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COVID-19 IN SAUDI ARABIA: WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR**沙特阿拉伯的新冠肺炎：我们所知道的很远****Mohammad Nurunnabi**Department of Accounting, Prince Sultan University
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, mnurunnabi@psu.edu.sa*Received: September 15, 2020 ▪ Review: November 10, 2020 ▪ Accepted: December 15, 2020**This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)***Abstract**

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is affecting social and economic life worldwide. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current status of COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia. National data regarding SARS-CoV-2 infections in Saudi Arabia were obtained from the World Health Organization, the Saudi Ministry of Health, and Our World in Data as of June 13, 2020. The stimulus package data were obtained from the International Monetary Fund. The data were then analyzed to paint the current scenario of COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia. The initial case of SARS-CoV-2 infection in Saudi Arabia was detected on March 2, 2020. Epidemiological data indicate that by August 15, 2020, there were a total of 258,156 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 2,601 deaths. The case fatality rate decreased significantly to 0.74% on June 13, compared to 1.51% on April 7, 2020. The tests per thousand people increased to 0.66. The study suggests that importation of SARS-CoV-2 infection was effectively handled by the government, with stringent lockdown and significant support for employees and local businesses through stimulus packages.

Keywords: Pandemic, Saudi Arabia, Coronavirus, Economic Growth, Stimulus Package

摘要 冠状病毒病（新冠肺炎）大流行正在影响全世界的社会和经济生活。本研究的目的是评估沙特阿拉伯新冠肺炎的当前状态。截至 2020 年 6 月 13 日，有关沙特阿拉伯 SARS-CoV-2 感染的国家数据来自世界卫生组织，沙特卫生部和《我们的世界》数据。刺激方案数据来自国际货币基金组织。然后分析数据以描绘沙特阿拉伯新冠肺炎的当前情况。沙特阿拉伯于 2020 年 3 月 2 日发现了首例 SARS-CoV-2 感染病例。流行病学数据表明，到 2020 年 8 月 15 日，共有 258,156 例确诊的新冠肺炎病例，死亡 2,601 例。病死率从 2020 年 4 月 7 日的 1.51% 大幅下降至 6 月 13 日的 0.74%。每千人测试的比率增加至 0.66。该研究表明，SARS-CoV-2 感染的进口已由政府有效处理，并通过刺激措施严格锁定并为员工和本地企业提供了大量支持。

关键词: 大流行, 沙特阿拉伯, 冠状病毒, 经济增长, 刺激计划

I. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak that originated in Wuhan, Hubei Province (China) has become a global pandemic. The symptoms of COVID-19 include dry cough, chest pain, fever, and labored breathing [1]. A novel coronavirus was eventually identified on December 13, 2019 [2], [3]. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General reconvened the Emergency Committee (EC). Based on advice from the EC, the WHO Director-General declared the novel coronavirus outbreak (2019-nCoV) a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). On March 11, 2020, WHO made the assessment and declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Globally, as of August 15, 2020 (4:35 pm CEST) there have been 21,026,758 confirmed cases of

COVID-19 in 216 countries, including 755,786 deaths [4].

II. GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO COVID-19

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases totaled 119,942, with 893 deaths as of June 13, 2020 (Figures 1, 2a, and 2b). On March 2, 2020, the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia announced the first case of coronavirus infection in a citizen who had returned from Iran via the Kingdom of Bahrain [5]. The citizen had not disclosed his condition at the Saudi port of entry. All the people who were in close contact with him had samples taken that were examined by the Saudi Center for Disease Control and Prevention. On March 24, 2020, the first recorded COVID-19-related death was a 51-year-old Afghani resident [6].

