



## — COVID-19 - Effective measures to combat the pandemic —



Commuters wear face masks to protect themselves from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) during morning rush hour traffic in Taipei, Taiwan. Picture: REUTERS/Ann Wang/File Photo



Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-Wen and soldiers wear face masks at a military camp in Tainan, Taiwan. Picture: REUTERS



Government staffers spray disinfectant outside a train station, amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Taoyuan city, Taiwan. Picture: REUTERS

# Taiwan's strategy

THE global total confirmed cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have reached the number of 1.5 million with more than 90 thousand related deaths. Fiji, a major transportation hub for the Pacific area with close links with mainland China and Australia, still manages to contain confirmed case within a two digit number. The Fiji government takes several effective approaches to safeguard and protect people in Fiji against this virus. With every new case reported, Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama faced the public himself to provide transparent public health responses, and announced enhanced screening and quarantine measures. Thanks to these implementations, Fiji remains a relatively safe place in the world. Transparency, accountability and prompt reactions by government have proven an efficient way to flatten the curve of spreading COVID-19.

### Taiwan's COVID-19 outbreak response draws international attention

Seven thousand miles away, Taiwan, the island nation in the Pacific had the first COVID-19 case on January 21. Prior to that date, according to a study by John Hopkins University, Taiwan was predicted to become one of the hardest-hit places because of its close proximity to China, providing more than a million Taiwanese living and working in China, and frequently going

back and forth across the Taiwan Strait. But despite this, Taiwan only has 382 cases with 6 deaths as of April 10 – the vast majority of cases are citizens returning from China, Europe and USA, far lower than all of its neighbors.

Was this achieved through severe lockdown and suppression of social contact and activities? No. Surprisingly, businesses are open, restaurants are operating, and children still go to school. Without declaring state of emergency, without social activities freezing, Taiwan is still able to contain transmission rate and flatten the curve. Taiwan has been praised by the international community especially in Europe and USA for its early and effective measures to combat the pandemic. Taiwan's story may also be worthy for Fiji's reference.

**When human life is in jeopardy, it's everyone's business not just the government's only.**

When the outbreak began in Wuhan, Taiwan took this much more seriously early on than other countries. With hard learned lessons from combating SARS in 2003, immediately and prompt advanced arrangements were made to block and control the influx of COVID-19. The National Health Command Center was set up, and ongoing monitoring and temperature checks at borders and traceable measures were implemented. The health authorities put together a winning combination of early prevention, big data

“... health authorities put together a winning combination of early prevention, big data and AI, and daily press briefings – keeping the situation under control and the public informed every step ...

— Jessica Lee

and AI, and daily press briefings – keeping the situation under control and the public informed every step of the way.

Civil society also stepped up to fight the virus; independent developers and "Netizens" of different backgrounds utilise published data by the government to develop mobile apps, including real-time locations of where to buy surgical masks, a face-mask reserve system and a compilation of virus-related news that help everyone protect against the virus through getting factual updates. As the virus spreads globally, so does misinformation too.

Facts sometimes get lost in the shuffle, especially in private chat groups. Such a deluge of misinformation can be more harmful than the disease itself.

Tech whizzes in Taiwan gather and publish data for the public on how to protect themselves against the virus and have created their own information compilation and fact-checking websites for news about the COVID-19. The government's vigilance for accurate information, as well as public efforts, highlight the necessary elements to fight the virus.

In addition to the well-established public health system, the government is using the integrated database of national health insurance system to trace recent travel history of confirmed patients. The other effective way to stop the virus transmission is using a "mobile phone based electronic fence" as a surveillance tool track location of those who are required to conduct self-quarantine. They are contacted several times a day by surveillance staff for well-being, with meals and money compensation provided.

However, those who fail to conduct self-quarantine before their time will be fined heavily. All of these methods ensure the general public a safe environment and fair access to related resources and transparent information. This is a society where health surveillance and protective quarantine is taken seriously.

Another key issue that was addressed early on is the availability

of face masks and medical equipment. Surgical masks and PPE (personal protection equipment) are essential gear for medical workers to combat pandemic. Taiwan ramped up 18 times of its mask production capacity and PPE in a couple of weeks during the Chinese New Year to ensure the steady domestic supply, from 1,880,000 pieces per day to 10 million per day, and now aiming to 20 million pieces per day. Mask wearing is required to take public transportation in Taiwan.

Now, with building-up capacity, Taiwan is able to provide assistance and to donate surplus masks and other supplies to our allies and countries hit hardest by COVID-19. These supplies will go to medical workers on the front lines who are working around the clock to save lives. The first donation of 10 million masks has arrived in EU, USA and allies countries where this pandemic has struck the hardest. The second donation of 6 million masks will assist other countries in need, including Fiji.

"Over the past months, we have seen countless acts of bravery and sacrifice from medical workers around the world. It is our duty as global citizens to give them our full support," said President Tsai Ing-wen.

Taiwan can help and Taiwan is helping.

■ Jessica C. Lee is the Representative of the Taipei Trade Office in Fiji, formerly known as The Trade Mission of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in Fiji.