3 million Afghan children facing with severe malnutrition

By: Shukria Kohistani

Increasing insecurities and drought in Afghanistan has caused suffering 3 million Afghan children from severe malnutrition. An official of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in Afghanistan has considered current situation in Afghanistan as horrific as fighting and violence as well as drought are threatening the life of Afghans.

UNICEF's regional operation representative Mustafa bin Masoud told media that most Afghan children have been affected by the current situation in the country.

"The news is horrible, but not surprising. Drought has been reported in recent weeks and war has entered its deadliest and most destructive phase. While the children are forced to leave their homes, they often run out of nutrient food and do not even know where their food comes from," Masoud said, adding that UNICEF is helping its 11 partnered organizations to provide food and other needs to the people.

According to UNICEF, RUTF – Ready – to – Use Therapeutic Food has been distributed in a number of provinces of Afghanistan.

Mustafa bin Masoud has predicted that half of Afghan children under five won't have necessary psychological health and energy to play due to severe malnutrition in Afghanistan until end of the current year.

Meanwhile, Afghan officials for the Ministry of Public Health say nearly half of the country's population is living in severe poverty caused by increasing insecurities and recent drought in the country. "The number of Afghan children under five suffering from severe malnutrition is now 895,000, while the number of children suffering from mild nutrition is 2.2 million. In the meantime, nearly 720,000 pregnant or breastfeeding mothers are suffering from malnutrition in Afghanistan," said Mursal Manati, head of malnutrition affairs of the Ministry of Public Health.

According to officials of the Ministry of Public Health, the number of individuals suffering from malnutrition in Afghanistan is on the rise on annual basis.

Meanwhile, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Anwarul Haq Ahadi has recently said that necessary and serious steps needed to be taken for addressing poverty in Afghanistan until end of the current year.

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has called Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Ethiopia as countries where the humanitarian crisis has intensified and has had the greatest impact on children.

As the war is raging in some parts of the country, many families with their children are leaving their home areas due to serious clashes. Currently, children, women and the elderly are one of the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan suffering from this situation.

Shukria Kohistani

'We're not going to lock down our economy,' White House says

WASHINGTON: The White House used Friday's news of nearly a million jobs gained throughout July to argue that notions of a potential pandemic backslide are greatly exaggerated.

"This is not March 2020," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said during a Friday press conference, addressing fears that the Delta-driven surge of COVID-19 cases now gripping the nation would see the return of crippling restrictions. "Or even January 2021. We're not going to lock down our economy, or our schools, because our country is in a much stronger place than when we took office." The report of U.S. employers adding 943,000 jobs provided a welcome capstone as President Biden left Washington to spend the weekend at home in Delaware. It has been a week in which infection rates rose, the mask culture wars returned and Americans wondered what happened to a battle that seemed only weeks ago like it had been won.

Coronavirus vaccines were becoming widely available around the time Biden assumed office. A total of 193 million Americans have had at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine (two of the three vaccines approved in the United States require two doses), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The unemployment rate today stands at 5.4 percent; when the pandemic first struck and businesses closed, that rate rose to 14.8 percent in April 2020. The economic recovery began under then-President Donald Trump, but Biden has made a more thorough return to normalcy a centerpiece of his presidency.

The more transmissible Delta variant has frustrated the White House, leading to questions about whether Biden was premature in declaring "independence" from the coronavirus last month. Even though Delta's arrival in the United States was not unexpected — the strain had been circulating throughout India and the United Kingdom during the winter and spring — it appeared to land with a greater force than expected, quickly exploiting low-vaccination areas of the nation, including the Midwest and the Southeast.

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Will rising medical risks derail positive economic trends?

In many ways, July was both the best of times and the worst of times. We saw some good news on the financial front. U.S. markets hit new all-time highs, and earnings reports substantially beat expectations. Dropping interest rates also helped drive markets higher, with bond markets rallying on those lower rates.

Abroad, the news was more of a mixed bag. While developed markets did well (although less so than U.S. markets), emerging markets got hit hard on rising worries about the pandemic and ended the month down substantially.

Let's take a closer look at the big picture in July—and where that leaves us as we head into August.

Medical risks surge. July saw a substantial increase in infections globally, due largely to the spread of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus. This explains the market declines in emerging markets. In the U.S., despite the strong market performance, we saw a similar—or even larger—surge in infections. After declining to low levels in June, daily case growth grew by six times throughout July. The seven-day case growth average, which was 13,400 on June 30, rose to 81,900 on July 31. This trend took us back to where we were in mid-February. Clearly, July saw a major resurgence of medical risks here in the U.S.

Strong U.S. economy. Yet, despite that resurgence, the economic data and markets in the U.S. did just fine. Consumer confidence was mixed, but in general held up. Business confidence rose. Consumer spending and business investment continued strong. As of this morning, the jobs report came in above expectations, showing that hiring actually increased in July—despite the faster case growth. So while there were some signs of slowing in the economy, the real message from the data was the continued strength of our recovery. And that is what markets reacted to. Despite the rising medical risks, markets expect the economy to keep moving ahead.

Economic momentum. That note brings us to the prospects for August. The first question we have to ask is whether the economy can continue to grow in the face of higher infection rates. So far, the answer looks to be yes.

