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Will China be given a clean chit?

May 15, 2021, 2:39 PM IST / Jagdish Batra in Cultural Inputs, World, TOI

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Jagdish Batra

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It is heartening to note that a group of leading scientists from the UK and US have called for more investigation to determine the origin of the Covid pandemic in order to mitigate the risks of future outbreaks of this type. This is a rational view but there is also the other view also – call it political or what you will – that this was

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University, India. He has nearly four decades of teaching and research e
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intentionally done by China and there are sufficient proofs to believe it. The problem is that these were not seriously taken up by the powers that be. The recent revelations in the British and Australian press quoting secret US reports about the culpability of China have mercifully raked up the controversy. It is reported that the People's Liberation (!) Army of China had as far back as 2015 suggested to authorities that the use of a variant of the SARS virus as a bio-weapon could lead to the collapse of the medical system in the enemy country.

More than hitting the health system of enemy countries, the deeper design must have been to weaken the economies of competitors and other countries and create scope for Chinese goods and influence in keeping with its expansionist designs. The spread of the virus from Wuhan was ruthlessly controlled by the Chinese government within China. We saw on television, videos of policemen dragging people out of cars on the roads and welding doors shut of residents – all because the authorities there knew well, even though it was something novel for the world, about the deadly potential of the pandemic once

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it started spreading. There are other indicators too, like when Australia blamed China for the spread of this virus, it seemed to have touched the raw nerve resulting in an overblown reaction from China in the form of a trade war which is still on. We also have the testimony of the Chinese whistleblower scientist Meng Li who was working in Wuhan and who had to flee China to save her skin. Her recordings went viral but were surprisingly not taken up at the official level by any western government. Recently, she published along with the Australian journalist Sharri Markson a book *What Really Happened in Wuhan* on this theme.

Even the addition by China of the 'pandemic force majeure' clause to the \$200 billion trade deal that it signed with the US on Jan. 15, 2020, was interpreted to mean that it saw the pandemic coming. The WHO's sheepish admission sometime after its team returned from China that China did not part with all the relevant information is another indicator of something fishy there. While Donald Trump was severely cross with China, Pres. Biden does not evince that attitude. Recently, the Biden

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administration replaced China's status from 'a danger' to 'a competitor' and the Biden-Xi talks had no mention of the pandemic. It is surprising to see how the sentiments have changed. The point is should China be allowed to go scot-free?

In August last year, there was talk of asking China for reparations from some politicians in America. The popular German tabloid *Bild* joined this attack by drawing up an itemised invoice for Euro 149 billion taking into account the losses suffered by tourism, entertainment and travel industries as also small businesses. Add people's health and life and the amount would multiply beyond imagination. The German government, however, is now spearheading the repairing of trade ties and China is counting on it to curry favour with the EU countries.

The legal opinion about dragging China to ICJ is said to be that the delay in relaying news about the spread of the virus and discontinuing immediately trade and traffic does not provide sufficient ground. Maybe so, but the use of the virus as a bio-weapon is akin to creating a state of war. Eminent Western economist Danielle DiMartino Booth has reportedly called it 'an act of

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Mahua Moitra is doing politics over a pandemic

war' and commented that China is held accountable for the global pandemic along with WHO for its deference to China. The intentional spread of the Covid19 virus is a crime against humanity. The bio-weapon is deadlier than the atom bomb because the range of a bomb is still limited, so whether it was the bombing of Hiroshima or the Chernobyl accident, the area of impact was limited. But this virus has gripped the entire world.

By the end of last month, some three million people worldwide had died due to it. Countless people have lost their children, parents, siblings, friends, etc. Is there no concern for the innumerable children orphaned, women widowed, aged people left without support? We are all reeling under the second wave while the dire forecast of a third wave stares in the face. The surprising fact is that all that talk of holding the guilty to an account that started last year has not come to proper closure. It should be a collective move by all major powers to gather proofs and take action. If trials could be held to punish those guilty of unleashing World War II, the present tragedy is no less than that in magnitude. The

only catch lies in that it is the victors who judge the vanquished in realpolitik. Who will be the judge remains to be seen.



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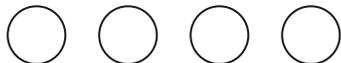
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