

Wuhan 'turned the tide' in virus battle: Xi

China reported just 19 new COVID-19 cases as it shut last of 14 makeshift hospitals in the city

REUTERS
BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday made his first visit to Wuhan since the COVID-19 outbreak forced a lockdown of the city of 11 million people, in a sign that authorities' efforts to control the spread of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) are bearing fruit.

Mr. Xi's arrival on the same day that Wuhan shut the last of 14 temporary hospitals that had been opened to manage a surge in COVID-19 patients, news website The Paper reported.

Earlier on Tuesday, China said it had just 19 new infections on Monday, down from 40 a day earlier. That also marked the third straight day of no new domestically transmitted cases in mainland China outside of Hubei province, where Wuhan is located, even as the disease spreads rapidly in other countries, including Italy and the United States.



Ground zero: Chinese President Xi Jinping waving at a COVID-19 patient and medical staff via a video link at the Huoshenshan hospital in Wuhan on Tuesday. • AFP

ised patient by videolink. Residents of Wuhan were shown cheering Mr. Xi from their apartment windows, while negative comments on China's heavily censored social media were quickly removed.

"Why only come now when the epidemic is almost over?" one comment on the official People's Daily's Weibo feed said before disappearing.

Stocks lifted
News of Mr. Xi's Wuhan visit gave a lift to Chinese stocks, with the blue-chip index ending the day 2.1% higher after falling into negative territory in morning trade.

"It is obvious that Mr. Xi could not have visited Wuhan earlier because the risk of him contracting the virus there was initially too high," Zhang Ming, a professor at Renmin University in Beijing, told Reuters.

"He is there now to reap the harvest. His being there means the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) may declare victory against the virus soon," Mr. Zhang said.

'Containment zone' in New York to halt spread

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ALBANY

New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo announced on Tuesday he is sending the National Guard into a "containment area" in New York City suburb to help fight what is believed to be the nation's biggest cluster of coronavirus cases - one of the most dramatic actions yet to control the outbreak in the U.S.

The move came as health authorities contended with alarming concentrations of the disease on both sides of the country and scattered cases in between.

Schools, houses of worship and large gathering places will be shuttered for two weeks in a "containment area" in New Rochelle, and the troops will scrub surfaces and deliver food to the zone, which extends a mile in all directions from a point near a synagogue con-

nected to some of the cases, Mr. Cuomo said.

"It is a dramatic action, but it is the largest cluster of cases in the country," Cuomo said. "The numbers are going up unabated, and we do need a special public health strategy."

The virus has infected over 700 people in the U.S. and killed at least 27, with one state after another recording its first infections in quick succession. New Jersey recorded its first COVID-19 death.

In California, the evacuation of passengers from Grand Princess began on Monday with several hundred people let off the ship. About two dozen people who needed acute medical care were taken off first, though it was unclear how many of them were infected. About 2,000 passengers were still aboard on Tuesday morning.

168 die in Italy, highest single-day toll

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

Italy recorded 168 deaths on Tuesday from COVID-19, its highest single-day toll to date, pushing the number of fatalities outside China to more than 1,000.

Overall in Italy, 631 people have died from the disease and 10,149 have been infected in just over two weeks.

Tuesday's toll raised the total number of deaths outside China to 1,115, according to an AFP tally. The Italian government has imposed a nationwide ban on public gathering and travel restrictions until April 3.

It's beginning of epidemic for France: Macron

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron warned on Tuesday that France was "just at the beginning" of the COVID-19 outbreak that has killed 30 people in the country and infected more than 1,600.

"We're just at the beginning of this epidemic," he said in Paris, urging the French not to panic.

France is the second-worst affected country in Europe after Italy. Culture Minister Franck Riester and five MPs are among those who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

Putin backs amendment that will let him remain in power

Constitutional changes will let him seek re-election in 2024

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday backed a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow him to seek re-election after his current term ends in 2024, ending uncertainty about his future.

Putin gave his support to the amendment put forward by lawmaker Valentina Tereshkova, who as a Soviet cosmonaut in 1963 became the first woman to fly to space. She proposed either scrapping Russian's two-term limit for presidents or resetting the clock so Putin's four terms wouldn't count.

Lawmakers in the Kremlin-controlled State Duma quickly endorsed Ms. Tereshkova's proposal, along with a sweeping set of constitutional changes proposed by Mr. Putin.

In a speech to lawmakers on Tuesday, Mr. Putin spoke against scrapping presidential term limits altogether but backed the idea that if the Constitution is revised, the two-term limit only would apply from 2024 on.



Vladimir Putin

The President's current six-year term expires in 2024.

