

## China admits ‘shortcomings’

Opens hospital built from scratch in under two weeks

AFP, Beijing

China's top leadership has admitted "shortcomings and difficulties" in its response to the coronavirus outbreak, as state media said a new hospital built at breakneck pace began receiving patients in the epicentre of the crisis.

The government in Beijing nevertheless hit out at the United States for sparking "panic" with its response to the coronavirus, including a ban on foreigners who have recently been to China.

The virus has so far spread to more than 20 countries, and several other nations have instituted tough travel rules.

As it races to try to contain the spread of the virus, China's elite Politburo Standing Committee called for improvements to the "national emergency management system" following "shortcoming and difficulties exposed in the response to the epidemic," according to the official Xinhua news agency.

"It is necessary to strengthen market supervision, resolutely ban and severely crack down on illegal wildlife markets and trade," the Politburo said in a meeting on Monday, Xinhua reported.

Most of the deaths have been in Wuhan and the rest of surrounding Hubei province, most of which has been under lockdown for almost two weeks.

With more than 20,400 confirmed infections, the mortality rate for the new coronavirus is much lower than the 9.6 percent rate for SARS.

In Wuhan, where the virus is believed to have jumped from animals at a market into humans, authorities have been racing to build two new hospitals to treat the infected.

The first of those -- a 1,000-bed facility -- "began to receive" patients Monday, the



People's Daily reported, just 10 days after construction began. Around 50 patients were admitted, reports said.

A second hospital is due to open later this week.

China is also converting an exhibition centre, along with a nearby gymnasium, into hospitals which will house an extra 3,400 beds and provide "emergency treatment and clinical testing" for those infected with the virus in Wuhan.

# Coronavirus keeps spreading

3 more countries confirm cases; Chinese lockdown approaches Shanghai

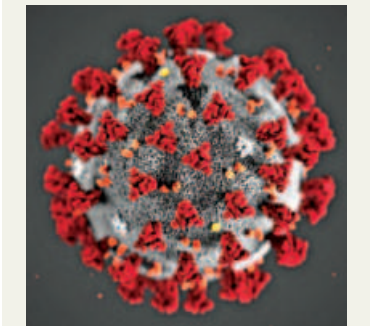
AGENCIES

Three more Asian countries confirmed coronavirus infections yesterday among citizens who had not travelled to China, as Hong Kong reported its first death from the disease and millions more people in Chinese cities were ordered to stay indoors.

The toll in mainland China soared to 425 after 64 more people died, the biggest single day tally since the first fatalities emerged last month. 2 more people died of the virus outside China.

More than 20 countries have confirmed cases of the virus, prompting the World Health Organization to declare a global health emergency, several governments to institute travel restrictions, and airlines to suspend flights to and from China.

But it has continued to spread



Death toll hits **427**; more than **20,600** infected

Hong Kong records first virus death, Macau shuts casinos

British nationals told to leave China



with Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand yesterday reporting new infections that were not imported from China.

In a sign of growing concern about a spread to other densely-populated Chinese metropolitan areas, authorities in three cities in eastern Zhejiang province -- including one near Shanghai -- limited the number of people allowed to leave their homes.

Three districts in Hangzhou -- including the area where the main office of Chinese tech giant Alibaba is based -- now allow only one person per household to go outside every two days to buy necessities, affecting some three million people. The city is only 175 kilometres

(110 miles) southwest of the financial hub of Shanghai, which has reported more than 200 cases, including one death, so far.

Similar measures were imposed in Taizhou and three districts in Ningbo, covering a total population of nine million people.

Days before, similar restrictions were placed on Wenzhou, home to another nine million.

Zhejiang province has confirmed 829 cases -- the highest number outside the central region of Hubei, whose capital, Wuhan, is the epicentre of the outbreak.

The disease is believed to have emerged in December in a Wuhan market that sold wild animals, and spread rapidly as people travelled

for the Lunar New Year holiday in late January.

China has struggled to contain the virus despite enacting unprecedented measures, including virtually locking down more than 50 million people in Hubei.

On Sunday the Philippines reported the first death abroad: a Chinese man who had come from Wuhan.

All British nationals were advised yesterday to leave China "if they can" to minimise their risk of exposure to the deadly novel coronavirus.

The death of the 39-year-old man in Hong Kong came as the semi-autonomous city closed all but two land crossings with the Chinese mainland. Hong Kong media said the man had underlying health issues that complicated his treatment. He had visited Wuhan last month and his 72-year-old mother was also infected.

