

China: How Credible that China Accidently or By Design Spread Covit-19?

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Conspiracy theories abound. Main accuser is Donald Trump. Accused id Xi-Jinping. Charge is very serious. Particularly when death toll has passed one hundred thousand. Is the charge tenable and incendiary at a time when time has stood still? The world does not yet know when it will be free from the scourge. Millions of people are losing or have lost their jobs. In the US alone post-covit-19 unemployment is expected to be 40% the highest ever in US history but during the Great Depression. In developing countries conditions are expected to be dire. Nick Cohen a British journalist and political commentator writing in *The Spectator* found WHO asleep at the switch and cautioned that the current state of vaccine development was an expensive, slow and laborious process, costing billions of dollars, taking decades, with less than a 10 per cent rate of success.' Cohen asked the people not to despair or return permanently to autarky and localism. With the right precautions, an open, free-trading, free-moving, innovating world is possible without pandemics and is essential for raising living standards. Government he said, must both splash the cash and slash many of the things it does that are not urgent to alleviate human suffering, and there are a lot of them. Despite the obvious deadly impact of covet-19 on the health and the economy of the world people have started to wonder whether the space for democracy will not be squeezed in the post-coronavirus globe. Hungary's right-wing government offers perhaps the most striking example of how a crisis of public health has been used to further authoritarianism. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has cited the virus spread to cancel all elections and remain in power indefinitely. He has invoked broad powers to limit air travel and individual movements. But there is no end date to the restrictions, nor any parliamentary review of his actions. For as long as Orban's emergency orders are in place, he has claimed the right to rule by decree. In Serbia, President Aleksandar Vucic has pushed for similarly extreme measures and relied on heavily armed police patrols to enforce his edicts. He too has undermined parliamentary oversight of his actions and assumed the right to rule by decree (Can democracy survive the coronavirus? SONALI KOLHATKAR APRIL 14 2020 ALTNET). One could argue that both Hungary and Serbia were part of the authoritarian regimes and their introduction to democracy has been of recent origin. But then again both are members of the European Union some of whose members in the past rose in rebellion against repressive monarchies and landed aristocracy. Though some people in some countries may for the time being feel at ease with strict disciplinary measures it is doubtful that these same people will countenance Orban and Vucic in the long run. In developing countries though due to lack of education,

healthcare, and employment people caught in “poverty trap” may get used to authoritarianism and develop a thick skin to tolerate violation of their fundamental rights. Pakistan is an example where the armed forces either directly or through proxy have ruled the country ever since 1958 when General Ayub Khan imposed martial law in the country and ruled the country for a decade. Myanmar is another example where General Ne Win put the army in control since 1962 which remains the defacto ruler of the country despite a civilian cover. Bangladesh, a rebel with a cause since the British ruled the Indian subcontinent, has fought against the British and then Pakistani injustice and finally a bloody war of independence under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. If some critics allege the present government, in power for more than a decade, of authoritarianism it is mainly because a credible opposition has not been formed due to lack of popular support and the inability of the opposition party leaders failed to enthuse the people to embark on a mission to unseat the government. It appears that despite weak administrative and Ministerial incompetence the present Prime Minister is incontestably the preeminent leader of the people and any talk of her replacement, be it voluntary or otherwise, and causes a shiver in the spine of the general people. One may be reminded that Malaysian Mahathir Mohammed led the revolt against corrupt Negib government and became Prime Minister at the ripe age of ninety three. Joe Biden should he get elected to the US Presidency will be seventy seven when he takes oath in January next year. Barak Obama’s endorsement of Joe Biden favors his chances of winning the November elections. More so as Trump has once again gained international opprobrium for his criticism of WHO for alleged mishandling of covit-19. The Coronavirus pandemic has involved the judiciary in the US on Wisconsin primary held on 7th April. After the State Governor’s order to postpone the elections to a later date was nullified by a Republican dominated state assembly who demanded that the elections be held as scheduled the case went up to the US Supreme Court where majority opinion held that the votes along with the absentee votes be counted on 7th April though many absentee ballots could not be sent by the state election commission to the voters. The Supreme Court saw the appeal as a narrow, technical question about the absentee ballot process. The Court held that lower federal courts should ordinarily not alter the election rules on the eve of an election and that the elections be held on 7th April. The decision was made despite the facts that in the weeks leading up to the election, the COVID-19 pandemic had become a “public health crisis.” As of April 2, Wisconsin had 1,550 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 24 deaths attributable to the disease, “with evidence of increasing community. In a dissenting note Justice Ginsberg noted the Governor’s order to postpone the elections to a later date until slowing down of the disease. Additionally gathering of the people at the polling place would poses dire health risks. Wisconsin voters—at the encouragement of public officials— turned to voting absentee. About one million more voters requested absentee ballots in this election than in 2016. Accommodating the surge of absentee ballot requests heavily burdened election officials, resulting in a severe backlog of ballots requested. She further noted “While I do not doubt the good faith of my colleagues, the Court’s order, I fear, will result in massive disenfranchisement. A voter cannot deliver for postmarking a ballot she has not received. Yet tens of thousands of voters who timely requested ballots are unlikely to receive them by April 7, the Court’s postmark deadline. The Court’s suggestion that the current situation is not “substantially different” from “an ordinary election” boggles the mind....The majority of this Court declares that this case presents a “narrow, technical question.” That is wrong. The question here is whether tens of thousands of Wisconsin citizens can vote safely in the midst of a pandemic”. With the majority’s stay in place, Justice Ginsberg, argued, that will not be possible. Either they will have to brave the polls, endangering their own and others’ safety. Or they will lose their right to vote, through no fault of their own. That is a matter of utmost importance—to the constitutional rights of Wisconsin’s citizens, the integrity of the State’s election process, and in this most extraordinary

