NKENCHO JACINTHA

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COVID-19 is caused by a new coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people such as with MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV, and now with this new virus, named SARS-CoV-2.

Early on, many of the patients at the epicenter of the outbreak in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China had some link to a large seafood and live animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. Later, a growing number of patients reportedly did not have exposure to animal markets, indicating person-to-person spread. Person-to-person spread was subsequently reported outside Hubei and in countries outside China, including in the United States. Most international destinations now have ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19, as does the United States. Community spread means some people have been infected and it is not known how or where they became exposed. The risk posed by COVID-19 depends on characteristics of the virus, including how easily it spreads between people; the severity of resulting illness; and the medical or other measures available to control the impact of the virus. Because there are not yet vaccines or treatments for COVID-19, non pharmaceutical interventions become the most important response strategy.

As the COVID-19 crisis worsens, the world also faces a global misinformation pandemic. Conspiracy theories that behave like viruses themselves are spreading just as rapidly online as SARS-CoV-2 does offline.

Firstly; The 5G conspiracy. in this case, the rapid rollout of 5G networks was taking place at the same time the pandemic hit. Cue a viral meme linking the two, avidly promoted by anti-vaccine activists who have long been spreading fears about electromagnetic radiation, egged on by the Kremlin.

Secondly;The involvement of Bill Gates. Many of these plots and subplots seem to involve Bill Gates, who has become a new target of right-wing disinformation after gently criticizing Donald Trump’s scapegoating (and subsequent defunding) of the World Health Organization. According to the New York Times, anti-vaxxers, members of QAnon and right-wing pundits have seized on a video of a 2015 Ted talk given by Gates — where he discussed the Ebola outbreak and warned of a new pandemic — to bolster their claims he had foreknowledge of the COVID pandemic or even purposely caused it.

Thirdly, The idea that the virus escaped from the Chinese lab. This one at least has the benefit of being plausible. It is true that the original epicenter of the epidemic, the Chinese city of Wuhan, also hosts a virology institute where researchers have been studying bat coronaviruses for a long time. One of these researchers, Shi Zhengli, a prominent virologist who spent years collecting bat dung samples in caves and was a lead expert on the earlier SARS outbreak, was sufficiently concerned about the prospect that she spent days frantically checking lab records to see if anything had gone wrong. She admits breathing a “sigh of relief” when genetic sequencing showed that the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus did not match any of the viruses sampled and studied in the Wuhan Institute of Virology by her team. However, the sheer coincidence of China’s lead institute studying bat coronaviruses being in the same city as the origin of the COVID outbreak has proven too juicy for conspiracists to resist.

Fourthly; COVID was created as a biological weapon; This theory that the Chinese somehow created the virus is particularly popular on the US political right. It gained mainstream coverage thanks to US Sen. Tom Cotton (Republican, Arkansas) who amplified theories first aired in the Washington Examiner (a highly conservative media outlet) that the Wuhan Institute of Virology “is linked to Beijing’s covert bio-weapons program.”

This theory can be easily debunked now that there is unambiguous scientific evidence — thanks to genetic sequencing — that the SARS-CoV-2 virus has entirely natural origins as a zoonotic virus originating in bats. The Examiner has since added a correction at the top of the original piece admitting the story is probably false.

Lastly; The US military imported COVID to China; The Chinese government responded to the anti-China theories with a conspiracy theory of its own that seeks to turn blame back around onto the United States. This idea was spread initially by Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who Tweeted “it’s possible that the US military brought the virus to Wuhan.” These comments, according to Voice of America news, “echoed a rumored conspiracy, widely circulated in China, that US military personnel had brought the virus to China during their participation in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan last October.” For China, as the Atlantic reported, this conspiracy theory, and an accompanying attempt to rename COVID the “USA virus,”’ was a transparent “geopolitical ploy” — useful for domestic propaganda but not widely believed internationally.

The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening lives and livelihoods across the world. In just three months, more than a million people in 180 countries have fallen sick from the viral illness, while at least 50,000 have died in a public health emergency the United Nations is calling the world's "most challenging crisis" since World War II.

In Xi Jinping's China, where the illness was first detected in late December, authorities are accused of engaging in a cover-up and punishing doctors who sounded the alarm in the early days of the outbreak - moves critics say allowed the virus to spread out of the central city of Wuhan to every corner of the globe.

In the United States, President Donald Trump initially downplayed the severity of the threat, predicting the virus would "disappear" like "a miracle" one day, and dismissing growing concerns over the disease as a "hoax" by his political rivals. He only changed tack last week after polling showed an increasingly worried public and modelling predicted that 200,000 people could die in the US without drastic containment efforts.

In Germany has since led the way in Europe with large scale testing for COVID-19, collecting nearly a million samples since the start of the crisis. And although the country now ranks fifth among territories with confirmed cases - recording more than 80,000 infections - it has a much lower fatality rate than most.

"There isn't a global response. And it's a huge problem in the sense that this a crisis that is much better handled if key countries came together," said Charles Kupchan of the US-based Council on Foreign Relations.

Early indications of COVID-19’s impact on the Chinese economy are worse than initially forecast. Surveys of China’s manufacturing and services sector plunged to record lows in February, automobile sales sank a record 80 percent, and China’s exports fell 17.2 percent in January and February. The official data confirmed a widespread slowdown in economic activity foreshadowed in low pollution levels and depressed shipping traffic, among other informal barometers. Analysts have sharply revised down estimates of Chinese growth, with many now predicting a drop in first quarter GDP, the first contraction since China began reporting quarterly data in 1992. As COVID-19 spreads, China’s economic recovery will be challenged as demand from other countries drops as they cope with the virus.

Although the outbreak appears to have slowed in China, COVID-19 and its impacts have gone global. Infections are mounting in Europe, South Korea, Iran, the United States, and elsewhere, with authorities implementing increasingly restrictive measures to contain the virus. Europe and Japan are likely already in recession territory given their weak fourth quarter performance and high reliance on trade. While the United States entered the crisis with a tailwind, some analysts are forecasting a contraction in U.S. GDP in the second quarter. Estimates of the global impact vary: early last week, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicted that COVID-19 will lower global GDP growth by one-half a percentage point for 2020 (from 2.9 to 2.4 percent); Bloomberg Economics warns that full-year GDP growth could fall to zero in a worst-case pandemic scenario.