madani in early 20th century, holds validity even today also, besides becoming more relevant and giving a new interpretation to nationalism.

Hussain Ahmad Madani was a traditional Islamic scholar and a political activist, as well as an advocate of both a unified global Islamic polity and an Indian nation-state democracy, in which Muslims and non-Muslims were to consider one another as equal members of the same nation; and each of these aspects is demonstrated in his seminal work *Muttahida Qaumiyat Aur Islam* (Composite Nationalism and Islam) published in 1938.

It provides an analysis of the Islamic intellectual tradition from someone considered to be a conservative and which can be seen to accommodate a secular government order for a Muslim minority.

Barbara D. Metcalf in introduction to the book had said, 'The assumption that a scholar like him was motivated by some "hermetic" Islam is thus misplaced,' and he was 'one of the most important Muslim figures in the history of twentieth-century South Asia'.

Madani, as a traditional Islamic scholar, clothes his vision in terms of an Islamic consciousness; in other words, it is not merely Muslim consciousness - i.e. the thoughts of someone who happens to be Muslim - but it is set forth as being scripturally coherent and faithful. He argued that Indian Muslims and non-Muslims possess a 'united nationalism' (*Muttahida Qaumiyat*).

Madani's discussion of *Qaumiyat* or nationalism can be seen as keeping with the age in which he lived, described as one in which 'nationalism [was] without doubt the most influential of the world's political creeds during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.

Within the context of the many debates surrounding notions of nation, nationalism, nation-state, citizenship, culture, multiculturalism, etc., Madani's work provides an argument for how Muslim minorities can be fully integrated and socially cohesive, without being considered disloyal to their faith or their compatriots.

Madani's Theory of United Nationalism
Written in the final days of the British Raj, Madani's theory of united nationalism was ostensibly composed in response to misgivings that poet Allama Iqbal expressed about

united nationalism, in which he saw - to use Madani's characterisation - united nationalism as 'unethical' and 'un-Islamic' for 'Indian Muslims'.

As a result, Madani's response was to fit with the main aims of his life, which were: removal of British rule from India through a uniting of the various religious groups in India. Towards these goals, one can understand certain points regarding Madani's

Madani builds his case - citing the 'Madinah Pact' and using the Arabic language, the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings - explaining the notion of nationalism

or *Qaumiyat* as comprising communities or *aqwam*.

Ultimately, although Madani does not directly address the complexities of race, his urge for Indian unity between Muslims and non-Muslims can be used for a call of greater togetherness amongst races, cultures or ethnicities (as one chooses to define such 'groupings').

Yet Madani's sense of not losing one's own identity in such a social enterprise entails retaining the notion of Islam's finality and acknowledging that

against such a barbaric regime and break the shackles of this slavery. In this regard, one should not hinder another's religion; rather, all nations (or communities) residing in India are free to follow their religions and moral values, and act as per their respective religious traditions. While maintaining peace and tranquillity, they should also publicise their ideology.

Indeed, they should all follow their respective culture, promote and protect their own personal law. Neither should a minority interfere in the personal affairs of other minorities or the majority, nor should the majority strive to absorb the minority in itself."

In summation, it is apparent that Muslims can form a nation with non-Muslims and it is neither an undue interference in religious affairs nor is it against the spirit of common welfare that Islamic law envisages. So a Muslim, while (faithfully) observing his religion, can join hands with non-Muslims and can become a nation as they have lived earlier.

Further, it becomes obvious that Madani's interpretation of *Qaumiyat* or nationalism, was not applicable only during that time, but it is relevant even more, today

also. It would be more prudent if the current dispensation can try to include the interpretation of nationalism as espoused by other thinkers also, including Madani, to their own theory of nationalism. Only this act would be able to provide a more sustainable and growth-oriented approach to tackle many ills confronting our nation, today.

Besides promoting this interpretation of nationalism, not only India will be able to handle many of its current issues but will also be able to influence the global narrative of the concept, and thus be really seen as a 'Vishwa Guru'.

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

Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi. He can be contacted on www.asadmirza.in

NATIONALISM



IT WOULD BE MORE PRUDENT IF THE CURRENT DISPENSATION CAN TRY TO INCLUDE THE INTERPRETATION OF NATIONALISM AS ESPOUSED BY OTHER THINKERS ALSO, including Madani, to their own theory of nationalism. Only this act would be able to provide a more sustainable and growth-oriented approach to tackle many ills confronting our nation, today.

Human Challenge Studies: What We've Learned From Intentionally Infecting People With Covid

Simon Kolstoe

When COVID began to spread rapidly in 2020, sending the UK and other countries into lockdowns, many people asked what they could do to help. While millions of people found novel ways to help others in their communities, a large number became interested in volunteering for medical research.

