

# China faces more border curbs

Lunar New Year holidays draw to an end; more flights cancelled as toll touches 259

REUTERS  
SHANGHAI

China faced mounting isolation from international travel curbs and flight suspensions on Saturday as the death toll from a spreading coronavirus outbreak rose to 259.

The epidemic has led to mass evacuations of foreign citizens and risks exacerbating the slowdown in growth in the world's second-largest economy. Russia said its aerospace defence forces would begin flying its citizens out.

Inside China, Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, was under a virtual quarantine, with roads sealed off and public transport shut down. Elsewhere, local authorities placed growing restrictions on travel and business.

China's National Health Commission said there were 2,102 new confirmed infections in China on Friday, bringing the total to 11,791. Around two dozen other countries have reported another 137 cases. The death toll rose by 46 to 259.

**Data collection**

The Chinese data would suggest it is less deadly than the 2002-03 outbreak of Severe



**Heading home:** A crew member using disinfectant on a flight with French evacuees from Wuhan on Saturday. • AFP

## Vietnam stops flights to China

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HANOI

Vietnam has suspended all China flights as part of "strengthening measures" against the coronavirus outbreak.

The step applies to all airlines "which have routes between Vietnam and China" and also includes Hong Kong and Macau.

Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which killed nearly 800 people of the some 8,000 it infected, although such numbers can evolve rapidly. In Beijing, counters were

## U.K. pulls out staff, families

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

Britain on Saturday said it was temporarily withdrawing some staff and their families from its diplomatic sites in China.

He added that U.K.'s Ambassador in Beijing and key staff will remain, and British nationals would still have consular access.

set up at the entrances of housing estates, where volunteers wearing red arm bands and masks noted down details of residents coming back from their hometowns after the Lunar

New Year holiday.

"As long as I am properly protected and don't go to crowded places, I don't feel scared at all about my hometown or Beijing, said a 58-year-old migrant worker surnamed Sun.

Others were more worried.

"There will be a huge number of people returning to the city. I think it will put Beijing at risk of more infections," said Zhang Chunlei, 45, another returning migrant worker.

Singapore and the U.S. announced measures on Friday to ban foreign nationals who have recently been in China from entering their territories.

Australia followed suit, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison saying the country would deny entry to all foreign nationals travelling from mainland China from Saturday.

Many nations have put on charter flights to repatriate citizens from China and then place them in isolation for around two weeks, the incubation period of the virus. More than 300 South Koreans arrived home on Saturday and Indonesian officials said around 250 nationals were being evacuated.

## 33 students from Wuhan reach Sri Lanka

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

A group of 33 Sri Lankan students returned to the country from Wuhan Province in China, after a chartered Sri Lankan Airline flight flew them back on Saturday.

"Due to great diplomatic relations between #LKA & #China we were successful in evacuating our citizens in #Wuhan, under lockdown," President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said in a tweet on Saturday.

The students have been taken to a special quarantine facility at the Diyatalawa Army Base Hospital in the Uva Province, local media reports said.

Meanwhile, *Daily Mirror* reported that Chinese authorities in Colombo had "unofficially raised concern" with the Sri Lankan government over recent incidents of discrimination faced by Chinese nationals in the country, who were reportedly turned away by some restaurants, hospitals and supermarkets. However, Chinese authorities said that the public had no reason to fear as exit and enter channels to Wuhan have been temporarily closed, the reports said.

# Britain embarks on a future outside the European Union

There were celebrations and tears as U.K. bid goodbye to EU

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

Britain began an uncertain future outside the European Union on Saturday after the country greeted the historic end to almost half a century of EU membership with a mixture of joy and sadness.

There were celebrations and tears on Friday as the EU's often reluctant member became the first to leave an organisation set up to forge unity among nations after the horrors of World War II.

Little has changed as of Saturday as the U.K. is now in an 11-month transition period negotiated as part of the divorce.

Britons will be able to work in the EU and trade freely – and vice versa – until December 31, although the U.K. will no longer be represented in the bloc's institutions.

But legally, Britain is out. Thousands of people waving Union Jack flags packed London's Parliament Square and sang the national anthem to mark that reality as Brexit became law at 11 pm (2300 GMT) – midnight in Brussels.



