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Minutes

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CABINET

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Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet  
held at 10 Downing Street on

THURSDAY 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
At 0815 AM

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P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP  
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP  
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and  
Industrial Strategy

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP  
Secretary of State for International Trade and  
President of the Board of Trade and Minister for  
Women and Equalities

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP  
Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural  
Affairs

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and  
Local Government

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Julian Smith CBE MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Alister Jack MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland

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The Rt Hon Simon Hart MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park  
Leader of the House of Lords, Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Morgan of Cotes  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and  
Sport

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP  
Secretary of State for International Development

The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP  
Minister without Portfolio and Party Chair

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP  
Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

The Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP  
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury and Chief Whip

The Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox QC MP  
Attorney General

The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP  
Minister of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP  
Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office

The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP  
Minister of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The Rt Hon. the Baron Goldsmith of Richmond Park  
Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Department for International  
Development

The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP  
Minister of State, Home Office

Secretariat

Sir Mark Sedwill  
H MacNamara

NR

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### Update on Coronavirus

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that the spread of coronavirus was clearly very serious. In China, the number of cases was doubling every five days; the official estimate was of around 28,000 cases, but that was likely to be a significant underestimate. Despite the extreme efforts of the Chinese Government, including shutting down an entire city and building a hospital in ten days, the virus did not appear to have been contained in Wuhan. Whilst the virus spread easily, it was better news that the mortality rate was only around 2 per cent.

Continuing, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had done good work to bring UK Nationals back from China. The final flight from Wuhan to take UK Nationals home was expected to take place later that week. Those on that flight would be subject to isolation procedures. The 30,000 UK Nationals not in Wuhan would not be rescued by the Government, and had been encouraged to leave using commercial flights whilst they were still available. When they arrived back in the UK they would get the appropriate support. They would not be automatically isolated.

Concluding, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that he was grateful for the support of his Ministerial colleagues in coordinating the Government response. There were two cases in the UK and there would almost certainly be more. The approach to tackling the virus in the UK to date had been medic-led. The Chief Medical Officer was doing most of the public communications. The central point to make was that the Government had a plan to deal with this illness, and this was guided by science. Cross-government working was essential. The reasonable worst case scenario would see almost every government department affected by coronavirus. There would be a tabletop exercise the following week. Colleagues should attend personally or designate a junior minister as a dedicated departmental minister. Depending on how events unfolded, it was possible that an emergency bill to fill legislative gaps would be needed.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a) the economic impact of the virus was unknown, and would depend on whether it was contained. In 2003, when the SARS virus broke out, China was 4 per cent of the global economy. It was now 17 per cent, and last year the growth in the global economy due to China was more than the EU, US and Japan put together;
- b) the previous Monday, the Beijing stock exchange had fallen by 8 per cent, its biggest fall in four years. There had also been reports of a 25 per cent fall in oil imports to China that month;
- c) the knock-on impact for the UK economy was also uncertain. Estimates showed that UK GDP growth could be significant: 0.1-0.2 percentage points. The impact would be felt most by exporters and importers;
- d) companies were reluctant to quantify the impact at this stage. However, Airbus had closed its factory in Tianjin. There would also be an impact on the automotive component supply chain. Ships from China took 30-40 days to arrive in the UK, so the impact was only just starting to be felt; and
- e) coronavirus had also spread to developing countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Nepal. The Department for International Development was working with these governments on their preparedness and capability to test and isolate people should the virus spread further. The UK had committed to contribute to the World Health Organisation appeal, and was also funding the development of a rapid diagnostic tool. The Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office were working together to coordinate the UK Government's international efforts.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that confidence was also contagious, and it was important that the Government remain measured in its response. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care had taken the right tone. Often the significant economic damage of a crisis came from political overreaction rather than the problem itself. This had been true of Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

The Cabinet:

- took note.

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