

China sees hope in virus 'war' as deaths top 1,100

February 12 2020, by Laurent Thomet and Eva Xiao



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China's leadership touted "positive results" Wednesday from efforts to contain the new coronavirus epidemic, but warned it still faced a "large-scale war" against the outbreak as the death toll passed 1,100.

President Xi Jinping chaired a meeting of the ruling Politburo Standing Committee after figures showed that the number of new cases dropped for the second straight day, fuelling hopes the epidemic could peak later this month.

Xi said there were "positive results" but warned that the country "must not relax" its epidemic control efforts, according to state media, as authorities have kept tens of millions of people under lockdown.

China still faces a "large-scale war" and a "big test", said state broadcaster CCTV in a readout of the gathering.

Authorities said Wednesday another 97 people had died in China, raising the national toll to 1,113, while more than 44,600 people had been infected by the COVID-19 virus.

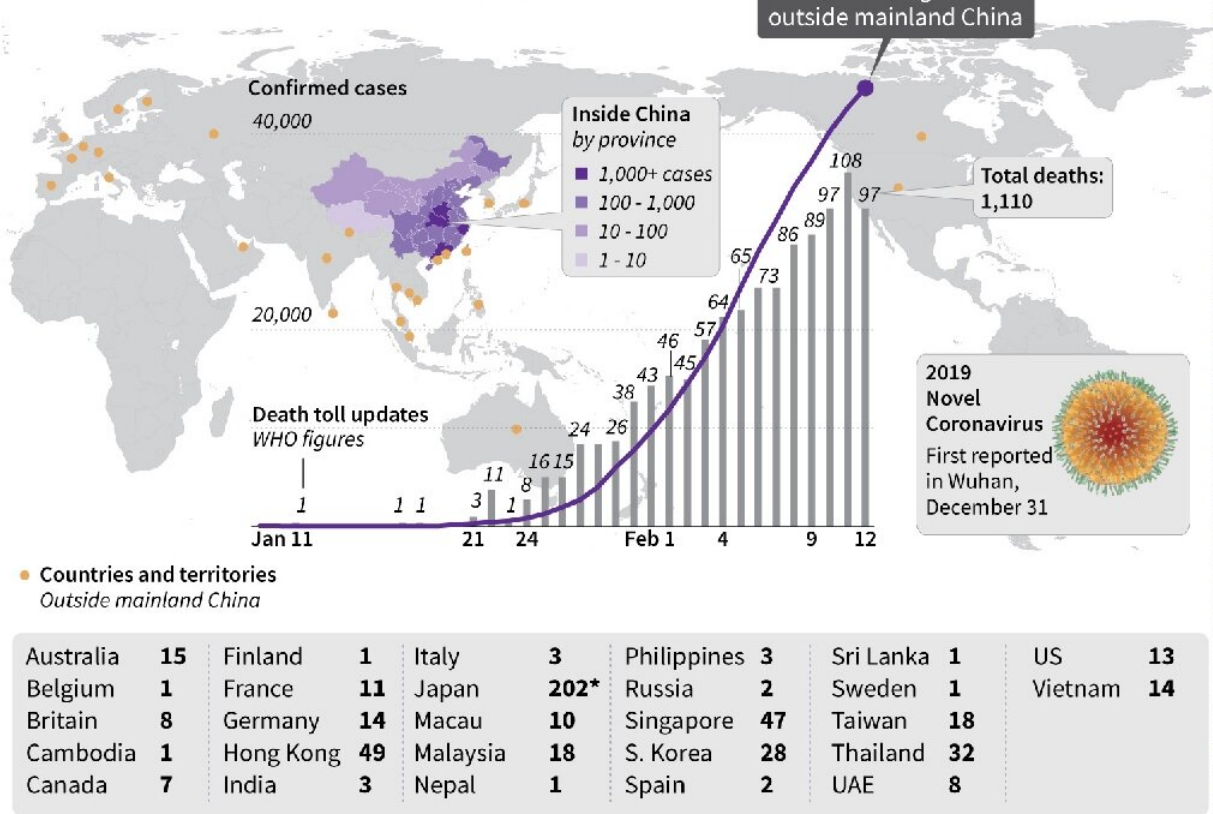
'Too early' to predict

In Geneva, World Health Organization officials warned against reaching premature conclusions on the Chinese data.

"I think it's way too early to try to predict the beginning, the middle or the end of this epidemic right now," said Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme.

The global spread of the coronavirus

Confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV as of February 12, at 03:00 GMT



*including 174 aboard the cruise ship Diamond Princess

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Countries and territories with confirmed cases of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus, as of February 12, 0300 GMT.

The number of newly reported cases from China has stabilised, said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"But that has to be interpreted with extreme caution," he warned. "This outbreak could go in any direction."

In Spain, organisers of the world's top mobile telecommunications trade fair, the World Mobile Congress, said the event would be cancelled

following an exodus of industry heavyweights over coronavirus fears.

The GSMA, which organises the annual show, set for Barcelona, said it was cancelled due to "the global concern regarding the coronavirus outbreak, travel concern and other circumstances."

The announcement was made just hours after Vodafone, Nokia, Deutsche Telekom, Britain's BT and Rakuten of Japan had pulled out, following in the footsteps of Intel, Facebook, Cisco and China's Vivo.

The epidemic has threatened to harm the Chinese economy, the world's second-largest, with ANZ bank warning that China's first-quarter GDP growth would slow to 3.2-4.0 percent, down from a previous projection of 5.0 percent.