With more than 20,400 confirmed infections in China, health officials yesterday noted that the mortality rate for the new coronavirus stood at 2.1 percent, with most victims either old or with underlying health problems. SARS killed nearly 10 percent of patients.

There have been nearly 200 cases elsewhere across 24 countries and China's special administrative regions Hong Kong and Macau.

Singapore announced Tuesday its first four cases of people being infected locally, bring the total number of infections to 24.

Macau, China's semi-autonomous gambling hub that is popular with mainland Chinese visitors, decided to temporarily close all of its casinos for at least two weeks.

## Sanders claims Iowa lead; Biden at fourth



Senator Bernie Sanders claimed victory in the Iowa caucuses on Monday, citing internal campaign data that placed him ahead of Pete Buttigieg after a major delay to the release of official results. The first vote of the US election season, Iowa's caucuses kick off the Democratic primary that will determine who challenges Donald Trump in November. Data released by the Sanders campaign, which said it represents results from nearly 40 percent of precincts in Iowa, shows the leftist senator garnering 28.62 percent of the vote, followed by moderate Buttigieg on 25.71 percent. The data showed progressive Senator Elizabeth Warren in third place, with 18.42 percent of the vote, with former vice president Joe Biden slipping to fourth place on 15.08 percent. Monday's contest turned sour after major hiccups in the reporting process prevented the release of official results.

## Syria violence displaces 500,000 in two months

A Russian-backed Syrian government offensive against the country's last rebel enclave has caused one of the biggest waves of displacement in the nine-year-old war. Weeks of intensive aerial bombardment and a bruising ground offensive have emptied entire towns in northwest Idlib and sent huge numbers fleeing north towards the Turkish border. "Since 1 December, some 520,000 people have been displaced from their homes, the vast majority -- 80 percent -- of them women and children," said David Swanson, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The exodus, which coincides with a biting winter, is one of the largest since the 2011 start of a conflict in which more than half of the country's pre-war population of 20 million has been displaced.

## Key HIV vaccine trial fails

A clinical trial for an HIV vaccine has been discontinued since the vaccine was not found to prevent infections of human immunodeficiency virus, the virus that causes AIDS. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases or NIAID, which sponsored the trial, announced on Monday that the study taking place in South Africa was halted after an independent data and safety monitoring board found the vaccine to be ineffective in preventing HIV. The vaccine trial, named HVTN 702 or Uhambo, began in 2016 and enrolled 5,407 HIV-negative volunteers at 14 sites across South Africa, according to NIAID. Those volunteers were sexually active men and women ages 18 to 35 who were randomly assigned to receive either the vaccine or placebo injections. An analysis of the study showed no significant difference in subsequent HIV infections among the volunteers in the vaccine group versus placebo group.

SOURCE: AFP

## NEWSIN brief

### Kenya school stampede kills 13

AFP, Nairobi

At least 13 children died and dozens of others were injured in a stampede as they left their primary school in Kenya on Monday, local police said, with investigators still trying to ascertain the cause of the tragedy. The police have launched an inquiry into what caused the crowd of students to panic, leading to the crush at around 5:00 pm at the school in the western town of Kakamega.

### 52 pc Scotts back independence: poll

AFP, London

Support for Scottish independence has risen to 52 percent, its highest level in three and a half years, according to a poll conducted just before Britain left the European Union. It is the third poll in the past two weeks to suggest support for independence was growing and hovering at about 50 percent. Scots voted by 55 percent to remain part of the United Kingdom in a 2014 referendum.

### Shooting at Texas university kills 2

REUTERS, Texas

Two women were killed and a toddler was wounded on Monday in a shooting at a residence hall on the Texas A&M University campus in Commerce, authorities said. They provided no more information about the women or the child. Officials at the campus, located about 65 miles northeast of Dallas, did not respond to a request for further comment.

## WHO FORECAST

## Cancer cases to rise 81pc in poorer nations

AFP, Geneva

The UN health agency yesterday warned that cancer cases would rise by 81 percent in low- and middle-income countries by 2040 because of a lack of investment in prevention and care.

The Geneva-based World Health Organization (WHO) said in a report that these countries had focused their limited resources on combating infectious diseases and improving maternal and child health instead of fighting cancer.

It said they often had the highest cancer mortality too. "This is a wake-up call to all of us to tackle the unacceptable inequalities between cancer services in rich and poor countries," Ren Minghui, a WHO Assistant Director General, said in the report.

