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In Depth: Cruise Ship Diamond Princess & Coronavirus SOS

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The massive outbreak of the **Coronavirus in China** and its rapid spread to more than 20 countries has alarmed the world. So far, it has claimed over 1,300 deaths, and nearly 60,000 confirmed cases of infection have been reported in China.

This has not only raised the burden of **human cost** across China but the **economic cost** is also mounting (as the damage is not due to the virus itself but due to efforts to prevent it from spreading).

Virus

- It is a small infectious agent that can **replicate inside cells of other organisms only**.

- They are found wherever there is **life** and **can't be destroyed** (as they don't have their own metabolism and require a host cell to make new products).
- Most viral infection results in death of the host cell. **Vaccination and antiviral drugs help in preventing viral diseases.**

Coronavirus

- **Coronavirus** is a large family of viruses that are often the source of **respiratory infections**, causing illness ranging from the common cold to severe diseases like **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)**.
 - 'Corona' is a Latin word which means 'Crown'. It is named so, because of the presence of **crown-like spikes** on its surface.
 - Under an electron microscope, the image of the virus looks like a **solar corona**.
- It is an **RNA (RiboNucleic Acid) virus** because of which it **mutates at a faster rate** as RNA mutation rate is higher than the DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) mutation rate.
- The new strain (that is currently creating havoc in China) has been **identified for the first time** in humans. Therefore, the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** has named it as '**Covid-19**'.
- **Coronaviruses** are '**zoonotic**', i.e., they are transmitted between **animals and people** (spread from non-human animals (usually vertebrates) to humans).
- **Incubation Period of Covid-19:** Amount of time between catching the infection and onset of symptoms ranges from **1-12 days** (usually within 5-6 days).

Note:

- **Mortality Rate:** The number of fatalities caused by **Covid-19** (however, with a low mortality rate of approx. 2%) is known to have surpassed the number of deaths that took place after the **SARS outbreak in China in 2002-03** and **MERS**.
 - **SARS** killed around **9%** of those it infected.
 - Although **MERS** did not spread widely, it was more fatal as it killed **one-third (~33%)** of those it infected.
- Detailed investigations found that **SARS-CoV** was transmitted from **civet cats to humans** and **MERS-CoV** from **dromedary camels to humans**.

Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans.

Origin of Covid-19

- According to Chinese reports, it is expected to have come from a **seafood market in Wuhan**, where the wildlife is illegally traded.
 - It is expected to have been transmitted from illegally-trafficked **pangolins**. Also, bats or snakes are also pointed out as the source of the virus by the scientists
- Even the WHO highlights the **animal source** as the primary source of the outbreak.

Transmission, Symptoms and Prevention

Transmission

- The virus enters the body through the **respiratory tract** (that's why a respiratory virus) and enters the **circulatory system**. It multiplies there, leading to **Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome** (ARDS – a disease in which the lung loses its capacity to expand further).
- It is primarily transmitted:
 - Through **secreted fluids** (during coughing or sneezing) from the respiratory system,
 - By **touching** the hands of the **infected person**,
 - **Contacting** with a **surface or object that has virus** on it and then touching it with one's nose, eyes or mouth,
 - Rarely by **contact with feces**.

Symptoms

- Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, **fever, cough, shortness of breath** and breathing difficulties.
- In more severe cases, the infection can cause **pneumonia**, severe acute respiratory syndrome, **kidney failure** and even **death**.

Prevention

- Regular handwashing,
- Covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing,
- Avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing, etc.
- Currently, there is **no vaccine** for it. Developing a new vaccine to contain its spread will require a few more months.

