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The Very Quickly Vanishing 10.799 Billion Masks

Imagine being quarantined in your own city or province while a SARS-like virus is affecting an unknown amount of people. Imagine also not being able to freely access the internet, nor being able to post, email, or text about some issues related to the virus. Bad situation, right? Well... then imagine watching your mayor or governor conduct a press conference during which time he twice has to correct himself over the number of face masks being produced. Imagine at first hearing “the yearly output of face masks is 10.8 billion,” before then watching your mayor or governor being handed a piece of paper and then stating “It’s actually 1.8 billion,”... only to a few moments later hear him say "it was 1.8 million masks".

According to Reuters, the New York Times, and other media outlets this literally happened today. Wang Xiaodong, the governor of Hubei province (where Wuhan and many other quarantined cities are located) reportedly conducted a press conference during which time he went from stating the province produces 10.8 billion masks to ultimately correcting himself twice and ending with stating the province produces only 1.8 million masks. Citizens in Hubei and elsewhere have reportedly become incensed at Wang and collectively many have spoken out online about what they perceive to be government incompetence.

While citizens' health and industrial output are two large issues at play regarding the coronavirus outbreak, another significant issue is that tens of millions of Chinese citizens are quarantined in their own cities. As we have stressed in our most recent Weekly China Report, we can only imagine the level of fear, confusion, and anger that many must be feeling. Often those emotions can bring out the worst in even the very best people, and there is a chance that small to larger pockets of civil

unrest could break out. Already videos are surfacing of grocery store fights, desperate hands reaching under gated stores, and ill patients throwing money over themselves in hopes of being treated

Not at all to make light of the current situation in China, but sometimes the worst part of disease outbreak movies or even television shows like the Walking Dead are not the illnesses (or even zombies) -- but instead how normal people end up treating each other. The world currently is witnessing an unprecedented event during which time multiple cities and tens of millions of people are effectively quarantined. We expect some will continue to lose faith in the government and others will act harshly against fellow citizens.

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