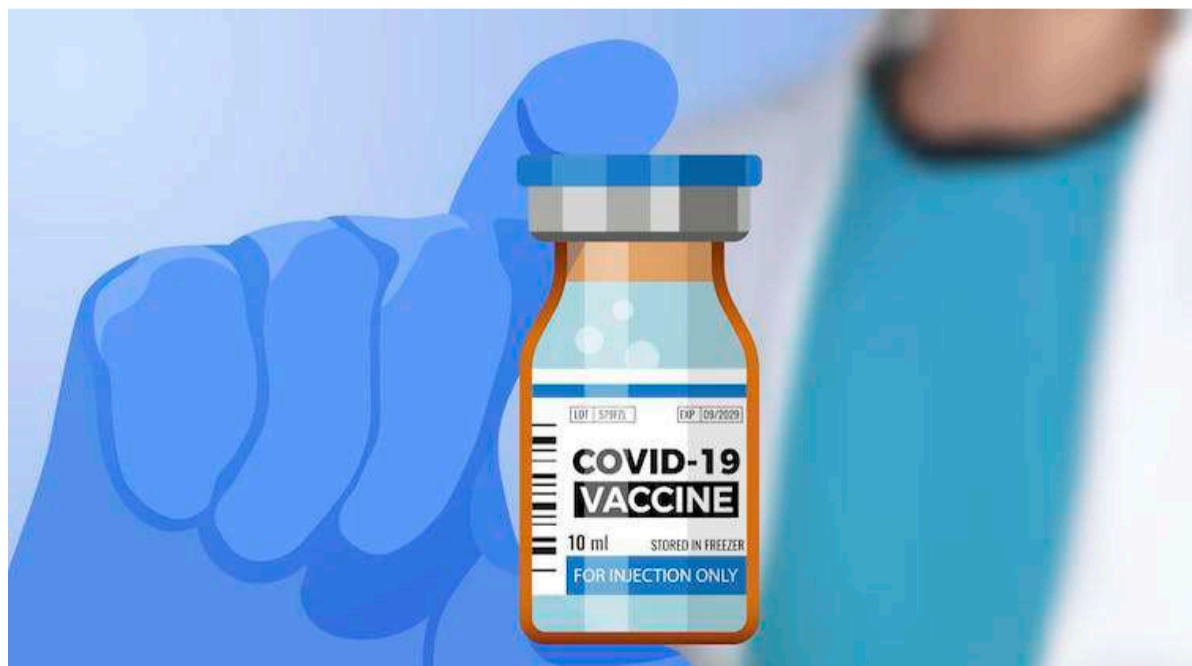
This presented an interesting situation for researchers who normally struggle to recruit participants. Suddenly there was significant enthusiasm from the public to volunteer for research studies. This included a willingness to volunteer for potentially risky "human challenge trials" that would intentionally expose participants to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID.

Many people hoped, or even assumed, that deliberately exposing themselves to the virus in the name of medical research would speed up the production of pandemic-ending vaccines. But the reality was a bit more complex.

Beginning in 2021, scientists in the UK embarked on three SARS-CoV-2 human challenge studies with healthy young adult participants. However, none hastened the production of the vaccines in use today. So what did these studies tell us?

THE SCIENCE

One main difficulty in human challenge studies is how quickly the challenge agent (for example, a virus such as SARS-CoV-2) mutates. Challenge studies rely on the safe production of a well-characterised agent, but since this can take months, the risk is that by the time the infectious agent has been created for research, the dominant virus in circulation



may be quite a different variant.

This was indeed the case with SARS-CoV-2, where the first and second challenge studies were conducted with the alpha variant about a year after it was the main variant of concern. The third challenge study, which is currently recruiting, is using the delta variant, and is facing a similar problem.

Could the challenge agent have been created more quickly? Perhaps, but with SARS-CoV-2, the high level of community infections meant that more traditional placebo-controlled studies (where people are given either an active or inactive vaccine and subsequent infections are recorded) were far more effective, and easy to conduct, for scientists trying to develop vaccines.



Could the challenge agent have been created more quickly? Perhaps, but with SARS-CoV-2, the high level of community infections meant that more traditional placebo-controlled studies (where people are given either an active or inactive vaccine and subsequent infections are recorded) were far more effective, and easy to conduct, for scientists trying to develop vaccines

So, contrary to many people's expectations, and despite their track record in accelerating vaccine development for diseases such as malaria, the SARS-CoV-2 challenge studies

didn't speed up the immediate development of vaccines.

The studies are, however, still very useful, as they were able to follow the infection closely from first expo-

sure through to the development of symptoms and subsequent recovery. They revealed just how infectious the virus is, as participants exposed to even the smallest dose became infected. They also provided a useful validation of the sensitivity of rapid antigen tests.

THE ETHICS

It wasn't a surprise that the UK was the first country to conduct SARS-CoV-2 challenge studies. The UK has a history of conducting challenge studies dating back to the "flu camps" of the 1940s and has several active research groups with experience using this approach.

The healthcare system in the UK is also well set up for providing life-long care through the NHS should any participants be harmed in a research study. One reason such studies were considered unethical in the US was the more individualised insurance-based healthcare system and subsequent lack of guaranteed long-term care from the state.

In the UK most medical research is reviewed by one of a network of about 60 research ethics committees coordinated through the Health Research Authority. The role of these committees is to balance the enthusiasm of researchers with the rights, safety and wellbeing of the potential participants.

In July 2020, the Health Research Authority established a new specialist research ethics committee ready to review any SARS-CoV-2 human challenge studies, of which I was a member. This was in parallel with the World Health Organization publishing ethical guidelines for any country conducting SARS-CoV-2 challenge studies (to date only the UK has).

On the specialist committee we

did consider whether the challenge model was the most effective way to rapidly develop treatments. However, this was not our primary ethical concern, because we knew the studies would generate a wealth of other useful scientific knowledge.

Instead, we were more focused on the participants themselves, and the conditions that were required to conduct the studies in an ethically robust way. These included informed consent and how participants would be looked after in the isolation unit.

The practical experience of our specialist committee also offered a useful opportunity to engage internationally with the bioethics community and the substantial debate the challenge studies raised. Specifically, we have been able to closely consider the best ways to screen and recruit people for contentious studies like these and help develop new guidance for use in future studies.

Were these studies worthwhile?

The COVID human challenge studies have undoubtedly been worthwhile, though perhaps not in the way many people originally expected. Challenge models enable the study of viral infection and disease progression in a carefully controlled environment and have a proven track record. But for a rapidly changing virus like SARS-CoV-2, they have been less helpful in the development of treatments and vaccines.

However, this may not be the case in future pandemics. The practical and ethical lessons learned from the challenge studies this time around could be invaluable next time we need to respond rapidly to a pandemic threat.

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