time, the health of the Nation". Justice Ginsberg's dissent note is an extra-ordinary chastisement of the Republican dominated Supreme Court who decided to follow an undemarcated line of loyalty for being appointed by Republican Presidents to the nation's highest judicial posts instead of the risks of contamination to the voters to line up to cast their votes. Most of the constitutions of the world provide for peaceful right to assembly. But the state reserves the right to place restrictions on the time, place, and manner of peaceful assemblies. In the case of social distancing and lockdown the governments may seem to have trodden on the right of assembly but when it is being done for the good of many and the people generally consenting to such compression of liberty such governmental actions should be presumed to have the sanction of the law. Global projection on coronavirus suggests that at the end of the covet-19, unpredictable though it is now, half of the global population will live in poverty. Even before the pandemic hit the world multiple international indices ranked Bangladesh one of the world's most natural-disaster prone countries. Bangladesh joins a growing number of countries trying to endorse food as a legally binding right. Many international NGOs have been advising the government to regard food as a human right. Monisha Biswas, policy and advocacy manager for international NGO Oxfam in Bangladesh, said even though Article 15 of the constitution recognizes the state's responsibility to secure the "basic necessities of life" for its citizens, - including food, it does not recognize a person's right to food. As of December 2010 13 countries worldwide recognized the right to food or provided for state obligations relating to food and nutrition as state policy and Bangladesh was one of them. Though it has not yet been legislated the decisions announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to reach food to the hungry and to sell rice at a very concessional rate to the poor are expected to meet the challenges thrown by covit-19 on hunger and poverty. Another challenge thrown by coronavirus pandemic is large scale unemployment both in developed and developing countries.

