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*Report – Webinar*

# **“COVID-19: Learning from China’s Experience”**

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China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a webinar on “Covid 19: Learning from China’s Experience” on June 11, 2020. Mr. Zahoor Ahmed, Additional Secretary (Asia-Pacific), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was the Chief Guest while H.E. Yao Jing, Ambassador of People’s Republic of China was the Keynote Speaker at the occasion. The webinar brought together China focused Institutes and Centres across Pakistan. Panelists included Directors of leading China Study Centers situated in Gilgit, Islamabad, Peshawar, Jamshoro, Lahore, Sargodha, Quetta and Muzaffarabad.. The session was moderated by Director CPSC, Dr. Talat Shabbir.

Dr. Talat Shabbir in his introductory remarks thanked panelists for graciously attending the webinar, which highlighted the importance China Study Centers give to learning from China’s experience in fight against the pandemic. He underscored that research institutions have played a crucial role in creating awareness about the on-going pandemic situation. Dr. Shabbir further stated that the outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill, which has affected almost every aspect of human lives. It has created a crisis, which is unparalleled in human history. This crisis has exposed fragile not only the global health care structure but also of individual states. In wake of this unusual crisis, China showed unprecedented strength and unity to counter the looming threat. China has exploited the pioneering role of science and technology and fully applied the results of scientific and technical innovation in its fight against COVID-19. Thus it offers a model for international community to deal with this crisis. Pakistan in particular, can see what lessons can it learn from China’s experience and strategies adopted to minimize the spread of COVID-19, despite being the first epicenter of the virus.

In his welcome remarks, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director-General ISSI underscored that it is special webinar with diverse panelists, and participation from all provinces and regions of Pakistan. He underlined that China Study Centres are working hard to consolidate Pakistan’s relations with China. He underscored that, in the evolving geopolitical situation Pakistan-China relations has come forth as center-piece of unity and strong diplomatic ties. As the coronavirus pandemic spread, countries realized that it is extremely serious and cooperation was required to contain it. Earlier, China was mocked for its effort to deal with the virus. China has now recovered and done a good job while Pakistan is entering the thick of it and as we hit peak next month, we have to really brace ourselves for a difficult phase. We

thought it would be a good idea to learn from Chinese experience and in that contrast we have Ambassador Yao and many other important voices. He concluded that we can learn from the Chinese experience to deal with the menace that is right upon us.

Ambassador Yao Jing, in his keynote address, elaborated on Pakistan-China cooperation in fighting the pandemic from January till now. He underscored that Chinese government has issued a White Paper on fight against COVID-19 pandemic and China's efforts for international cooperation. He highlighted mutual support extended by Pakistan and China to each other as they battle with pandemic. He noted that Pakistan and China extended material support to each other and Chinese medical teams have visited Pakistan and shared experience in pandemic control. At present, both governments are focused on supporting Pakistan's economy and adjusting economic cooperation under CPEC framework. In this he highlighted China's support to Pakistan in freezing debt repayments under G20 framework Pakistan. Moreover, despite the pandemic situation, China and Pakistan are collaborating in locust control and supporting Pakistan's agriculture sector.

Dr. Fazal-ur-Rehman, Director Pakistan Institute of China Studies, University of Sargodha, highlighted the role of strong and dedicated leadership in leading the swift response to the pandemic. China has been able to control this pandemic in the shortest possible time with minimum losses, which needs to be appreciated and there are lessons for many countries like Pakistan. It is the Chinese Government's rapid response strategy along with strong leadership, which has helped in containing the spread at large. Well-coordinated efforts at each level of the Government's tier along with the use of traditional herbal medicines are something, which countries need to emulate in the fight against the pandemic. Dr. Fazal further said that a scientific approach is very important and in this regards institutions and think-tanks need to join hands in giving meaningful and constructive policy inputs to the government in dealing with this crisis.

Mr. Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, Director Asia Study Center, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, while referring to Sun Zu, Confucius and Tao, underlined that China overcame the challenge with a dedicated strategy of attacking the virus, wisdom of planning for it and belief that it will succeed. The world needs to understand the history behind China's success today as

it has built an efficient health care system over the decades with people's lives given the top priority. This has helped it in dealing with pandemics more efficiently with minimum loss of lives and economy.

Dr. Samina Sabir, from University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, while presenting her views on the topics stressed that there are lot of things we should learn from China in dealing with the health crisis emerged out of COVID-19. China set out its primary and secondary priorities, while keeping people's lives and their health among the top priorities. China contained Covid-19 in less than four months which is remarkable and emphasized that screening, testing and monitoring with epidemiological investigation are key factors to cut virus transmission and provide timely treatment to infected patients.