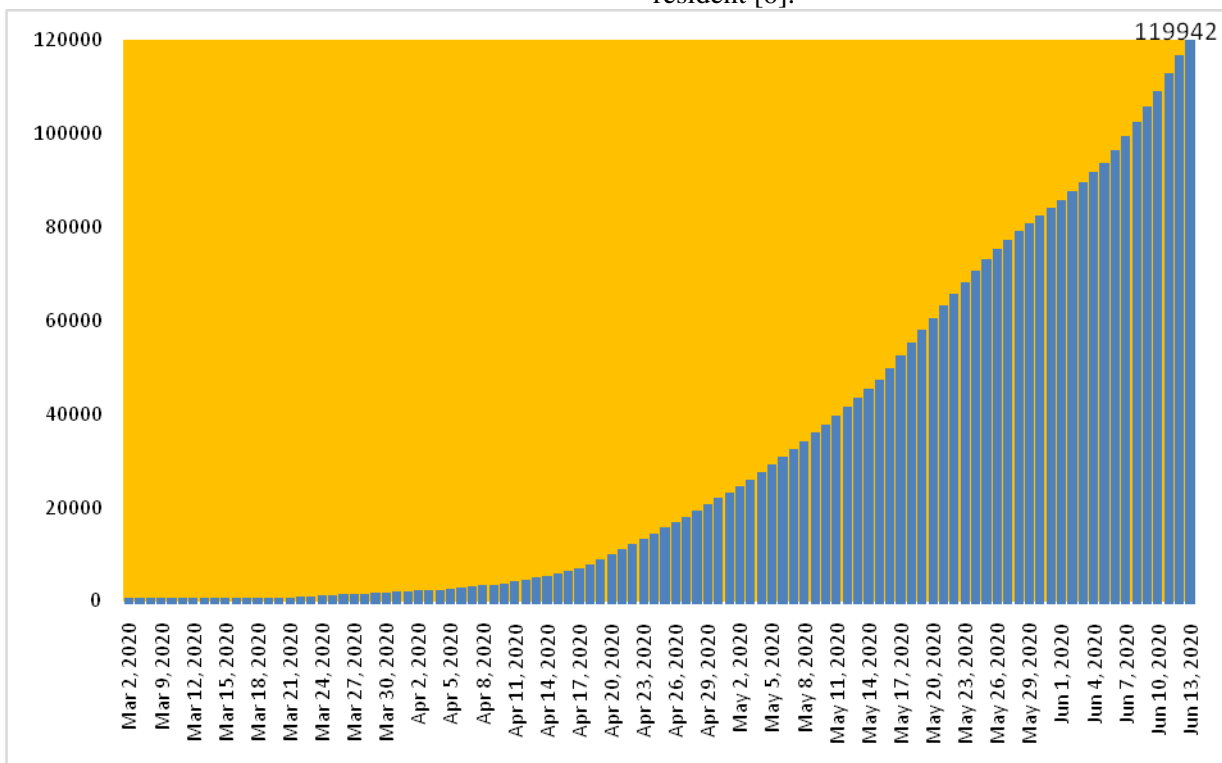


Figure 1. Total cumulative confirmed cases of COVID-19 (Author's compilation)

