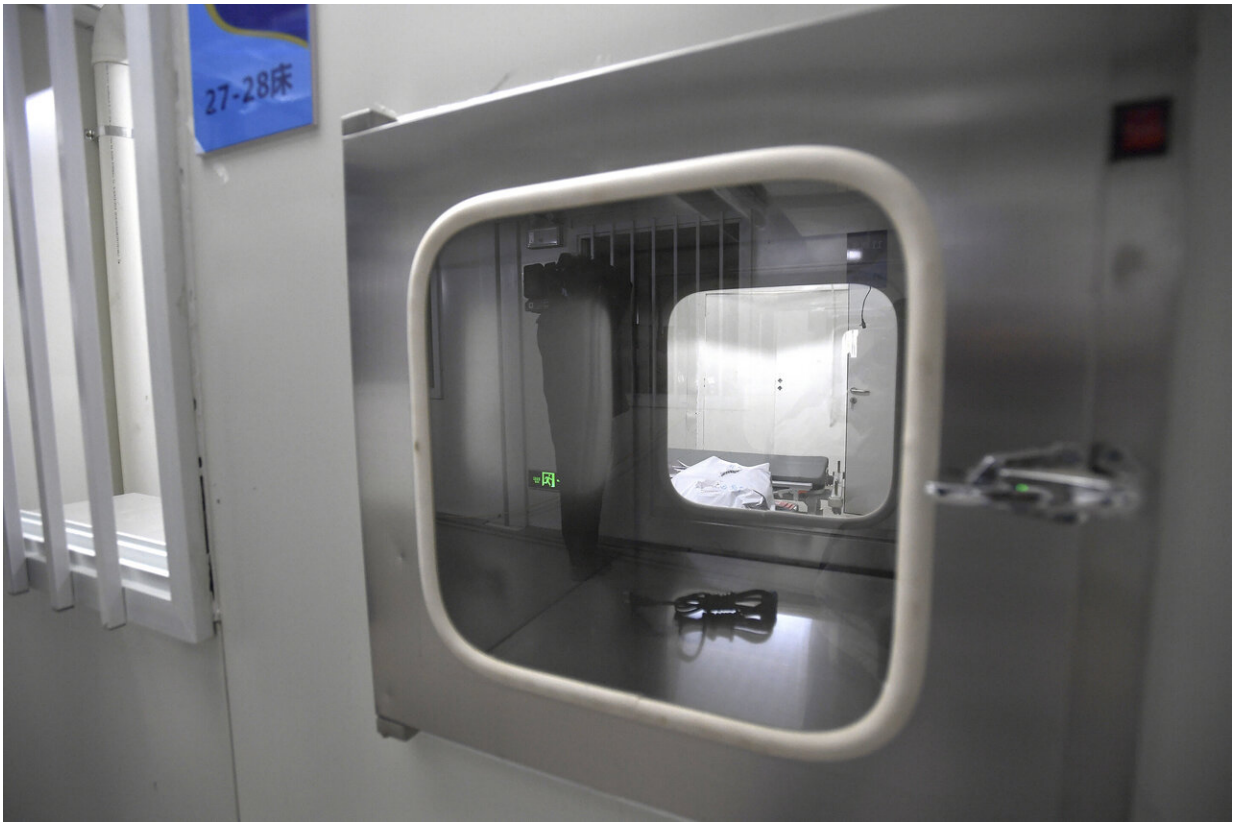
Built in 10 days, China's virus hospital takes 1st patients

February 3 2020, by Joe McDonald



An isolation unit is seen at the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

The first patients arrived Monday at a 1,000-bed hospital built in 10 days as part of China's sweeping efforts to fight a new virus that is causing global alarm.

Huoshenshan Hospital and a second 1,500-bed facility due to open this week were built by construction crews who are working around the clock in Wuhan, the central city where the outbreak was first detected in December. Some 50 million people are barred from leaving Wuhan and surrounding cities.

The Wuhan treatment centers mark the second time Chinese leaders have responded to a new disease by building specialized hospitals almost overnight. As severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, spread in 2003, a facility in Beijing for patients with that viral disease was constructed in a week.