Dr. Saranjam Baig, Director Centre for Research on CPEC, Karakorum International University, underscored the importance of preparedness and resolve instead of panic to confront the crisis emerged out of Covid 19 as the virus can strike anywhere without discrimination. Secondly, we must, as a nation get organized and disciplined if defeating coronavirus is necessary. We need to understand that basic precautions such as washing of hands and covering coughs can help prevent the virus from further spreading. It has been said that "people behave rationally when they are intellectually and emotionally prepared for the possible outbreaks" Third, it is imperative to enhance the capacity of health organizations and health workers to effectively tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Safety of the health workers should also remain a priority. He further said that being an all-weather cooperative partner of People's Republic of China, we can learn and replicate the lessons that have once again made China a leader.

Dr. Khalid Manzoor, Director China Study Center, Government College University Lahore, highlighted the role of responsive government and exemplary coordination between party organizations and people at the grass root level in fighting the pandemic. He further said that apart from assessing the health systems, the COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to evaluate the political systems of various countries. Particularly, the political systems of European countries and US, stand exposed to cope with the epidemic despite have sound economies and proper infrastructures. Though China has economic depth but it has proved that with strong and dedicated leadership, responsive government, people having trust in government along with

strong coordination between party organizations and people at grass root level are significant to fight the current crisis.

Dr. Zahid Anwar, of China Study Center, University of Peshawar, underscored world needs unity, and should follow science and facts to deal with COVID-19 as China did. While elaborating on the role of China in dealing with the current pandemic, Dr. Anwar said that China successfully contained COVID through its precise, effective, timely and powerful measures and provided valuable time to the rest of the world to prepare. China's non-pharmaceutical measures like proactive surveillance, cases detection, isolation of cases, rigorous tracking, quarantine of close contacts, rapid diagnosis, successful convincing of population to accept these measures contributed to flatten the curve of this virus infection. Moreover, public health security is a common concern and thus mutual respect, learning from one another and peaceful co-existence are important to build a peaceful world amidst the pandemic.

Dr. Liaquat Ali Shah, Executive Director, CPEC Center of Excellence, underlined that self-discipline of Chinese people and government at all levels has been the driving force in beating the pandemic. The commitments at the top leadership level, both at the central and local government level along with strong coordination among institution have helped in dealing with the crisis. The prompt response from Government to the masses has also proved successful, which has been missing in the cases of other western countries, which are important for Pakistan to emulate in the current crisis.

Dr. Kaleem Ullah Mandokhail, Focal Person China Study Center, University of Balochsitan, highlighted that Government of Balochsitan has learnt lessons from Chinese experience while formulating protocols for healthcare workers in the province. He further said that the University of Baluchistan is working in close coordination with the provincial government to draft policy inputs, which includes preparing guidelines for the people for safety measures, risk assessment for different age groups while studying the strategies of China in dealing with similar situations.

Dr. Mukesh Kumar Khatwani, Director Area Study Centre for Far-East, University of Jamshoro emphasized on raising awareness among masses. Dr. Khatwani elaborated the role of study Centre in creating awareness and mobilizing the masses in taking precautionary measures to fight the virus. Since this crisis has hit hard the economy, resulting into food insecurity and

poverty, it is very important that as a nation we act responsibly such that the crisis can be contained in the shortest possible time, saving lives and economy together.

In his address, the Chief Guest, Additional Secretary Zahoor Ahmad, underscored the element of efficiency in China's response. He commended China for being transparent by publishing the recently released White Paper. It is a thorough analysis of Chinese position on this particular issue, and publication of this particular white paper is very important for variety of reasons; first, at a time, when the whole world is grappling with the pandemic, this white paper has come as a message of hope released by a country, which has successfully meted this crisis and is willing to share its experience with others. This shows the transparency and importance of sharing their experience with the global community, displaying China as a responsible country willing to help others without any stigmatization and political strings attached. Others important factors include the element of efficiency and effectiveness in their governance system which has been helpful in tackling the situation. He specifically highlighted extensive support of China to Pakistan during the recent COVID-19 crisis, which he noted underscored strength of the relationship.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI, in his concluding remarks, underlined that the way China reacted with great speed and valour in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic is exemplary. The lesson from China is: countries don't need to wait for the virus to hit them; rather they have to take action first. China, he highlighted, did a great service to humanity by delaying inevitable spread of the virus and allowed other countries to make arrangements before it reached them. He noted that pandemic has shown that countries cannot tackle such threats on their own. It requires extensive international cooperation, and China has been fully cooperative with World Health Organization from the very beginning.