

## Taiwan could have helped India

Written by Sana Hashmi  
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Over the past few months, COVID-19 has tested the grit and health preparedness of countries worldwide. Major powers have been seen picking up the pieces. In this crisis, Taiwan is a rare success. It has emerged as one of the safest places to live.

As of yesterday, there were 445 confirmed cases and seven casualties. It managed to do this despite its proximity to China, where the outbreak was detected at the end of last year.

Taiwan's handling of COVID-19 has garnered appreciation from countries worldwide. While most countries had to resort to either a partial or complete lockdown, Taiwan has dealt with the crisis without shutting down the economy or doing much harm to human lives.

Taiwan's successful management of the pandemic and the resultant praise accompanied with wide reportage has irked China, which is struggling to prove that it acted responsibly and the China model is the only successful way to tackle COVID-19.

Taiwan's success has boosted the argument that democracies can also handle a crisis situation without compromising democratic values.

Taiwan acted responsibly by notifying the WHO about the potential health threat from a novel coronavirus in December last year, even when other countries were unaware of the existence of the virus. A series of advisories was also uploaded on the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control. Transparency has been a key feature of Taiwan's response.

There is a sense of collective responsibility and mutual trust between the government and citizens. Continuous assurances by the government have mitigated the element of fear among people in Taiwan.

The successful containment of COVID-19 has motivated the administration of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to utilize its successful strategy to project its soft power in its international outreach.

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The Taiwan model provides an alternative to China's non-democratic model.

China has been attempting to shrink Taiwan's international space. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was a blessing in disguise for Taiwan on the diplomatic front. It has given the nation an opportunity to push for greater international participation.

Despite its exclusion from the WHO, Taiwan is willing to share its experience and help the US, European countries and countries under the scope of the New Southbound Policy. Given that Taiwan is unfairly excluded from all the high-level inter-state and WHO-led meetings, it began to act on its own by formulating its strategy with little or no help.

Taiwan's success story has been shaped by a mix of factors.

First, it has learned from its past mistakes and experiences from SARS and used that to fight COVID-19. It already had an epidemic prevention strategy to deal with the challenge.

Second, it succeeded because the government acted promptly after observing the situation in China at a very early stage. There was a quick response from the administration, which adopted a whole-of-government approach.

As soon as the first case was diagnosed, measures such as temperature monitoring and sanitization were put in place at public places. Quarantine protocols were strict and it was mandatory to observe self-quarantine for Taiwanese and foreigners entering Taiwan from high-risk areas, primarily China, from Feb. 6.

Social distancing has also been encouraged wherever is possible.

Third, the preventive measures are accompanied by a high-quality healthcare system. Taiwan's

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healthcare has been ranked the best by online database Numbeo's Health Care Index by Country, and 99.9 percent of its population is covered by the National Health Insurance system.

Taiwan is one of the few nations that has used negative-pressure isolation rooms to treat COVID-19 patients.

Taiwan's experience is directly relevant to India, which is the second-most populous country in the world, and a large section of its society is still not covered by social security measures.

As a fellow democracy, India could learn from Taiwan that COVID-19 is not the first pandemic, nor will it be the last, but preparedness and making a concerted effort could save the country from a large number of casualties next time.

An important lesson is that government promptness in addressing the situation is key.

Taiwan has approached COVID-19 by taking the right actions at the right time, which has made it possible for the nation to return to complete normalcy.

Another lesson that India could learn from Taiwan is that healthcare spending is not a choice but a necessity. Having a nationalized health scheme has made it convenient for Taiwan to treat patients effectively. India has to invest more in ensuring that its 1.25 billion people have comprehensive healthcare.

Transparency is a virtue democracies should adhere to. Taiwan has been keeping its population apprised of the developments and its strategies. This leads to higher ratings and positive public opinion.

In their fight against COVID-19, India's central and state governments must work together by consistently adhering to the principles of accountability, transparency, trust, effective management and good healthcare.

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Countries such as India, which still have not been able to flatten the COVID-19 curve, could have benefited immensely had Taiwan's experiences been shared with them in a comprehensive and timely manner.

With India assuming the chair of the WHO's Executive Board, a welcome step would be for it to support greater participation for Taiwan in the WHO, so that the international community could learn from Taiwan's experience.

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