**Comparing the Pak-India COVID fights**

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As the second COVID wave hits the world and nations across the globe grapple with the emerging challenge, it may be important to compare Pakistan’s COVID management strategy with India to draw some lessons to deal with the second wave.

Pakistan and India were affected by COVID’s first wave in Feb-March this year, despite a better economy and a reasonably well-structured health system, India was initially found to be in a state of denial, its lethargic health system, bureaucratic red tape and the chaotic political decision-making system was thoroughly exposed as Modi went into an abrupt lockdown.

Taking help from our previous articles published on India’s fight against COVID, we have tried to summarise the initial response to get a clear picture.

When Modi announced the Janta Curfew on March 19 with catchy words like ‘taali bajao, thali bajao’, the Bollywood mentality came into action with sharing videos of claps, bells and thali-banging to Modi’s official twitter account. Some got so excited that they came out on the streets and started celebrating the death of coronavirus. WhatsApp groups run by RSS posted some ‘scientific’ data claiming that a NASA satellite telecast had shown that coronavirus had retreated from India, thanks to people’s effort at 5PM on March 22.

[All steps to be taken for progress of Radio Pakistan: Senator Shibli](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/all-steps-to-be-taken-for-progress-of-radio-pakistan-senator-shibli)

Modi’s second announcement came after a few days with the complete shutdown of India, virtually locking the 1300 million Indians into a freezer. As time passed, it dawned on the poor and hapless Indians that the rich and powerful had actually abandoned them to either stay in cities without work and pay, or move out to their villages and towns to be with their loved ones; after all, rural India still has some humanity left in the community.

The lockdown in India was sudden, resulting in a massive migration on foot; although Indian mainstream media was selective in covering the story, social media was rife with pictures and videos of a mass of human misery marching on the roads and exposing the cruelty of the Indian state with the hapless and poor; we called it the ‘Indian March of Shame’.

The Livemint magazine survey published on August 10 analysed the effects of lockdown on rural India. The results display a pathetic, deplorable and archaic system of governance, where the poor were left on their own to fend off the double whammy of COVID-19 and hunger.

[Proud of serving Sikh community: Governor Punjab](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/proud-of-serving-sikh-community-governor-punjab)

Modi’s grand announcement of feeding 800 million poor at the scale of 1kg daal and 5kg rice per head for three months is a farce and nothing else. This package clearly indicates that almost 70 percent of India is living in abject poverty, where it cannot afford even survival rations without government support.

In contrast, Pakistan was praised for Covid handling on many accounts:

In his interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, the distinguished economist and Former US treasury secretary, Lawrence ‘Larry’ Summers appreciated Pakistan’s attempts in handling the outbreak. “America’s failure on COVID-19 is almost unimaginable. Heck, if the US had handled the pandemic as well as Pakistan, we would have saved in the neighbourhood of $10 trillion,” Summers highlighted.

In September, the Chief of WHO, Tedros Ghebreyesus congratulated Pakistan on its efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed its economy to recover. In an OpEd article for The Independent, Tedros wrote, “Community health workers (in Pakistan) who have been trained to go door-to-door vaccinating children against polio have been redeployed and utilised for surveillance, contact tracing and care.” Tedros added that Pakistan’s response fortifies the idea that the choice is not between controlling the virus and saving the economy, rather the two go hand-in-hand.

[Babar Azam appointed Test captain](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/babar-azam-appointed-test-captain)

Prime Minister Imran Khan’s policy on handling Covid was mainly centred on humanitarian principle and care for the poor. The highlights are as following:

The leadership took a deep breath, appreciating the importance of early strategic decision making without loss of precious time, adopted a bold and practical approach to Covid handling. Based on the principal of centralised planning and decentralised execution, Pakistan created a federal structure of National Command Operation Centre (NSOC) which became the nerve centre of planning, execution and supervision. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was mobilised and furnished with health and relief equipment in record time to expand its operations across the nook and corners of Pakistan.

Pakistan’s health system came under stress but a well thought out strategy to erect emergency COVID specific hospitals and provision of medical equipment in COVID hotspots made a difference. The role played by brave doctors and paramedical staff in managing the crisis will be written in golden words when the history of the Pakistani nation to deal with pandemic will be written.

[PM desires targeted subsidy system for poor](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/pm-desires-targeted-subsidy-system-for-poor)

No panic; unlike India there was no panic in Pakistan, not even a single labourer or worker travelled on foot to his hometown, the public and private transportation system remained functional and due care was taken to make sure people reached their destinations without major hiccups.

The border control mechanism was strengthened, giving due care to the humanitarian factor. Decisions on the Afghanistan and Iran borders, creating quarantine and corona inspection centres on all entry points helped to manage it with quiet ease; despite some excitement in the media, Pakistan remained steadfast and well-focussed.

The smart lockdown and media campaign to convince the poor as well as middle class that precautions and SOPs were important, played an important role in targeted control measures.

Evolving mechanism and flexibility: NCOC and NDMA kept evolving the response and structures to adjust to the changing situation. Their round-the-clock functioning and system of feedback for mid-course correction helped the state in flattening the curve and presenting Pakistan as one of the best managed states in the world.

[Does an ordinary citizen enjoy the right to access of information in Pakistan?](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/does-an-ordinary-citizen-enjoy-the-right-to-access-of-information-in-pakistan)

Despite the fatigue in society and the system, NCOC has not lowered its guard. Recently, NCOC launched a WhatsApp number for registration of COVID related violations by the public. Any citizen coming across any violation of COVID SOPs like not wearing a mask, non-adherence to social distancing, overcrowding at public places etc, can take a picture and brief account of violation and send it to NCOC. These small steps of communication with the public have made it possible to fight the menace of COVID effectively.

Indigenous manufacturing of medical equipment: a VOA News report of 6 July acknowledged that Pakistan has rolled out its first ever locally produced ventilators for deployment at hospitals treating coronavirus patients, Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated the production unit and handed over the first batch of ‘SafeVent SP100’ portable ventilators to the NDMA. The facility in Haripur has a production capacity of up to 300 ventilators a month and it is being expanded.

[NA deputy speaker discusses political, constitutional matters with Punjab governor](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/na-deputy-speaker-discusses-political-constitutional-matters-with-punjab-governor)

The Pakistani system of charity and philanthropy: another major factor that helped Pakistan in fight against Covid was the spirit to help the poor and downtrodden. Asianworld UK conducted a survey in 2018 and found that when it comes to donating to charity, Pakistan is a leading nation in the world and is contributing to approximately 1.5 percent of its GDP to charity. The contributions push it to the top of the ranks, compared to wealthier countries like the United Kingdom, which donate 1.3 percent GDP to charity and Canada who donate 1.2 percent GDP. According to reports made by the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy, Pakistanis donate around Rs240 billion ($2 billion) annually to charity.

Pakistan’s COVID package for the poor was greatly supplemented by the system of charity in Pakistan; no wonder the world was surprised that Pakistan came out of the initial crisis with flying colours.

To conclude, Pakistan in comparison with India has outperformed it in all domains, it has managed to come out of initial shock with a bold outlook; however, the gains of this effort can get dented if Pakistan and her people do not remain alert to the second wave hitting the globe now.