In the US till 16th April jobless claims have exceeded 22 million in four weeks. It underscores how the downdraft has spread to every corner of the economy: hotels and restaurants, mass retailers, manufacturers and white-collar strongholds like law firms. According to a prominent economist: "This is the deepest, fastest, most broad-based recession we've ever seen." Some of the new jobless claims represent freshly laid-off workers; others are from people who had been trying for a week or more to file. The US Commerce Department reported the steepest monthly drop in retail sales since record keeping began nearly 30 years ago, and the Federal Reserve said industrial production had recorded its biggest decline since 1946. World output, writes Ishaan Tharoor in Washington Post, over the next two years will fall \$9 trillion short of what was expected before the crisis. It is a loss akin to having Germany and Japan's economies vanish, says Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist. More than 90 countries have petitioned the IMF for assistance, with poorer nations facing the looming prospect of debt crises and political turmoil should they fail to secure fiscal aid from wealthier powers. Will the world come back to its axis before the corona virus almost devastated many countries regardless of the rich or poorness of the regions and the countries? This is an important question facing all of us as China is advocating itself as possessing the best model not only to save people from pandemic the likes of which the world has never seen but also having the best economic model for others to emulate. This argument may get force from the fact of the American withdrawal from the role of the leadership of the world. Ever since Donald Trump declared his "America First" policy which effectively meant that the US would look after its own interest and the NATO allies and the Bretton Woods institutions better listen to the US dictates, withdrawal of US troops from Syria, abandoning the fifty year old Palestinian policy and declaring Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, distancing US from the policies of its European allies, and most recently withdrawing support from WHO at a time when international coordination with WHO at the center was the call of the day. Domestically Donald Trump declared the media as his enemy,

frequently firing senior policy makers from their positions(some like General Mattis preferred to step down), and being at odds with the Democrats in the House and the Senate, quarreling with the CNN journalist as an example, and most recently calling the popular Governor of Michigan as “that woman”. The list is endless. The future both near and far will testify to the destruction wrought by Trump administration long after he is gone. Richard Hass, an American diplomat and President of the Council of Foreign Relations wrote recently (The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It-April 7 2020) “It is too soon to predict when the crisis itself will end. Whether in six, 12, or 18 months, the timing will depend on the degree to which people follow social-distancing guidelines and recommended hygiene; the availability of quick, accurate, and affordable testing, antiviral drugs, and a vaccine; and the extent of economic relief provided to individuals and businesses...Haas continues “Implicit in “Trump’s America First” policy was the assumption that much of what the United States did in the world was wasteful, unnecessary, and unconnected to domestic well-being The pandemic is likely to reinforce the democratic recession that has been evident for the past 15 years”. Opposed to that Mark Green, the outgoing administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), raised alarms about how refugees and displaced populations (71 million displaced around the world) will be affected by the pandemic and reflected on the Trump administration’s repeated attempts to cut funding for foreign aid. It is difficult to accept a proposition that the US that prided on American Exceptionalism will become a second rate power conceding the preeminence to China. Most of the countries of the world except a few African countries(Patrice Lumumba’s Congo, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Ghana, Tanzania) most of the newly freed nations adopted democratic elections as a way of changing power. In Asia SEATO, CENTO and other organizations kept these countries away from communism. One of the reasons was that the colonizers were European powers who had no tract with communism. China was no factor during the forties and fifties when liberation movements were at their peak. As deeply flawed as Washington’s response to the pandemic has been so far, the United States’ power—distinct from any particular president—rests on an enduring combination of material capabilities and political legitimacy, and there are few signs that the pandemic is causing power to shift rapidly and permanently to China’s side of the ledger write Michael Green and Evans Medeiros (The Pandemic Won’t Make China the World’s Leader Foreign Affairs) that “as deeply flawed as Washington’s response to the pandemic has been so far, the United States’ power—distinct from any particular president—rests on an enduring combination of material capabilities and political legitimacy, and there are few signs that the pandemic is causing power to shift rapidly and permanently to China’s side of the ledger. ... Some leaders, of course, are embracing Beijing’s narrative and applauding its methods in combating the outbreak—including officials in Cambodia, Iran, Pakistan, and Serbia. But few of these governments have been newly persuaded by recent Chinese messaging; they have a long record of accepting Chinese political narratives and economic assistance, often at the service of their own power at home. Indeed, some early recipients in Europe of Chinese-made testing kits and protective equipment rejected them as substandard. Just this week, Finland’s prime minister fired the head of the country's emergency supply agency for spending millions of euros on defective Chinese facemasks”. China’s expulsion of journalists from New York Times, Washington Post and Wall street Journal have put question mark on China’s tolerance of transparency. Though China’s has toned down its attack that the US had spread the virus in Wuhan many countries have not forgotten China’s efforts to contain information when they realized that the virus had gotten out of their hands in December last year. In conclusion the world now more than ever has to fight this evil together. Time for bickering is not now.

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