

Fighting China's lethal propaganda

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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On Tuesday last week, Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) said that he would ask government officials to assess the possibility of holding an online conference with international disease prevention experts to share Taiwan's methods of limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Su was responding to a question by Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Charles Chen (陳昌猷), who had said that Taiwan should capitalize on its first-rate disease prevention experts and experience to "show the world its loss for excluding [Taiwan] from the WHO."

Chen is right. Taiwan must use this time — when the nation's international profile has been elevated due to its pandemic response — to deliver a message to the world.

Democratic nations have for decades allowed their foreign policy to be dictated by Beijing. It is immoral for them to turn their backs on a flourishing democracy. The pandemic perfectly encapsulates why kowtowing to Beijing over its "one China" principle is dangerous, with an as-yet unknown number of deaths and economic shutdowns threatening a new Great Depression.

Taiwan began hearing reports of a new virus in China in December last year. This crucial intelligence, gleaned from contacts among Chinese physicians, allowed health officials to swiftly enact preventive measures, earlier than any other nation outside of China.

The government on Dec. 31 warned the WHO and Chinese health authorities of evidence of human-to-human transmission, but the WHO did not make the information public.

If Taiwan were a member of the WHO, its warning might have been heard, giving other nations valuable time to prepare their defenses while Beijing was silencing doctors, censoring its media and deleting social media posts about the disease.

When Beijing finally admitted on Jan. 20 that human-to-human transmission was occurring, six precious weeks had been squandered.

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However, there is an even more compelling argument for why Taiwan must unsheathe its diplomatic bazooka: Having created a global crisis, Beijing over the past few weeks has launched a massive propaganda offensive to hijack the media narrative and rewrite history.

It is engaging in “mask diplomacy,” donating tens of thousands to desperate European nations, channeled through Huawei and Alibaba Group Holding cofounder Jack Ma (马), China's richest man and a member of the Chinese Communist Party. Beijing has also sent ventilators and doctors to Italy.

The message is clear: China is a responsible global leader, your friend and savior in this unfortunate crisis.

Even more brazenly, Beijing has been promoting the false narrative that COVID-19 originated not from a market that sold exotic animals in Wuhan — but from the US.

Meanwhile, much of the world's media continue to blindly republish Beijing's statistics on declining cases of the virus within its borders — without questioning whether they are being fed false information — and even parrot Beijing's line that China is now safer than the rest of the world.

In Taiwan, the Criminal Investigation Bureau has linked multiple cases of social media disinformation to China, which were clearly designed to sow fear by wildly exaggerating the number of deaths in this nation.

What more does China have to do before it becomes an international pariah? Taiwan should set the record straight and lead the fight against Beijing's onslaught of propaganda.

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