**[Managing Covid-19](https://www.dawn.com/news/1656263/managing-covid-19)**

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THE Covid-19 pandemic has adversely impacted even the most resilient health systems — from individuals to communities, from daily wagers to accomplished professionals. However, Pakistan, a developing country of nearly 220 million inhabitants has fared well in its fight against Covid-19. This success is embedded in multiple factors which have contributed towards effectively managing the pandemic since its onset in Pakistan. The government of Pakistan and WHO had been closely monitoring the evolving situation and as soon as the first case was reported on Feb 26, 2020, in Pakistan the mitigation measures were already in place.

At the national level under the prime minister’s leadership, the National Coordination Committee was established as an apex body which is tasked with supervising the national response towards the Covid-19 pandemic. In April 2020, the government in collaboration with partners launched a $595m Pakistan Preparedness and Response Plan (PPRP) that chalked out a coordinated international effort in consultation with the foreign affairs ministry to support the health ministry at the federal and provincial levels.

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The establishment of the National Comm­and and Operation Centre was one of the stepping stones which made the Covid response pragmatic and swift. It led the coordination between various government agencies, provinces and regions. Based on epidemiological data, the model of testing, tracing and quarantine was implemented for identifying disease spread and hotspots so as to enable targeted smart lockdowns. The NCOC also oversaw the enforcement of critical non-pharmaceutical interventions such as closure of schools during peak waves, regulation of the timings of commercial activities and tourism etc.

A testament of these measures is the effective management of four distinct waves of Covid-19 since April 2020. Likewise, Pakistan’s Covid fatality rate ie 124 casualties per million population and 5,536 cases reported per million population are amongst the lowest in comparison to countries in South Asia and in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Also, Pakistan’s economy performed beyond expectations amid the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a 3.94 per cent economic growth rate during the fiscal year, compared to a revised negative 0.47pc in 2019-20. The government, under the umbrella of the Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme, disbursed over Rs200 billion to nearly 1.7m families across Pakistan. This valuable assistance benefited nearly 109m people or half the country’s population.

The success of Pakistan’s Covid response management was also acknowledged by WHO director general Dr Tedros Adhanom, who noted that Pakistan effectively utilised the well-established community health workers’ infrastructure for surveillance, contact tracing and care. Dr Tedros appreciated Pakistan’s approach that the choice is not between controlling the virus or saving the economy; the two go hand in hand.

For a developing country, Pakistan’s vaccination roll-out programme has been remarkable. A recent significant milestone in this regard is the administration of 100m vaccine doses across the country. Moreover, special measures have been taken by deploying mobile vaccination teams which are reaching out to senior citizens, people living with disabilities and marginalised populations.

The silver lining during the pandemic has been the identification of the gaps in the existing health infrastructure, providing us with the opportunity to take corrective measures to strengthen health systems in the country. In 2016, WHO facilitated a joint external evaluation for Pakistan, which looked in detail at 19 technical areas, including pandemic preparation. As a result, comprehensive recommendations were made to improve the national health emergency infrastructure.

Notwithstanding the success of the Covid-19 response, there are a few areas where we can do better. The pandemic does not discriminate with regard to caste, creed and gender. However, data indicates that the vaccination rates amongst women are much lower in comparison to men. A similar predicament has been observed amongst the refugee population in Pakistan.

As the WHO representative in Pakistan, I state this with cautious optimism that Pakistan’s Covid-19 management is headed in the right direction with a particular emphasis on close coordination, strengthening surveillance systems, tracking the evolution of new variants and investing in research and innovation. On behalf of WHO, I would like to express my profound gratitude towards the most resilient healthcare workers. They have worked and continue to do so around the clock to deliver a balanced response that has been the hallmark of Pakistan’s efforts with dividends in health systems along with economic prosperity. We firmly believe in the resolve, ‘No one is safe until everyone is safe’.

*The writer is serving as World Health Organisation’s representative/head of mission in Pakistan.*

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