**Straight Talk: is corona the new weapon of war?**

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[Corona Virus](https://dailytimes.com.pk/544198/corona-virus-surfaces-in-china/) is a clear and present danger. Honestly, just researching for this article was a scary experience. I have relied on credible sources in an effort to inform my friends and readers about this deadly outbreak. I will feel redeemed if I can help prevent even one potential case from this cruel virus. Information has the power of prevention.

The outbreak of Corona Virus named “2019-nCov”wasreported on 31st December 2019. It started from a seafood market that also trades live animals in Wuhan, Hubei Province in Central China. Suddenly there was a cluster of pneumonia cases. It was at the start of Chinese Lunar Year celebrations, an annual event akin to Christmas or Eid. Chinese holiday spirits quickly turned to fear and panic.

Investigations will determine its origin. However it is believed that this new virus belongs to the same group that caused SARS in 2003 and MER in 2019. Its origin is in animals, transferred to humans and is now spreading person to person. SARS origin is Civet Cats in South East Asia. MER was transferred from camels.

Corona in latin means crown. The virus cell resembles a crown in its outer shape. 2019-nCov data is being closely monitored. It does not respond to antibiotics. Finding a vaccine is work in progress. It’s a respiratory infection starting with fever and cough and quickly turns into pneumonia leading to kidney failure. Pretty scary. It is transmitted through cough, sneezing, shaking hands with an infected patient.

The most vulnerable are the elderly with pre-existing conditions or a weak immune system. It’s contagiousness and virulence are being studied in China and globally. WHO is working closely with stakeholders on this virus. It has been declared a public health emergency. Risk Assessment states: “China very high; globally high”. Cases have been detected in 25 countries.

Fortunately Pakistan is in the clear. We do not have the resources and infrastructure to deal with such an outbreak. It requires two weeks isolation for which we don’t have facilities. Overcrowded hospitals don’t have screening and monitoring equipment, nor testing kits till China provides them. Patients need to be put on ventilators to survive. We have too few.

Our Government made a wise move not to repatriate Pakistani students from Wuhan in a hurry. It was tough in an emotionally charged atmosphere. They have access to far better medical care. Prevention is better than cure. Maintain hygiene, wear masks, avoid crowded places and frequently wash hands.

Corona Virus has severely brutalized China. Till date there are563 deaths and 2801 confirmed cases. Yet the nation has stood strong and tall.

Their leader Xi Jinping openly acknowledged “this epidemic is a major test of China’s system and capacity of governance.”It has strained China’s health care system and brought the country to a standstill. Wuhan is under lock down. Roads are deserted. But the Chinese have met the challenge head on. They built a 1000 bed hospital in one week. It is totally manned and operational.

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However the ripples run across China and beyond its borders. Chinese stocks fell across the board and in one day lost 9% when markets opened after the Lunar New Year holidays. Chinese Government is preparing to inject US$200 millions into the stock and financial market to stabilize the economy. Its people are geared up to do everything in their power, plus some more, to deal with this crisis. Trade and manufacturing losses will run into billions.

On the other hand China is getting a raw deal from the rest of the world. Look at social media. Pictures of Chinese eating habits are outright disrespectful. There is a deliberate effort to ridicule and paint a picture portraying the whole nation responsible for the outbreak.

It is being projected as if every Chinese, a nation of 1.2 billion people, is a carrier. That is not fair. It is stereo typing. The borders are being sealed for Chinese travelers by Russia, USA and other countries. Chinese reaction was “decisions should be evidence based.” It is an effort to corner a nation. It is racist.

**Where does this anger stem from?**

Till the nineties we were living in a world of two super powers competing to increase their spheres of influence. With the end of cold war, after dismemberment of USSR, it became a one super power world.

Around the same time China began to emerge as an industrial giant. They have been very strategic in their growth making deep inroad into economies around the world. They built their military clout without seeking confrontation. As they have progressed they have slowly started to flex their muscles. This has made USA uncomfortable.

The nature of warfare has changed in the last two decades. It’s no longer tanks and guns. Technology has taken over. It is now drones and remote controlled weapons that inflict maximum damage. It is being fought in laboratories and R&D centers. All sides are poaching the brightest brains.

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That is also true for developing viruses as weapons to subdue and disrupt the enemy. The reports by Chinese media claiming that biohazard containers were buried in the evacuated US Consulate in Wuhan are alarming. Could it be preparations for bio weapons? Is this a move on the Chinese?

The world trade and travel is disrupted. Multiple economies depending on tourism are desperate. Cruise ships are being quarantined. The fallout of this crisis threatens to be global. We need sanity to prevail. Global powers need solidarity to work together to control this demon before it causes irreparable damage. The good news is that kids are not affected in all the detected cases and the mortality rate thus far is only 2.1%. Let’s hope a vaccination and cure is found sooner than later.

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