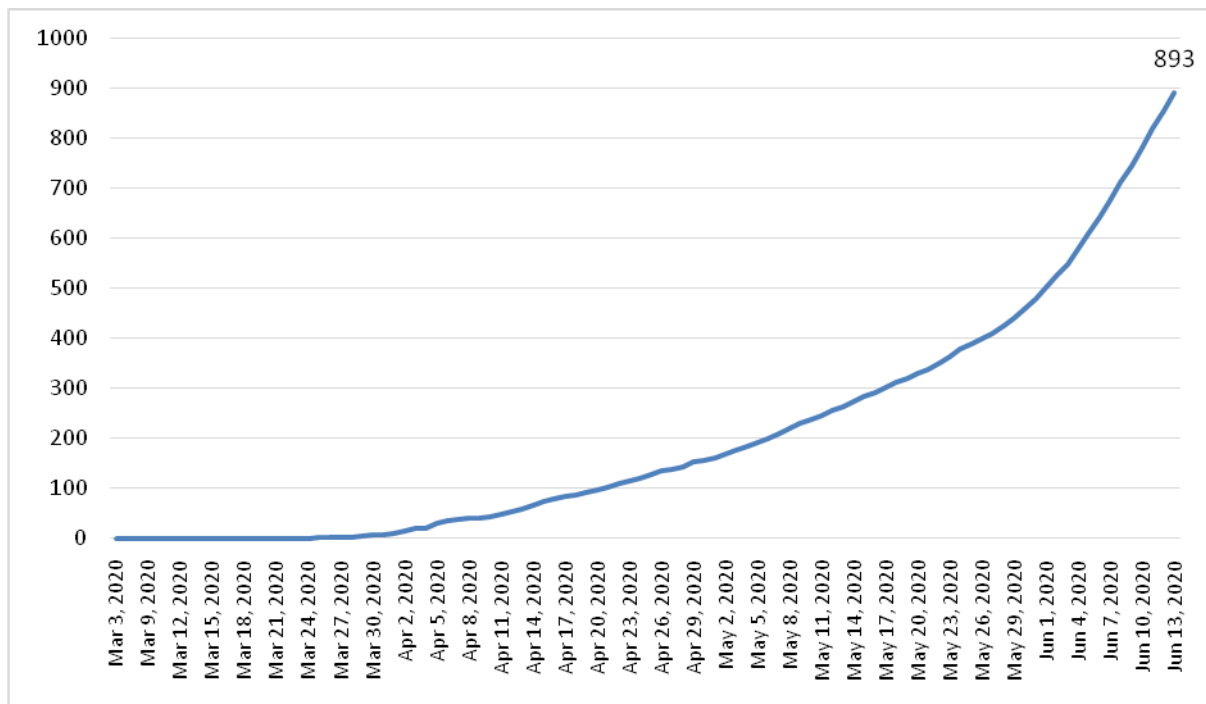


Figure 2a. Cumulative deaths due to COVID-19 (Author's compilation)

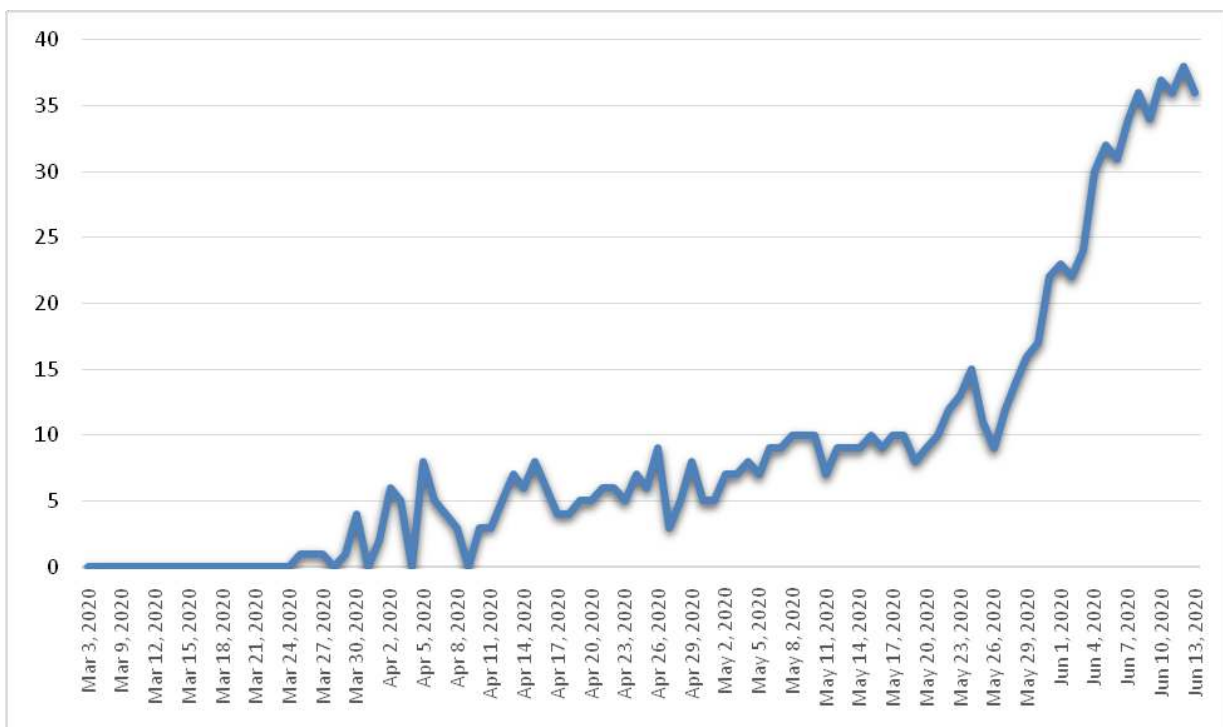


Figure 2b. Daily confirmed deaths (Author's compilation)

The Saudi government implemented a range of measures to limit the spread of the virus that included the following: setting curfews; restricting travel (including on international flights and internal public transportation and taxis); suspending prayers at mosques; closing all schools, universities, and shopping malls; suspending employee attendance at government and private workplaces (except for critical staff); and increasing testing (Tables 1 and 2). Additionally, on April 22, 2020, a repatriation

program called “Auda” (or return) was launched online to facilitate the return of expatriates.