The first patients arrived at Huoshenshan Hospital at 10 a.m. on Monday, according to state media. They gave no details of the patients' identities or conditions.

The ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army, sent 1,400 doctors, nurses and other personnel to staff the Wuhan hospital, the official Xinhua News Agency said. The government said earlier that some have experience fighting SARS and other outbreaks.

A Chinese army medic looks at a patient room at the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

The state newspaper Beijing Daily applauded construction workers and suppliers who cut short their Lunar New Year holiday. It hailed the rapid construction as a political triumph, despite complaints leaders in Wuhan endangered the public by failing to respond fast enough to reports of a dangerous new disease.

"Today's Chinese people are more deeply aware: where I stand is my

China," the newspaper said. "When this national sense of ownership is awakened, our mentality in the face of disasters becomes more mature."

Authorities have cut most road, rail and air access to Wuhan and surrounding cities, isolating some 50 million people, in efforts to contain the viral outbreak that has sickened more than 17,000 people and killed more than 360.

Before this week's addition of 2,500 new beds, Wuhan had 6,754 in hospitals designated for virus patients, according to the website TMTpost.com. It said authorities were considering assigning another 2,183 beds to virus cases at the city's other hospitals.

Medical equipment is seen at the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital in

Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

The Huoshenshan Hospital was built by a 7,000-member crew of carpenters, plumbers, electricians and other specialists, according to Xinhua.

About half of the two-story, 60,000-square meter (600,000-square foot) building is isolation wards, according to the government newspaper Yangtze Daily. It has 30 intensive care units.

The name Huoshenshan means God of Fire Mountain. The second hospital, Leishenshan, means God of Thunder Mountain.

Newspapers published day-by-day accounts of crews clearing a riverside plot, laying the foundation, installing sewage and electrical equipment and assembling prefabricated rooms that were shipped to the site.

Photos in state media showed workers in winter clothing, safety helmets and the surgical-style masks worn by millions of Chinese in an attempt to avoid contracting the virus. Trucks were shown arriving in the middle of the night carrying rolls of insulation and other materials.

A patient room is seen at the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

People walk down a corridor at the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

People walk near a CT scanner in a room at the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

The Huoshenshan temporary field hospital under construction is seen as it nears completion in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020. The Philippines on Sunday reported the first death from a new virus outside of China, where authorities delayed the opening of schools in the worst-hit province and tightened quarantine measures in a city that allow only one family member to venture out to buy supplies. (Chinatopix via AP)

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This Saturday, Feb. 1, 2020, photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, shows construction workers at the site of the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital being built in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. China's death toll from a new virus has increased to 304 with more than 14,000 cases, amid warnings from the World Health Organization that other countries need to be prepared in the event the disease spreads among their populations. (Xiao

Yijiu/Xinhua via AP)

This Saturday, Feb. 1, 2020, photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, shows construction workers at the site of the Huoshenshan temporary field hospital being built in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. China's death toll from a new virus has increased to 304 with more than 14,000 cases, amid warnings from the World Health Organization that other countries need to be prepared in the event the disease spreads among their populations. (Xiao Yijiu/Xinhua via AP)

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Doctors can talk with outside experts over a video system that links them to Beijing's PLA General Hospital, according to the Yangtze Daily. It said the system was installed in less than 12 hours by a 20-member "commando team" from Wuhan Telecom Ltd.

The building has specialized ventilation systems and double-sided cabinets that connect patient rooms to hallways and allow hospital staff to deliver supplies without entering the rooms. It is equipped with

infrared scanners to warn if any employees show signs of the disease's distinctive fever, the website Economy Net reported, citing the company that provided the technology.

A Chinese company donated "medical robots" to deliver medicines and carry test samples, according to the Shanghai newspaper The Paper.

In other cities, the government has designated hospitals to handle cases of the new virus. In Beijing, the Xiaotangshan Hospital built in 2003 for SARS is being renovated by construction workers. The government has yet to say whether it might be used for patients with the new disease.

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