During the first part of the pandemic, the primary cause of economic damage was shutdowns that forced businesses to close and lay people off. In many respects, the recession we saw then was a policy recession. At this time, there are reasons to believe we will not see widespread shutdowns. The infection growth is primarily localized in a handful of states with low vaccination rates, so there will be no need to shut down in most of the country. In those states where a shutdown might be helpful, it is politically unlikely. As we saw in the jobs report this morning, an open economy should keep hiring and spending moving forward, at least for a while.

Effect of behavior changes. Furthermore, as demonstrated earlier in the pandemic, people are now starting to change their behaviors in ways that should bring infection growth back down. Vaccination rates have moved higher, and mask wearing and social distancing are on the rise again. As we have seen before, behavior changes can bring the pandemic under control, and that is what we should start to see in August. If we do, expect the economic momentum to continue.

What's Ahead?

To sum up, July was a terrible month on the medical front, but a good one on the economic and market fronts. In August, the positive economic trends will continue, although we will be looking to see whether the medical news starts to improve—or at least stops getting worse. If the news gets better, we can reasonably expect the positive economic trends to continue through the rest of the year.

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How BTS is adding an estimated $5 Billion to the South Korean economy a year

There's an annual debate in the U.S. over the song of the summer. The consensus this year seemed to be "Butter" by Korean pop group BTS, or at least it was, until "Butter" was replaced by "Permission To Dance," also by BTS. Stacey Vanek Smith, host of our podcast, The Indicator From Planet Money, looked into the band that has become a global economic force, creating jobs, billions in revenue, even moving the needle on South Korea's GDP.

STACEY VANEK SMITH: Tamar Herman is a reporter for the South China Morning Post and author of "BTS: Blood, Sweat & Tears." She says as big as having a song of the summer is - much less two songs of the summer - this is like a blip for BTS, which has been on a streak of success that's almost hard to fathom.

TAMAR HERMAN: They're just so big. You can't just look at BTS and be like, ah, yes, this is just the same cloth reshaped. No, it's a brand-new cloth.

VANEK SMITH: BTS fans are devoted. In the last couple of years, they started bringing in so much money, the South Korean government decided to try and measure the economic impact of the band. Park Chan-Wook is head of cultural industry research at the Korea Culture and Tourism Institute.

PARK CHAN-WOOK: (Through interpreter) We have some tools that can help us make estimates from the Bank of Korea, which lets us see the impact of sales growth spilling out to other industries.

VANEK SMITH: An online concert held by BTS during the pandemic brought in more than $70 million in ticket and merchandise sales. But, like Park Chan-Wook says, there is a major ripple effect. BTS's popularity is fueling tourism to Korea, study of the Korean language, interest in Korean movies, television, fashion and food. All told, BTS is bringing in an estimated $5 billion a year to South Korea. That's around half a percent of the country's entire economy.

PARK: (Through interpreter) The influence impact of fandoms are huge and started to spread globally with the success of BTS.

VANEK SMITH: BTS fans are known as A.R.M.Y., and there are huge groups of A.R.M.Y. in the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil and The Indicator. Michael He is our intern, and he's a huge BTS fan. Wait, did you learn Korean?

VANEK SMITH: This is not unusual, according to journalist Tamar Herman. She says many of BTS's fans, A.R.M.Y., they connect with the band and with each other through the study of these songs.

HERMAN: Literally, like a linguistics class - so this word means this thing, but it also can relate to this situation in Korea and history.

VANEK SMITH: And fans respond by buying everything BTS touches. And BTS is touching a lot of stuff. The band has not been shy about brand partnerships. They've collaborated with Samsung Galaxy on a BTS phone, with FILA on a sportswear collection, with Hyundai on the Palisade model that ended up in six-month backorders, with Baskin-Robbins, Coca-Cola, Louis Vuitton and McDonald's on a special Happy Meal. And in every case, everything sold out. Stacey Vanek Smith, NPR News.

Argentinians protest for more jobs, food amid economic crisis

Tens of thousands of Argentinians have protested across the country over poverty and unemployment as an economic crisis worsened by the coronavirus pandemic continues to hit residents hard. Organisations working with the unemployed and left-wing groups led a protest in the capital, Buenos Aires, that started at a church where thousands of pilgrims travel each year to pray at the shrine of San Cayetano, the patron saint of work, whose feast day is Saturday.

It ended at the Plaza de Mayo, an enormous square in front of the seat of government where protests usually take place.

"I come on behalf of people who do not have work: my brother, my neighbours and many people who you see really struggling everywhere," Nestor Pluis, a 41-year-old educational assistant, told the Reuters news agency.

Protests also took place in other parts of the country, including in Argentina's second city of Cordoba and the western city of Mendoza.

On Friday, the Argentinian government announced it would ease coronavirus restrictions after weeks of declining case and mortality figures.

"The more we vaccinate and take care of ourselves, the more we can sustain these achievements and advance in sustained and progressive openings," President Alberto Fernandez said in a recorded television message.

"Fernandez said he saw brighter days ahead. "Argentina is growing, recuperating jobs and will recover income," the president said.

Argentina has reported just more than five million cases of COVID-19 and more than 107,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

The pandemic has worsened an already difficult economic situation in the South American nation, where 42 percent of the country's 19 million people lives below the poverty line and the unemployment stands at 10.2 percent.

Lawmaker Juan Carlos Alderete, leader of the left-wing party Corriente Clasista y Combativa, said the needs of people in some neighbourhoods were "tremendous".

"The soup kitchens are seeing whole families coming to eat and many of the children have to be attended to by health professionals because they are malnourished," he said. Aljazeera