**New beginning:** The Union flag being removed from the atrium of the Europa building in Brussels on Friday. • AFP

Prime Minister Boris Johnson held a private party in his Downing Street office with a clock projected on the walls outside counting down the minutes to departure.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is preparing to impose full customs and border checks on all European Union goods entering Britain from next year, in an attempt to increase pressure on the bloc in trade talks, The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported.

"We are planning full checks on all EU imports – export declarations, security declarations, animal

health checks and all supermarket goods to pass through Border Inspections Posts," Saturday's *Telegraph* quoted a senior government source as saying.

**Deep divisions**

However, Brexit has exposed deep divisions in British society and many fear the consequences of ending 47 years of ties with their nearest neighbours.

Some pro-Europeans, including many of the 3.6 million EU citizens who have made their lives in Britain, marked the occasion with candlelit gatherings.

## Senate blocks witnesses in Donald Trump's trial

Final voting on his fate on Wednesday

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

The Senate narrowly rejected Democratic demands to summon witnesses for President Donald Trump's impeachment trial late on Friday, all but ensuring Mr. Trump's acquittal in just the third trial to threaten a President's removal in U.S. history. But Senators pushed off final voting on his fate to next Wednesday.

The delay showed the weight of a historic vote bearing down on Senators, despite prodding by the President eager to have it all behind him in an election year and ahead of his State of the Union speech on Tuesday night.

Mr. Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell spoke by phone to lock in the schedule during a tense night at the Capitol as rushed negotiations proceeded on and off the Senate floor.

The President wanted to arrive for his speech at the Capitol with acquittal secured, but that will not happen. Instead, the trial will resume on Monday for final arguments, with time on Monday and Tuesday for Senators to speak. The final voting is planned for 4 p.m. on Wednesday, the day after Mr. Trump's speech.

Mr. Trump's acquittal is all but certain in the Senate,



Donald Trump

where his GOP allies hold the majority and there's nowhere near the two-thirds needed for conviction and removal.

Nor will he face potentially damaging, open-Senate testimony from witnesses.

**No new testimony**

Despite the Democrats' singular focus on hearing new testimony, the Republican majority brushed past those demands and will make this the first impeachment trial without witnesses. Even new revelations on Friday from former National Security Adviser John Bolton did not sway GOP senators, who said they'd heard enough.

Mr. Trump was impeached by the House last month on charges that he abused power and obstructed Congress as he tried to pressure Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden, using military aid as leverage.

## Racing to safety



**Chased by blaze:** A spot fire ran through a private property near Canberra on Saturday, forcing horses to move to safety. Authorities have declared the first state of emergency in almost two decades as a bushfire bore down on the Australian capital. • GETTY IMAGES

# After over three years, Maldives rejoins Commonwealth

The island nation was reinstated after it followed a sustained reform process

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

The Maldives on Saturday rejoined the Commonwealth, more than three years after the Indian Ocean island nation quit the association amid mounting criticism of its human rights record then.

In 2016, the Maldives pulled out of the Commonwealth terming "unjust" the

grouping's decision to penalise the country over former President Mohamed Nasheed's controversial ouster in 2012. It followed the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)'s warning to Maldives of suspension from the bloc, voicing "deep disappointment" over the country's lack of progress in resolving the political crisis

during former President Abdulla Yameen's presidency, whose authoritarian slant sparked concern domestically and internationally.

However, months after President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih won the 2018 presidential elections, promising to restore democracy, he wrote to the Commonwealth, requesting to re-join the bloc.

Following the island nation's readmission Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland said: "The

reform process under way in Maldives aligns with the values and principles of the Commonwealth and we encourage the nation to continue on this path."

President Solih said in a tweet: "A short while ago, I had a conversation with the Commonwealth's Secretary General who informed me that the Maldives has been formally reinstated into the Commonwealth as its 54th member state. We shall long strive to uphold the Com-

monwealth's values of democracy and human rights."

