Commentaries & Analyses

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Measures to Contain the SARS Outbreak

China has taken various measures to contain the disease:

1. China set up the National Headquarters for Prevention and Control of SARS to coordinate the work of local governments and departments, promptly and accurately report the changing situation and take effective measures against the disease. Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi, was appointed to serve concurrently as Minister of Health, and is in charge of the headquarters.

2. Effective action has been taken across the board to strengthen prevention and to contain the spread of the disease, the SARS outbreak was declared a statutory epidemic under China’s legislation, and an open and transparent system for epidemic reporting and news release was establish.

The Chinese government standardizes the clinics caring for fever patients so as to ensure proper layout of the clinics and to avoid possible cross-infection; implements strict isolation of the SARS patients; carries out close observation of people who have close contact with SARS patients, and improves work on epidemiological investigation; makes efforts to improve protection of migrant workers, to curb SARS spreading into rural areas, and try to set up a barrier to protect healthy people from infection.

3. At the same time, the Chinese government has been going all out to treat SARS

Economic Impact of SARS

On 16 August 2003, the last SARS patient in China was fully recovered and there have been no new SARS patients since then in China, the health ministry of China has announced.

However, the SARS outbreak did have some negative impact on the economy. The economic growth rate was 6.7% in the second quarter, 3.2% lower than in the first quarter of 2003, and the lowest growth rate in the second quarter since 1992. Some sectors are seriously impacted. The total amount of transportation (people) decreased 23.9%. The total sale of goods in the second quarter increased 6.7%, much lower than 9.2% in the first quarter.
patients and set up a SARS fund. As an example, free treatment is given to SARS patients from poor families. The Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health jointly issued a notice, promising that local authorities would pay medical charges for SARS patients from rural areas and impoverished urban families. The central government gives subsidies to local governments of economically-constrained western provinces and autonomous regions in an attempt to share the burden of SARS treatment costs. A SARS fund of RMB2 billion (about US$24.17 million) was set up to explore the cause and treatment of SARS and curb its spread. The Chinese government also allocated RMB10 million (about US$1.2 million) to set up a special fund for cooperative operations among the members of ASEAN.

4. China is making rapid progress in establishing an epidemic contingency mechanism and enhancing capacity for emergency management. China lost no time in establishing and improving a national public health contingency response mechanism, including a disease monitoring and data collecting and sharing network, and a collaborative network of laboratories.

5. The Chinese government mobilized the entire society to fight the SARS outbreak, through administrative agencies at a whole range of levels. Especially important were the grassroots organizations such as community commissions, which played an important role in raising SARS awareness and implementing preventive measures and control tasks against SARS at community level.

6. China also promptly mobilized the production and supply of medicines, medical facilities and goods to defeat SARS.

7. China has been putting great efforts into stepping up critical SARS research and exploring effective methods of diagnosis and treatment.

8. China has also been trying hard to enhance cooperation with the international community, especially with the WHO, and to draw on others’ successful experience.
9. New infectious diseases, with unknown causes, are common enemies of mankind. The cross-border spread of SARS was a challenge to the whole world, and to Asia in particular. China has proposed the following measures for international cooperation:

- Establishing a reporting mechanism with respect to epidemics and disease prevention and treatment;
- Carrying out exchanges of experience and go for cooperative SARS research;
- Accelerating the bilateral health cooperation process;
- Coordinating border exit and entry control measures; and,
- Doing everything possible to minimize the adverse effects of SARS, including the establishment of a China-ASEAN workshop to look into possible countermeasures.

10. The Chinese government has embarked on efforts to maintain steady economic growth and minimize the negative impact of the SARS outbreak on China's economic development. A State Council executive meeting was convened on 7 May 2003, and presided over by Premier Wen Jia Bao. The meeting has highlighted the following measures to be taken:

- Ensure that first quarter planting and second quarter harvests are carried out to stabilize agricultural production. Speed up rural structural reform, and increase the incomes of farmers.
- Increase investment and foster new consumption and economic growth engines, such as the automobile, real estate, telecommunications industries, and Internet-related business.
- Secure an increase in trade and attract more overseas investment. Exported products should be effectively quarantined, and greater support should be given to electromechanical, high-tech and textile products.
- Adopt preferential policies for civil aviation, tourism, catering, commerce and other sectors heavily hit by the SARS outbreak;
- Increase revenue and cut spending. Expenditure should be tightly controlled except for the prevention and treatment of SARS; and
- Improve employment and social security. Enterprises in SARS-hit areas should not fire employees at will, while local governments should provide assistance to those whose living conditions have slipped below the minimum level due to the SARS outbreak.