

China builds hospital in 5 days after surge in virus cases

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The hospital is one of six with a total of 6,500 rooms being built in Nangong in Hebei province. (Representational Image/Reuters)

Beijing: China on Saturday finished building a 1,500-room hospital for Covid-19 patients in five days to fight a surge in infections in a city south of Beijing, state media reported.

The hospital is one of six with a total of 6,500 rooms being built in Nangong in Hebei province, the Xinhua News Agency said. All are due to be completed within the next week.

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In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, workers begin to build a medical isolation site that, according to state media, will cover 33 hectares and have room for several thousand people in Shijiazhuang in northern China's Hebei Province, Thursday, Jan. 14, 2021. (Xinhua via AP)

A similar programme of rapid hospital construction was launched by the ruling Communist Party at the start of the outbreak last year to set up isolation hospitals in Wuhan, the central city where the virus was first detected in late 2019.

Nationwide, the National Health Commission reported 130 new confirmed cases – 90 of those in Hebei – in the 24 hours through midnight Friday.

There were 645 cases, two of them acquired abroad, being treated in Nangong and Shijiazhuang, according to Xinhua.

In Shijiazhuang, authorities have finished construction of one-third of the rooms in a planned 3,000-room coronavirus facility, state TV said Saturday.

More than 10 million people in Shijiazhuang underwent virus tests by late Friday, Xinhua said, citing a deputy mayor, Meng Xianghong. It said 247 locally transmitted cases were found.

Meanwhile, researchers sent by the World Health Organization are in Wuhan preparing to investigate the origins of the virus. The team, which arrived Thursday, was under a two-week quarantine but was due to talk with Chinese experts by video link.

The team's arrival was held up for months by diplomatic wrangling that prompted a rare public complaint by the head of the WHO.

That delay, and the secretive ruling party's orders to scientists not to talk publicly about the disease, have raised

questions about whether Beijing might try to prevent discoveries that would hurt its self-proclaimed status as a leader in the anti-virus battle.

- AP