"If people have access to primary care and referral systems then cancer can be detected early, treated effectively and cured. Cancer should not be a death sentence for anyone, anywhere," he said.

The report, timed to coincide with World Cancer Day, said an investment of \$25 billion (23 billion euros) over the next decade could save seven million lives from cancer. "Controlling cancer does not have to be expensive," Andre Ilbawi, of the WHO's department for management of non-communicable diseases, told journalists.

The annual report found that overall cancer cases in the world would rise by 60 percent by 2040 and said tobacco use was responsible for 25 percent of cancer deaths.

# Fear, racism spread worldwide

Experts say harsh travel bans, panic and misinformation fueling xenophobia

AFP, Sydney

As the deadly coronavirus has spread worldwide, it has carried with it xenophobia -- and Asian communities around the world are finding themselves subject to suspicion and fear.

When a patient on Australia's Gold Coast refused to shake the hand of her surgeon Rhea Liang, citing the virus that has killed hundreds, the medic's first response was shock.

But after tweeting about the incident and receiving a flood of responses, the respected doctor learned her experience was all too common.

There has been a spike in reports of anti-Chinese rhetoric directed at people of Asian origin, regardless of whether they have ever visited the centre of the epidemic or been in contact with the virus.

Chinese tourists have reportedly been spat at in the Italian city of Venice, a family in Turin was accused of carrying the disease, and mothers in Milan have used social media to call for children to be kept away from Chinese classmates.

In Canada, a white man was filmed telling a Chinese-Canadian woman "you dropped your coronavirus" in the parking lot of a local mall.

In Malaysia, a petition to "bar Chinese people from entering our beloved country" received almost 500,000 signatures in one week.

The incidents are part of what the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine has described

## CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC



as "misinformation" which it says is fuelling "racial profiling" where "deeply distressing assumptions are being made about 'Chinese' or 'Asian-looking' people."

Disease has long been accompanied by suspicions of foreigners -- from Irish immigrants being targeted in the Typhoid Mary panic of 1900s America to Nepali peacekeepers being

accused of bringing cholera to earthquake-struck Haiti in the last decade.

"It's a common phenomenon," said Rob Grenfell, director of health and biosecurity for Australia's science and research agency CSIRO.

"With outbreaks and epidemics along human history, we've always tried to vilify certain subsets of the population," he said, comparing the behaviour to 1300s plague-ridden medieval Europe, where foreigners and religious groups were often blamed.

"Sure it emerged in China," he said of the coronavirus, "but that's no reason to actually vilify Chinese people."

In a commentary for the British Medical Journal, doctor Abraar Karan warned this behaviour could discourage people with symptoms from coming forward.

Claire Hooker, a health lecturer at the University of Sydney, said the responses from governments may have compounded prejudice.

The World Health Organization has warned against "measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade", but this has not stopped scores of countries from introducing travel bans.



Riots police scuffle with migrants during a demonstration outside the municipal theatre of the city of Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, yesterday. Police on the Greek island of Lesbos yesterday clashed with hundreds of migrants protesting against tougher new asylum rules.

PHOTO: AFP

# Impeachment hangs over Trump state of union speech

AFP, Washington

America's divisions will enter into burning focus when President Donald Trump delivers the annual State of the Union speech to Congress, later Tuesday just ahead of his expected acrimonious impeachment acquittal.

The State of the Union is a grand set-piece in the US political calendar, a rare occasion when bitter opponents traditionally observe a truce while the president lays out a vision for the future.

But Trump will drive up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol at a time of rancor arguably unmatched for decades -- and likely to worsen as the November presidential election approaches.

The White House promises Trump will be "relentless" in talking up the US economy and the "blue collar boom" when he takes to the podium at around 9:00 pm (0200 GMT Wednesday).

The reality is that Trump will be entering a chamber where only last December the

Democratic-led House of Representatives, the lower chamber, impeached him for abuse of power and obstructing Congress.

And he'll be looking out over a group of legislators where only a narrow Republican majority in the upper chamber Senate is likely to save his job when a verdict vote comes today.

The speech could in theory be an opportunity to reach out and heal a nation boiling over in mistrust.

Trump could express regret for what even several of his own Republican senators agree was wrongful behavior in pushing Ukraine to open a questionable corruption probe against one of his main Democratic presidential opponents, Joe Biden.

Or he could seek to calm the waters by entirely avoiding the topic of impeachment, just as Bill Clinton did during his post-impeachment State of the Union in 1999.

White House officials say they don't know what he'll do.