Outbreak on Cruise Ship Diamond Princess

- The largest Coronavirus outbreak (outside mainland China) took place on a cruise ship viz. **'the Diamond Princess'** that has been quarantined at the Japanese port of **Yokohama**.
There are 138 Indians on board including 132 crew members and 6 passengers. 2 of the crew members have been tested positive for the virus.
- In this backdrop, many countries are now not allowing ships to be docked at their ports. For instance, **Cruise Ship MS Westerdam** was stranded in the sea and was finally docked at Cambodia after getting turned away from 5 countries which had apprehensions that passengers could bring Coronavirus at their place.
- **Debate on the Effectiveness of Quarantine on a Ship:** Quarantine refers to the **period and place of isolation** in which people or animals that have arrived from elsewhere or have been exposed to infectious or contagious disease are placed. In the case of coronavirus, it is **28 days**.
 - It is believed to be an effective measure to contain the further spread of the virus as the infected people will have to be anyway quarantined on land.
 - However, it is also believed that **transmissions levels** in close-quarter vessels/ships are **high** due to its semi-closed and crowded environment which gets worsened by the unhygienic conditions of sanitation.



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Impact on the Global Economy

Sectors Affected

- **Travel & Tourism:** It is the **biggest sector** hit by the Coronavirus. Many countries have stopped their **airline services** to China. **Shipping and freight & container services** have also been affected.
- **Industrial:** Many brands like Apple, Starbucks, etc. have shut down their plants in China. Around 50% of industries have shut down in Wuhan.
 - Indian **pharmaceuticals**, Bangladesh's **garment sector** (approx. 85%), and global **automobile and electronics** industries are dependent upon the raw material that is imported from China (China exports commodities of worth about \$2.5 trillion).
- **Education:** Out of the top 10 universities in China, 2 of them are located in Wuhan. Because of the Covid-19 outbreak, many Indian students studying there have returned to India.

Global Growth

- Due to the outbreak, it is **expected** that China's growth rate will **come down** by 1% and global growth by 0.3%.
- **Crude Oil:** However, globally the Crude oil prices have come down in the recent time. And after the Coronavirus disruptive impact on global growth, there would not be much price rise. This can act as a positive sign in balancing India's foreign reserves (as India widely imports crude oil).
- **Belt & Road Initiative:** Due to dependency on physical transportation of steel, cement, etc., BRI's completion duration is expected to increase which will consequently affect the linked countries.
- **ASEAN:** ASEAN is closely connected with China in the value chain because of which the ASEAN countries' growth will also get affected.

India's Efforts to Fight Covid-19

- **Management:** India has set up a high-level **Group of Ministers (GoM)** to **review, monitor and evaluate** preparedness measures to fight with the menace of Covid-19.
- **Screening:** Universal screening of flights from Japan, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, etc. is done at 21 airports, along with screening at international seaports, border crossings, etc. is done.
 - Camps by **armed forces** are maintained to test patients on a daily basis.
- **Nodal Centre:** Indian Council of Medical Research- National Institute of Virology is the nodal centre to coordinate diagnostics for Covid-19.
- **Labs & Testing Centres:** 14 regional labs for testing samples have been set up. Quarantine facility has been set up at **Manesar**.
- **Operationalisation:** 24x7 **control room** with a dedicated helpline number and **Information Education and Communication (IEC)** material dissemination through various media channels is also functional.

- **Evacuation:** A special flight of the **Air India** recently departed from **Delhi to Wuhan** to evacuate Indians stranded there.

India's Operation Evacuation

In the midst of rising cases of Coronavirus and declaration of it as the Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by WHO, Indian government undertook evacuation operation in Wuhan to ensure the safety of its citizens.

Air India's Boeing-747 aircraft was tasked for this purpose to bring back around **650** Indian nationals.

Major Evacuation Operations of India

Operation Name & Year	Country from where Evacuation was done
Operation Sankat Mochan (2016)	South Sudan
Operation Rahat (2015)	Yemen
Operation Safe Homecoming (2011)	Libya
Operation Sukoon (2006)	Lebanon
During Gulf War (1990)	Kuwait

In the wake of rising instances of infectious diseases outbreak worldwide, global communities should work in close cooperation with one another to deal with the menace of such outbreaks.