**India lauds inclusion**

The Government of India congratulated the Government of Maldives on its readmission to the Commonwealth of Nations as its 54th member. "India has always been a key supporter of Maldives' readmission and for it to play a larger role in international organisations and the comity of nations. We are committed to working close-

ly with Maldives on shared Commonwealth goals like development, democracy and peace," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

New Delhi-Male ties witnessed a significant shift following the poll defeat of former President Yameen, perceived to be a friend of China. India said it would continue working with Maldives in achieving its "democratic and developmental aspirations."

## SUDOKU

	1	6		4				3
	9				5	4		
			6	9				5
7	4							
8		5		7		3		9
							4	8
1				2	4			
		2	7					5
9				5		8	1	

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

2	8	3	9	5	4	7	1	6
7	1	5	8	6	2	3	4	9
9	4	6	3	7	1	2	5	8
6	7	9	5	4	8	1	2	3
8	3	2	6	1	7	4	9	5
1	5	4	2	9	3	6	8	7
4	9	1	7	8	6	5	3	2
5	2	7	1	3	9	8	6	4
3	6	8	4	2	5	9	7	1

## U.S. backs Ukraine against Russian aggression: Pompeo

Secretary of State met President Zelenskiy to calm unease among officials there over Trump trial

EDWARD WONG  
KYIV

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday that the Trump administration was committed to supporting Ukraine in its defence against aggression by Russia, which invaded and annexed part of the country and is supporting a separatist insurgency.

"Today I'm here with a clear message: The U.S. sees that the Ukrainian struggle for freedom, democracy and prosperity is a valiant one," Mr. Pompeo said at a news conference after meeting with Ukraine's leader in Kyiv. "Our commitment to support it will not waver."

**Impeachment trial**

Ukraine is a "bulwark between freedom and authoritarianism in Eastern Europe," Mr. Pompeo added. His visit, in which he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, was aimed at



**Key visit:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, right, and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Kyiv. • AP

calming unease among Ukrainian officials about the relationship between Washington and Kyiv, which has been thrust into the spotlight because of the impeachment of President Donald Trump, based on charges of abuse of power and obstruction over the president's actions on Ukraine.

Mr. Pompeo and Mr. Ze-

lenskiy met before noon in the President's office in central Kyiv, and the Ukrainian leader said they had talked about new steps to strengthen the partnership between the two nations.

"I don't think these friendly and warm relations have been influenced by the impeachment trial of the president," Mr. Zelenskiy said at a

news conference with Mr. Pompeo when asked whether Mr. Trump's impeachment had affected ties between Kyiv and Washington.

**'Relations strong'**

While the two officials offered reassurances that relations were strong, Mr. Pompeo did not give Mr. Zelenskiy one thing he has sought since his election in April: an invitation to meet Mr. Trump at the White House, which would be an important signal to Russia of U.S. support for Ukraine. Mr. Pompeo's message that Mr. Trump was not ready to receive Mr. Zelenskiy at the White House was a blow to the Ukrainian President's national security efforts.

Evidence that Mr. Trump had earlier demanded, in return for such a visit, that Ukraine announce the start of an investigation that could benefit him, became an im-

portant part of the impeachment inquiry. In response to a question on Friday, Mr. Pompeo said a White House visit by Mr. Zelenskiy was not dependent on the kind of investigation that Mr. Trump had sought.

Ukrainian officials are angry that the Americans have granted Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, two visits with Mr. Trump in the White House, most recently in December.

In renewing his request for a meeting on Friday, Mr. Zelenskiy said, "If we have an important subject for this conversation other than strategy and tactics, but important things we can negotiate over, something to sign and that I can bring back, then I am ready to go tomorrow!"

Mr. Pompeo was the first official from Mr. Trump's Cabinet to meet with Mr. Zelenskiy since the impeachment inquiry began. NY TIMES

## ELSEWHERE



**U.S. envoy for Taliban talks back in Kabul**

KABUL U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, who is leading negotiations with the Taliban, was set to meet with the Afghan President on Saturday, an official confirmed, in an apparent renewed push for talks on an agreement with the insurgents. AFP

**Iraqi President names new Prime Minister**

BAGHDAD Iraq's President Barham Saleh named former Communications Minister Mohammad Allawi as the country's new Prime Minister on Saturday after an 11th-hour consensus among political blocs. However, people seemed divided on his nomination. AFP