

A tale of two countries and how they are beating back Covid-19

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Vietnam is not a rich country. Being a developing nation it is a dot compared to a financially capable behemoth like America. Vietnam does not have the latest medical equipment nor can they manufacture at a moment's notice the way China can. Yet they have managed to avoid deaths from this pandemic (at the time of this writing) while those two rich nations suffer in the thousands. America's death count stands at 8489 while China is at 3329.

Track and isolate

How though? The Vietnam government did not waste time. They quickly stopped flights and quarantined all new arrivals. Schools were closed quickly followed by work institutions.

At 240 confirmed cases, Vietnam couldn't go for mass testing activities either but they focused on activities within their control. It suspended flights to and from China since February 1. This was followed by a 21-day quarantine in a province largely populated by migrant workers returning from Wuhan, China, where the virus originated. They went on strict measures to quarantine anyone arriving in Vietnam. Further measures include mandatory 14-day quarantines for anyone arriving in Vietnam. While anyone



infected were tracked down to find other contacts.

Inform and educate

Singapore on the other hand has the resources to fight back but they responded even earlier. It was one of the first countries to ban travellers from China in late January the moment news reports cropped up about the COvid-19 respiratory virus. This was done even when World Health Organization suggested there was no need

to ban travellers.

Singapore followed this up with developing facilities to test over 2,000 people a day. Strict quarantines backed up with criminal charges if violated have been imposed to contain further spread. In a country where chewing gum is banned and can be a punishable offense if spat out, people accepted all this rather easily.

All of this was followed by massive dissemination of information on how to conduct oneself and how to avoid

transmission. Schools and workplaces were provided with all kinds of easy to absorb information, some in the form of comics, cartoons and infographs, to educate the people on the severity. Testing is free in Singapore and locals receive free medical treatment. As a result, they did not have to go into lockdown and people could continue to lead almost normal lives. As of writing this, Singapore has had 1189 cases with 297 recovered and 6 deaths. It could have been worse.

What's the take for Bangladesh?

Is it too late? We made a few grave errors. Schools were closed near middle of March. Offices a little later. Flights in and out continued for weeks after they should have been stopped. RMG factories brought workers back into the city en masse and then turned them away the next day. Many people walk around still under the illusion that things are not as bad as they appear to be. 1.2 million positive cases and 64,784 deaths worldwide. That is not a small number for something that kills you with a cold and a fever, symptoms people here think goes away with a little paracetamol.

What Singapore and Vietnam had in common despite their financial differences is they prevented the spread by preventing contact. They tracked down cases and isolated them.

It works better in smaller countries because of scale, something the US is having difficulty managing. Hong Kong and Taiwan followed similar practices to keep the spread contained. It seems distance and isolation are the primary activities keeping the contagion from scattering.

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