Table 1.

Border measures in Saudi Arabia (Author's compilation from various sources)

Date	Event
06-Feb-20	Suspended travel to China
06-Feb-20	Tested travellers returning from China for COVID-19
27-Feb-20	Suspended the entry of travellers holding a religious visitor visa

27-Feb-20	Suspend the entry of tourists from countries with COVID19
27-Feb-20	Suspend the use of national ID card for travel in the GCC area
28-Feb-20	Suspended entry of GCC member states' citizens to religious sites
03-Mar-20	Introduced health screening and disinfection measures at all airports
08-Mar-20	Required all arrivals from COVID19 pandemic areas to self-isolate
09-Mar-20	flights suspended to number of countries
15-Mar-20	Suspended all international travel for 14 days
16-Mar-20	Extended residency permits and visas
21-Mar-20	Domestic flights suspension
23-Mar-20	Exempted Umrah visa violators from penalties

Table 2.
Lockdown schedule in Saudi Arabia (Author's compilation from various sources)

Date	Event
04-Mar-20	Umrah suspension
08-Mar-20	Required all arrivals from COVID19 pandemic areas to self-isolate
12-Mar-20	Suspended events and large gatherings
16-Mar-20	Directed most government employees to work from home
16-Mar-20	Closed malls and shops
18-Mar-20	Increased the limit for contactless card transactions
23-Mar-20	Imposed partial curfew (Curfew started for 21 days: 6am -7 pm)
25-Mar-20	Raised E-wallet top up monthly ceiling limit
26-Mar-20	Riyadh, Makkah and Madinah lockdown - curfew (6am - 3pm)
29-Mar-20	Jeddah lockdown
30-Mar-20	Makkah lockdown
02-Apr-20	Makkah, Madinah 24 hours curfew
04-Apr-20	Jeddah areas lockdown - 24 h curfew
06-Apr-20	Riyadh, Dammam, Tabuk, Dahrn, Hafuf, Jeddah, Taif, Qatif, Khobar 24h curfew
06-Apr-20	Imposed 24-hour curfew in certain cities
08-Apr-20	Changed partial curfew times

26-Apr-20	Partially lifted 24-hour curfew in all cities except Makkah
26-Apr-20	Allowed some commercial and economic activities to reopen
23-May-20	24-hour curfew across the Kingdom during the five-day Eid Al-Fitr holiday
28-May-20	<i>Phase 1</i> (May 28 - May 30): Movement within and between all regions of the Kingdom in private cars will be allowed from 6 am to 3 pm except in Makkah
31-May-20	<i>Phase 2</i> (May 31 - June 20): Movement is allowed from 6.00am until 8.00pm in all areas of the Kingdom, except in Makkah
05-Jun-20	A curfew running from 3pm to 6am, a suspension of prayers in mosques and a stay-at-home order for public and private sector workers in the Red Sea city whose airport serves Makkah pilgrims for 2 weeks
21-Jun-20	<i>Phase 3</i> (June 21-): The Kingdom will return to "normal" conditions as it was before the coronavirus lockdown measures were implemented

The tests administered per thousand people also increased to 0.66 (Figure 3). The case fatality rate decreased significantly to 0.74% on June 13, 2020, compared to 1.51% on April 7, 2020 (Figure 4) [7]. Upon comparing Saudi vs. non-Saudi cases, it was found that mostly non-Saudis were affected by COVID-19. On March 9, 2020, the total number of confirmed cases was 11, and the new number of confirmed cases was four. Three of the four cases (75%) were non-Saudis (two Bahraini, one American). On April 30, 2020, the total number of confirmed cases surpassed 21,000 as 1,351 new cases were confirmed, with 17% of the cases found in Saudi nationals and 83% in foreigners. On May 25, 2020, the cumulative number of confirmed cases surpassed 72,000 as 1,931 new cases were confirmed, with 45% (862) of the cases found in Saudi nationals and 55% (1,062) in foreigners (Figure 5).

