

China warns virus could mutate, spread as ninth victim dies



Li revealed that all the deaths had been in Hubei province. (AP pic)

BEIJING: A new virus that has killed nine people, infected hundreds and already reached the United States could mutate and spread, China warned Wednesday (January 22, 2020), as authorities scrambled to contain the disease during the Lunar New Year travel season.

The coronavirus has caused alarm for its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

In Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak, authorities cancelled large public events and urged visitors to stay away, telling residents not to leave the central Chinese city of 11 million people.

The illness is mainly transmitted via the respiratory tract and there “is the possibility of viral mutation and further spread of the disease”, National Health Commission vice minister Li Bin said at a news conference in Beijing. – **AFP, January 22, 2020**