The WHO decided to name the virus COVID-19 in keeping with guidelines aimed to avoid linking a disease to an animal or a geographic location

It has also disrupted sporting events in China: motorsport governing body FIA announced the suspension of the Formula One Grand Prix in Shanghai, originally scheduled for April 19, due to the "continued spread" of the coronavirus.

And this week's Singapore Air Show—Asia's biggest—was badly hit by exhibitors withdrawing and low attendance.

Due to the impact of the virus, the OPEC oil cartel lowered its forecast for growth in global oil demand this year by nearly a fifth.

While the full impact of the outbreak on the global economy remains unclear and a vaccine isn't in sight, investors appear to think the worst of the emergency has passed—and stock markets posted strong performances in Europe and the United States.

"The markets are ready to seize upon any sign of good news, so the fact there is evidence the number of new cases in China is falling was plenty of reason to push higher," said SpreadEx analyst Connor Campbell.

US planemaker Boeing, however, warned that there was "no question" the outbreak would hammer the aviation industry and the broader economy.



Bolivian migration officers use masks while working at El Alto International Airport, in La Paz

Cruise ship infections rise

The biggest cluster of cases outside China is on a cruise ship quarantined off Japan's coast.

An additional 39 people on board the Diamond Princess have tested positive, raising the total number of cases to 174, while thousands of passengers and crew face a second week in quarantine.

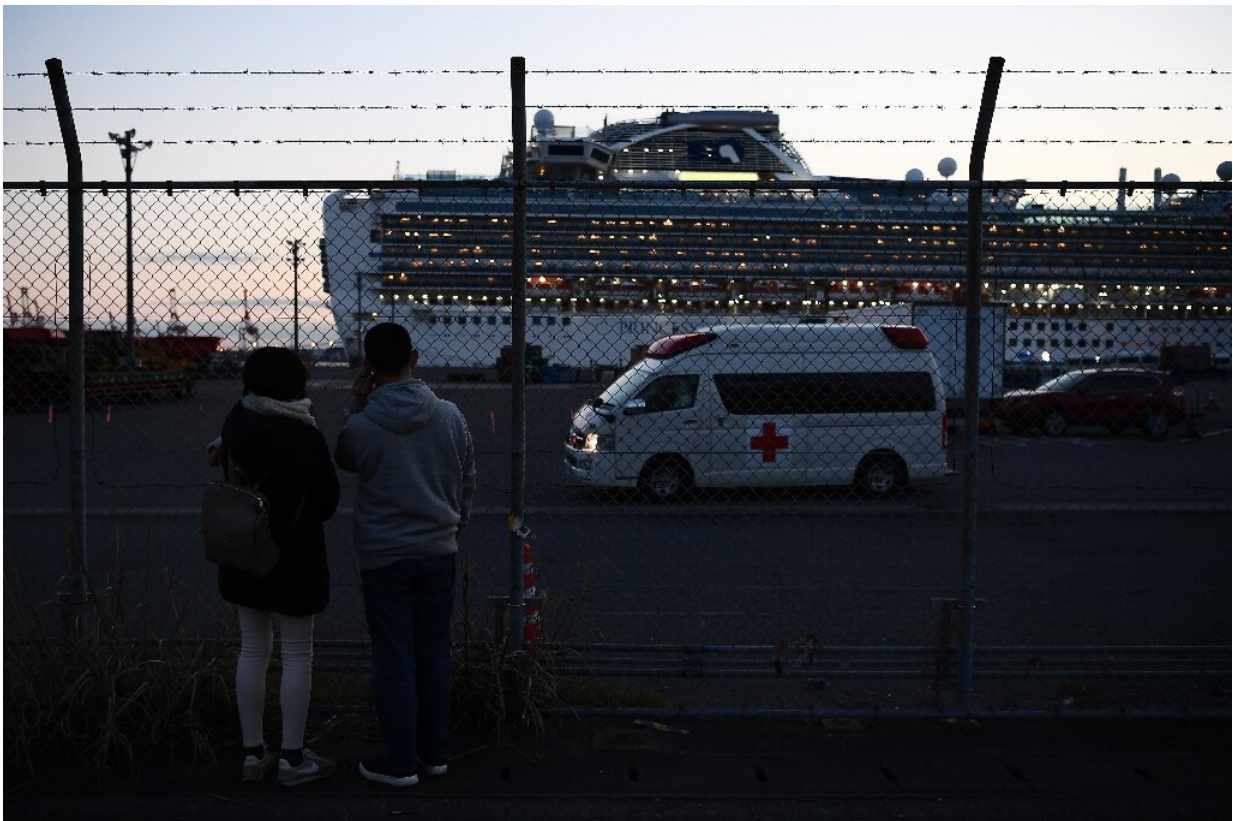
Most of the deaths and majority of cases however have been in central Hubei province, whose capital, Wuhan, is the epicentre of the outbreak.

Some 56 million have been placed under virtual quarantine in the province.

In a positive development, the number of new cases has fallen in Hubei for two straight days with some 1,600 reported, according to figures from the National Health Commission.

Outside the province, the number of new patients has declined every day for the past week.

In addition to locking down Hubei, authorities have restricted movements in several other cities far from the epicentre in its unprecedented effort to contain the virus.



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Several countries have banned arrivals from China, while major airlines have halted flights to and from the country, as hundreds of people have now been infected in some two dozen countries.

The case of a British man who passed on the virus to at least 11 other people—without having been in China—has raised fears of a new phase of contagion abroad.

The 53-year-old man was infected while attending a conference in Singapore and then passed it on to several compatriots on holiday in the French Alps, before finally being diagnosed back in Britain.

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