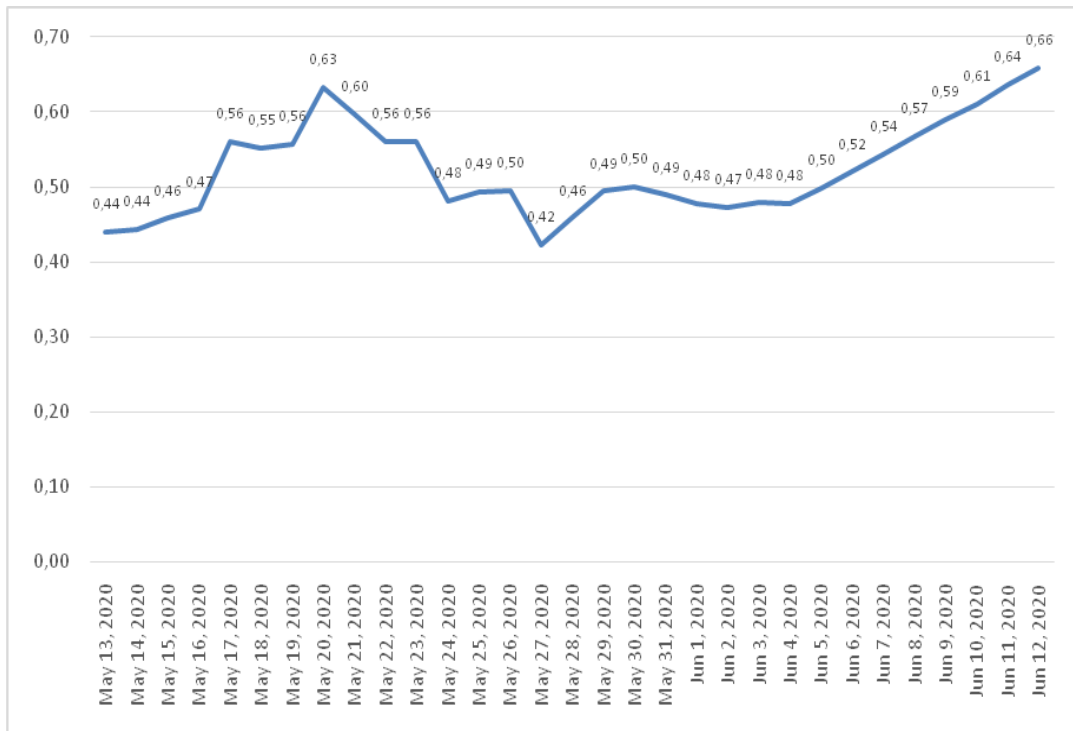


Figure 3. Daily tests per thousand people (7-day smoothed) (Author's compilation)