Mr. Putin, 67, has been in power for more than 20 years, becoming Russia's longest-serving leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. After serving two presidential terms in 2000-2008, he shifted to the Russian Prime Minister's office while protégé Dmitry Medvedev served as a placeholder President.

Mr. Putin reclaimed the presidency in 2012 and won another term in 2018.

A series of constitutional amendments Mr. Putin proposed in January were widely seen by Kremlin foes as part of his efforts to stay in

power. However, it wasn't clear until Tuesday how Putin could achieve that goal.

"I propose to either lift the presidential term limit or add a clause that after the revised constitution enters force, the incumbent president, just like any other citizen, has the right to seek the presidency," she said to a raucous applause.

After Ms. Tereshkova spoke, Mr. Putin quickly came to Parliament to address lawmakers.

"The President is a guarantor of security of our state, its internal stability and evolutionary development," Mr. Putin said. "We have had enough revolutions."

Then he dropped the bombshell, saying he positively viewed Ms. Tereshkova's alternate proposal to restart the term count when the revamped constitution enters force.

Mr. Putin's statement came as lawmakers were considering the amendments in a crucial second reading when changes in the document are made.

'Russia meddling in MH17 probe'

REUTERS
AMSTERDAM

Dutch prosecutors accused Russia on Tuesday of trying to sabotage the investigation into the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 in Ukraine in 2014, saying this cast "a dark shadow" over the impending trial of four suspects in the crash.

Pre-trial hearings began in Amsterdam on Monday. Prosecutors say the defendants, three Russians and a

Ukrainian, helped arrange the Russian missile system used to shoot down MH17, a civilian aircraft, killing all 298 passengers, most of them Dutch, on board.

"The sum of all the facts casts a dark shadow over this investigation because there is strong indicative evidence that Russian government is keen to thwart the investigation," prosecutor Thijs Berger said.

"Several witnesses in this

investigation have said that they fear for their lives if their identities would come to light... The use of Russian security services to discover the identity of witnesses in the investigation is a very real scenario," he said.

MH17 was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on July 17, 2014, when it was shot down by a missile fired from territory held by pro-Moscow rebels. Russia has denied any involvement.

ELSEWHERE



Pope tells priests to go out and meet the sick

VATICAN CITY
Pope Francis urged Catholic priests on Tuesday to "have the courage" to visit those sickened by the COVID-19 and help medical staff and volunteers in the work they do, hours after Italy was placed on a lockdown. AFP

Alcohol poisoning kills 44 in virus-hit Iran

TEHRAN
The death toll from alcohol poisoning in southwestern province of Khuzestan rose to 44 on Tuesday, state news agency IRNA reported, over misguided efforts to ward off COVID-19 by drinking bootleg alcohol. AFP

Michigan primary decisive for Sanders' campaign

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DETROIT

Bernie Sanders proved his 2016 presidential bid was serious with an upset victory in Michigan powered by his opposition to free trade and appeal among working-class voters. Four years later, the State could either revive the Vermont Senator's campaign or relegate him to the role of protest candidate.

Michigan and five other States already began voting early Tuesday morning in what will be a critical point in the Democratic race.

Former Vice-President Joe Biden is looking to quash Mr. Sanders' hopes and cement his own front-runner status just a week after resurrecting his beleaguered White House bid with a de-

legate victory on Super Tuesday. He played up his underdog story on Monday as he campaigned across Michigan, reflecting on his stutter as a child and the deaths of his first wife and young daughter.

And Mr. Biden wasn't alone. The former Vice-President courted the State's influential African American voters alongside the two most prominent black candidates previously in the 2020 race, Kamala Harris and Cory Booker, who endorsed Mr. Biden in recent days as part of a broader consolidation of support among party leaders.

They all appeared hand-in-hand at Mr. Biden's final Michigan rally on Monday night.

After keeping a low profile, MBS is back

The detention of senior royals and the decision to cut oil price show Crown Prince is back in action

DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

First he ordered the detention of at least four senior members of his own royal family. The next day he plunged Saudi Arabia into a price war with Russia that sent energy and stock markets around the world into free fall.

For a while, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia had appeared to be living down his reputation for dangerous aggression.

Perhaps chastened by the blowback over his connection with the killing of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, the 34-year-old Crown Prince had kept a low profile for more than a year.

Now his power plays are

back. His sudden, steep cut to the price of oil has rocked a global economy already at risk of falling into recession, threatened to burn through Saudi Arabia's cash reserves and undermined his grandiose promises of new investments to lessen the kingdom's dependence on oil.

Mutual destruction

"It is mutually assured destruction for any oil exporting economy, certainly including Saudi Arabia and Russia and probably the United States as well," said Greg Brew, a scholar of the region and a fellow at Southern Methodist University.

