

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK IN CHINA HAS EVOKED MEMORIES OF SARS EPIDEMIC. GLOBAL COOPERATION NEEDED TO CONTAIN IT

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

In a little more than a week, deaths due to coronavirus have multiplied by more than 20 times. Over a hundred people have succumbed to the mystery virus that originated in China's Wuhan province and it has been confirmed in at least 10 other countries. The Chinese authorities have acknowledged that the virus has affected 4,500 people. But modeling by researchers at Imperial College London suggests that 70,000 to 100,000 people could be affected. The WHO, which last week desisted from describing the situation as a public health emergency, has asked countries in Southeast Asia to remain vigilant. The Indian government is reportedly considering steps to prepare for evacuating the country's nationals from Wuhan.

The outbreak has evoked memories of the SARS epidemic of 2002-2003, which killed nearly 800 and affected more than 8,000 people worldwide. It was also ascribed to a coronavirus and manifested similar symptoms — fever, cough and shortness of breath. Antibiotics do not work against such viral pneumonia and there are no vaccines against them. However, there are reassuring differences between the situation in 2002-3 and the one today. For one, China's response to the current outbreak is markedly different from the way it dealt with SARS. In contrast to its secretive ways 17 years ago, Beijing informed the WHO, shared the virus's gene sequence with the world, imposed travel restrictions and quarantined 50 million people. Moreover, experts suggest that the current coronavirus outbreak is not as virulent as the one in 2002-3 — it has a mortality rate of less than 3 per cent as compared to SARS's death rate of nearly 10 per cent. But we are still looking at preliminary data, and scientists are likely to know the exact magnitude of the problem in the coming weeks.

The coronavirus is a zoonotic virus — one that jumps from humans to animals. The WHO estimates that three out of four new diseases that have infected humans in the past decade have been transmitted by animals. Bats are known to be the carriers of virus such as Ebola, SARS and even the current coronavirus. How such viruses spill over to humans is still not clear. But we do know that bushmeat markets — in China, Southeast Asia, Africa and other parts of the world — provide conditions for such pathogens to proliferate. The recent virus is reported to have originated in a wet market in Wuhan. In a globalised world, chances of the flu spreading fast are high. But global cooperation to check such virus has, at best, been episodic. Viruses are a global challenge and it's time they are seen as such.

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com