

Virus-hit Wuhan waits for barriers to come down

March 19 2020

A network of makeshift barriers has kept residents walled in their neighbourhoods for weeks in Wuhan, the Chinese city at the heart of the coronavirus pandemic.

The [city](#) of 11 million, where the virus first erupted, became a [ghost town](#) after authorities prevented people from leaving on January 23.

With thousands of patients swarming hospitals every week, authorities tightened the restrictions in early February, confining people to their homes.

Closing off communities split the city into silos, with different [neighbourhoods](#) rolling out controls of varying intensity and many of those sealed inside turning to online group-buying services to purchase food.

The measures have been enforced by an army of neighbourhood committees and a string of barriers.

Some of the boundaries are more official-looking than others.

At one spot, a long green border is flanked with a red Communist Party flag, propaganda slogans and tent station.

Elsewhere, a mountain of shared-use bikes have been piled up to block holes in a fenced barrier.

At one point where a blue metal barrier has been cut open, a bicycle is wired to the fence to prevent anyone passing through the gap.

Soldiers marched along one deserted road next to another blue [barrier](#), with an empty tree-lined park and towering pagoda visible behind.

But the barriers have not been unbreachable.

Peddlers of fresh noodles sold their fare across one fence, reaching up to pass plastic bags to customers on the other side.

And with millions under lockdown there have been signs of built-up frustration.

A visit by Vice Premier Sun Chunlan to a Wuhan residential community this month was met with angry public heckling as people reportedly complained that she was being shown a "fake" delivery of food.

However, Wuhan is edging nearer to the day when the barriers might come down.

On Thursday, the city reported no new cases of the [coronavirus](#) infection for the first time since data started being reported in January.

The majority of China's 3,245 coronavirus deaths and nearly 81,000 cases have been in Wuhan.

In recent weeks measures that forbid movement have been gently eased.

Some of the city's companies have been told they can resume work.

And officials decided Wednesday that in districts deemed "epidemic-free" residents could move around within their housing compounds—as

long as they don't gather in groups—while convenience stores and small markets could re-open.

The city even had a visit from President Xi Jinping last week—his first since the crisis erupted—who declared that the spread of the disease has been "basically curbed" in the country.

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