"But this is typical MBS, right?" he added, referring to the Crown Prince by his



Mohammed bin Salman

initials. "He is a risk taker, and he is prone to impulsive decisions."

The detention of the senior royals, which began to leak out on Friday, has not been acknowledged or explained by the Saudi officials. Two of the detained princ-

es - Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, the younger brother of the Crown Prince's ageing father, King Salman, and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the former Crown Prince and Interior Minister - had once been seen as possible rivals for power. Their arrests stirred anxious speculation among cowed members of the royal family that Crown Prince Mohammed might be sidelining opponents in preparation for taking the throne from his father, who is 84 and has sometimes appeared forgetful or disoriented.

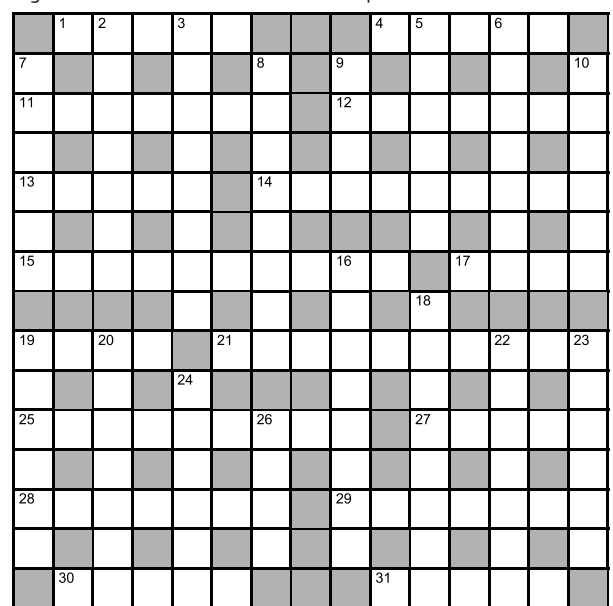
People close to the royal court, though, insisted the Crown Prince had merely lashed out at his uncle and cousins for speaking critical-

ly about him. He wanted to teach the rest of the family a lesson. Crown Prince Mohammed slashed the oil price to punish Russia, which he faulted for failing to cooperate in cutting production and propping up prices. The slowdown caused by the coronavirus was already reducing demand for oil.

The timing of the price war so soon after the roundup of his royal relatives on Friday has aroused speculation that the crown prince sought to contain potential opponents in anticipation of trouble. Perhaps he wanted to pre-empt any foes before economic pain from the downturn made him politically vulnerable, some analysts suggested. NY TIMES

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12880

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(set by Hypatia)

- 13 Lizard in sacred text (5)
- 14 Person who doesn't tidy up is Spooner's "grumpy bear" (9)
- 15 Places outside had everything except any dishes (10)
- 17 Time in place that's not subject to change (4)
- 19 Represent people around area (4)
- 21 Ram morphed animated tool (4,6)
- 25 Study about trapping rodents? Forget it! (5,4)
- 27 Initially kept in trust, equity dealer wrote bad cheques (5)
- 28 Hat trimmed from behind with lace at the edges to make dignified (7)
- 29 Small child needs friend - Absolutely! (7)
- 30 Student checked out fancy blazer and one with stripes (5)
- 31 Home Alone: Do baddies keep coming back? (5)

- 5 Ditch girl, say (6)
- 6 People stop exchanging tips between iOS and Android (7)
- 7 Badger artist tucking into eats, taking seconds (6)
- 8 Queen wearing stuff that is red on top and more showy (8)
- 9 Type of fabric in beatnik attire (4)
- 10 Going north, recollect capturing good soldier (6)
- 16 Old fashioned diet, incorporating work-out and fast (8)
- 18 How to make bats sell down the river? (8)
- 19 Stable or crazy German? (6)
- 20 Promote a varnam, initially depicted in Bharatanatyam, say (7)
- 22 Model model draping model model with a colourful pattern (7)
- 23 Report I studied before long-haul flight (6)
- 24 He tries to corrupt engineer refusing initially to cover crack (6)
- 26 One starts baking with old butter? (4)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12878

H	O	L	D	O	N	E	S	P	E	A	C	E	
S	H	E	L	L	M	E	A	N	S	T	E	S	T
T	R	I	E	P	E	A	H						
A	R	M	A	G	E	D	D	O	N	E	V	E	R
C	A	N	O	N	I	C	E	V	E	B	R	O	
O	R	I	O	L	E	S							
G	R	I	O	L	E	S							
S	N	Y	T	O	N	U							
S	L	A	P	J	A	M	S	E	S	S	I	O	N
E	S	S	S	H	P	F	O	N					
D	U	T	C	H	I	D	L	E	P	O	C	H	
A	W	H	A	L	E	O	F	A	T	I	M	E	

Solution to Monday's Sudoku

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



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