

# CORONAVIRUS: A LEAKED WEAPON?

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The new virus, christened 2019-nCoV by WHO, causes a severe respiratory infection that could potentially be fatal

A scary news report has suggested that the deadly coronavirus may have originated in a bio-warfare laboratory in China's Wuhan city, from where it went viral—to the world's alarm. The new virus, christened 2019-nCoV by the World Health Organization (WHO), causes a severe respiratory infection that could potentially be fatal. According to Chinese sources, it broke out of an unhygienic seafood market in Wuhan that was selling all manner of meats. But a Washington Times report cites an Israeli microbiologist as saying that this strain of the virus is likely linked to a lab associated with China's biological warfare programme. The Wuhan Institute of Virology is the country's only declared site that has the capacity to work with deadly strains of viruses, the report says.

Chemical and biological weapons are banned globally for the harm they inflict on non-combatants. Yet, some countries are suspected of holding deadly arsenals of germs and viruses that could wipe out millions if released in densely populated zones. Beijing is unlikely to admit having any such weapons, but now that suspicion has arisen, it must come clean and issue a white paper on it.

As of now, the virus is still spreading. As many as 15 cities in China are under partial or complete lockdown. Its death toll has reportedly climbed to 80, with over 2,700 confirmed cases across the country. What makes this virus particularly lethal is that it mutates easily and can spread even in its incubation period, which means the risk of contagion is high even before any symptoms show up. The world needs to put heads together to contain the threat. For that, Beijing would need to share all it knows about it.

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