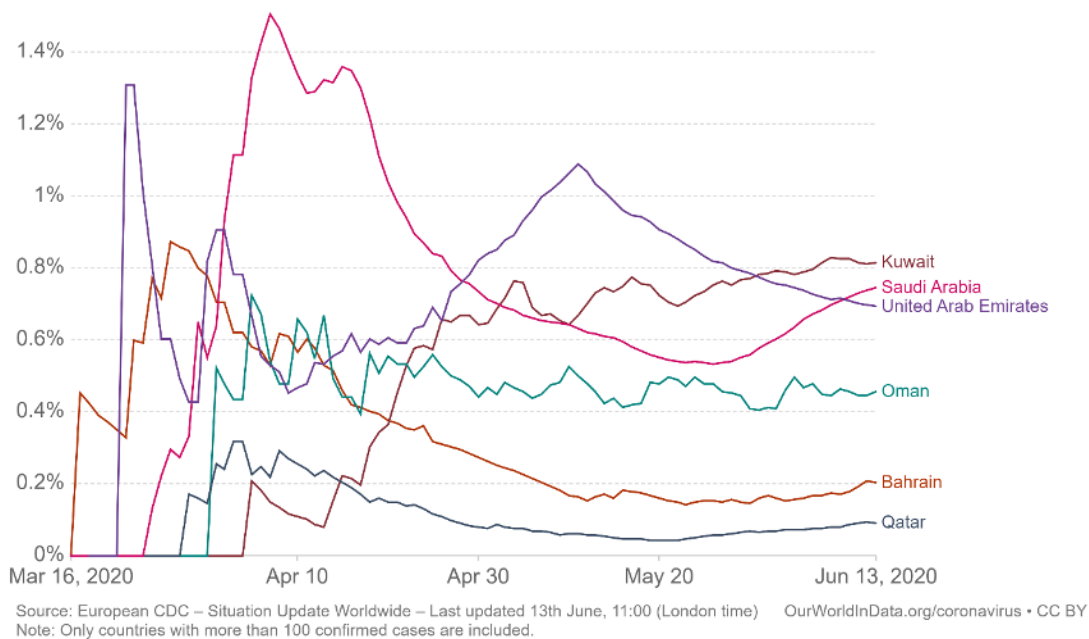


Figure 4. Case fatality rate in the GCC countries [7]

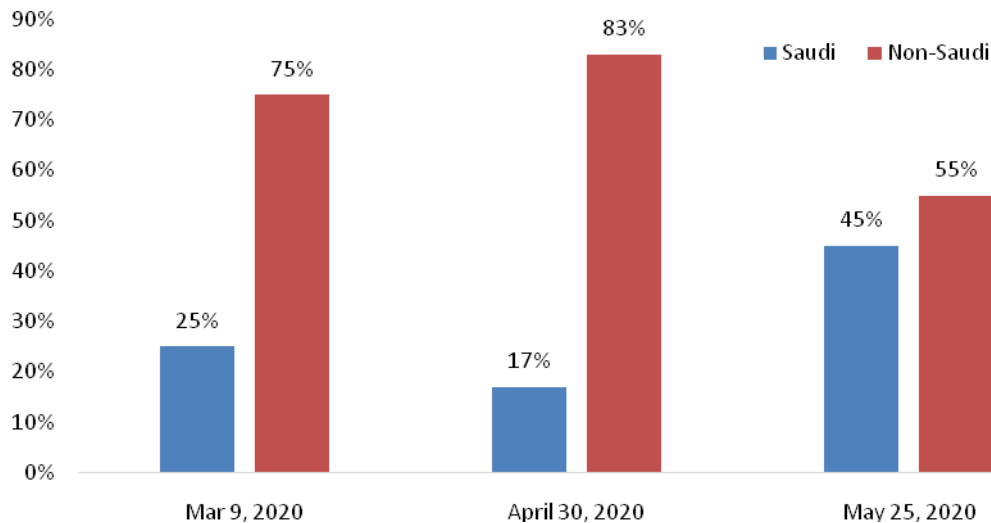


Figure 5. Daily confirmed new cases (Saudi vs. Non-Saudi) (Author's compilation)

In terms of health services, testing, and tracing, the Saudi government did the following: April 26, 2020—contracted with China to increase testing capacity; April 3, 2020—introduced health screening units at land ports; March 3, 2020—introduced health screening and disinfection measures at all airports; February 6, 2020—tested travelers returning from China for COVID-19; March 30, 2020—provided free treatment for all COVID-19 patients; and April 11, 2020—launched the “Rest Assured” app to provide information to those under quarantine.

One of the probable limitations of the study includes the fact that as of March 2, 2020, there was likely severe under-reporting of COVID-19 cases in many countries, including Iran and China. The population base of China and Iran are significantly higher, and an accurate number of properly reported cases may inform policymakers globally how to be better prepared against the COVID-19 pandemic [8].

III. CONCLUSION

The government has made significant efforts to keep the unemployment rate stable. The government announced a private sector support package amounting to SAR 70 billion (\$18.7 billion or 2.8% of GDP) on March 20. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman, ordered the government to pay 60% of Saudi employees' salaries for a period of three months, amounting to SR 9 billion (\$2.39 billion). The General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) conducted a large-scale survey. The initiative is in cooperation with the Global SME Policy Network (GSPN) and Prince Sultan University. A total of 918 micro, small,

and medium enterprises (MSME) from 13 administrative regions were surveyed. Many businesses are receiving support from the stimulus package of the government of Saudi Arabia. Mainly, small businesses are receiving this support [9]. The net employment (job creation) in March 2020 was 37,432 [10].

To conclude, the study suggests that, in the era of globalization, the risk of importing an epidemic from a given country is difficult to stop. However, the stringent initial responses from the government with respect to travel bans, lockdown, curfews, and social distancing considerably reduced the number of confirmed cases in Saudi Arabia.

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