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RSOG INSIGHT

MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

With the COVID-19 impacting countries at various stages, everyone is trying to understand what is required to protect themselves and their communities.

We spoke to some of our friends around the world on how it has affected them and their views of the situation.

ABOUT OUR GUEST

Sudhir Shetty is a non-resident fellow at the Center for Global Development and Professorial Lecturer at the Elliott School for International Affairs at George Washington University. His areas of interest include East Asian and African development, development finance, and gender equality. Professor Shetty has spent most of his professional career at the World Bank. Most recently, he was its Chief Economist for East Asia and the Pacific. During his time at the World Bank, he held a number of other positions in its Africa and East Asia and Pacific regions, including as Director of the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management department in both regions. He was also Co-Director for the World Bank's 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development. Prior to joining the World Bank, Professor Shetty taught economics and public policy at Duke University. He has a Ph.D. in Economics from Cornell University, an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and a BA in Economics from Bombay University.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in the article are of their own and do not reflect the opinion of Razak School of Government.

VIEWS FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In this edition, we spoke to Professor Sudhir Shetty, the former Chief Economist for East Asia and the Pacific, World Bank. He spoke at Razak School of Government on 13 December 2016 on a topic entitled "East Asia and Pacific Economic Update: Rising Vulnerabilities".

RSOG: How has the pandemic affected your daily life?

Professor Sudhir Shetty: Since I am now retired from the World Bank, the pandemic has affected me less directly than many others who are working or studying (or were doing so when the pandemic hit). For them, this crisis has in many cases truly been existential, exposing them either to losses of income or opportunities or to the risk of serious illness or death. The impact on me has been indirect, felt through its effects on my family and on the community I am part of as well as seeing its profound and devastating impacts on people around the world, especially the poor and disadvantaged. My family has been affected in two major ways, neither of them as serious as the impacts on so many others. First, since my wife is a doctor, she has worried more over the past several weeks about possible exposure to the virus in her interactions with patients. Specifically, she has been very concerned about two aspects of the response to the outbreak in the United States. One is the haphazard way in which testing has been rolled out across the country so that it is unclear who is actually infected at any point in time. The other is the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) available even to frontline health personnel. She has managed to cope with these gaps and dealt with the increase in risk by relying even more on her own ingenuity as well as on her network of colleagues across the country who have been generous in sharing good practices.



The second way in which my family has been affected has been through its impact on my children. Fortunately, they are both enrolled in universities and neither is actively looking for work in the midst of the most significant economic downturn in the United States in almost a century. Nevertheless, the crisis has meant that instruction has moved online for each of them and they have needed to move back home rather than remain at their colleges. Each of those changes has brought upheaval to the established routines of their lives and with it greater anxiety. Apart from these impacts on my family, I feel for those who have suffered or are continuing to suffer losses from the pandemic. The ones who have died from COVID-19 or who have lost loved ones to it. Those who have lost jobs and now worry about paying the rent or buying food. Or those whose opportunities for learning have been upended. It is tragic to see so much of the economic progress that has been achieved over the past couple of decades, especially by developing countries across the world, lost in a matter of weeks and months with no certainty that they will be recouped in the foreseeable future. A grim lesson for humanity and a fitting rebuke to the arrogance we have displayed as we have become better off materially..

RSOG: In your opinion what would be the top three leadership lessons that we can learn from this global pandemic?

Professor Sudhir Shetty: *First, the role of teamwork.* A true leader builds a strong team precisely for a crisis like this and then uses that team to deal with it effectively. Sadly, this has been the case in too few countries. Some stand out as successes – Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, New Zealand. But too many others – the US, the UK, Brazil, Russia – have failed this test. Their leaders have tried to make this crisis about themselves rather than about their teams working cohesively and collectively.

Second, leadership is a complement, not a substitute for science in dealing with a crisis of this sort. The countries and regions/states that have dealt with the best are those whose leaders have recognised this. Many Governors of US states, such as Andrew Cuomo in New York, Gavin Newsom in California, and Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan have demonstrated how politics and science can work together rather than at loggerheads with each other.

Third, global cooperation is essential. This has not happened consistently or deeply enough during this crisis and that is one reason it has dragged on longer than it should have and has taken a larger economic and human toll than would otherwise have been the case.

RSOG: Any messages you would like to share with our alumni and everyone involved whether directly and indirectly in curbing the COVID-19?

Professor Sudhir Shetty: This crisis too shall pass. It won't be easy and it will take time, but with sustained cooperative action, there will be progress against the virus as with similar scourges in the past. And perhaps this time there will be more learning than in the past so that the next time a crisis of this type occurs either in a nation, across a region or affecting the entire globe, action is taken early, less selfishly and more aggressively. As is often said, a crisis is a terrible thing to waste. One can only hope that we won't waste this very costly crisis by not learning the lessons we need to learn from it.

