

Globe battles virus as cases multiply outside China

February 26 2020, by Kim Tong-Hyung and Matt Sedensky



A worker wearing a face mask sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The number of new virus infections in South Korea jumped again Wednesday and the U.S. military reported its first case among its soldiers based in the Asian country, with his case and many others connected to a southeastern city with an illness cluster. (Lee Ji-eun/Yonhap via AP)

Crews scrubbed everything from money to buses, military bases were on high alert and quarantines were enforced Wednesday from a beachfront resort in the Atlantic to a remote island in the Pacific, as the world worked to halt the fast-spreading virus that for the first time counted more new cases outside China than inside the country where the epidemic originated.

Worries over the ever-expanding economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis multiplied, with factories idled, trade routes frozen and tourism crippled, while a growing list of countries braced for the illness to breach their borders. Even the Olympics, five months away, wasn't far enough off to keep people from wondering if it would go on as planned.

"We don't expect a miracle in the short term," said Kianoush Jahanpour of the health ministry in Iran, where an official tally of infections of 139 was doubted by some who thought the problem was far bigger.

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, reported that the number of new cases reported outside China on Tuesday exceeded the number of new cases in China for the first time.

"The sudden increases of cases in Italy, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Korea are deeply concerning," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Wednesday.

About 81,000 people around the globe have been sickened by the coronavirus that kept finding new targets.

With Brazil confirming the arrival of Latin America's first case, the virus had a toehold on every continent but Antarctica.



Workers wearing face masks spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus in front of Myungsung Church in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The number of new virus infections in South Korea jumped again Wednesday and the U.S. military reported its first case among its soldiers based in the Asian country, with his case and many others connected to a southeastern city with an illness cluster. (Yun Dong-jin/Yonhap via AP)

In Europe, where Germany, France and Spain were among the places with a growing caseload, an expanding cluster of more than 200 cases in northern Italy was eyed as a source for transmissions. In the Middle East, where cases increased in Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq, blame was directed toward Iran. In Asia, where the crisis originated late last year in China, threats continued to emerge around the region, with South Korea battling a mass outbreak centered in the 2.5 million-person city of Daegu.

The illness had now spread to 37 counties, said world health officials, who simultaneously cautioned against the risks of unnecessary fears or stigma.

"We are in a fight that can be won if we do the right things," WHO director-general Ghebreyesus said.

Though the virus pushed into countries both rich and poor, its arrival in places with little ability to detect, respond and contain it brought concern it could run rampant there and spread easily elsewhere.



In this Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2020, photo, a man passes by U.S. Army base Camp

Walker, in Daegu, South Korea. The U.S. military on Wednesday, Feb. 26, says one of its soldiers based in South Korea tested positive for a new virus, the first U.S. service member infected. (Kim Hyun-tae/Yonhap via AP)

"We're going to be trying to slow down the spread so that our hospitals are not overwhelmed in one big gulp, one big hit," said Ian Mackay, who studies viruses at the University of Queensland in Australia.

In South Korea, workers sanitized public buses, while in China, banks disinfected banknotes using ultraviolet rays. In Germany, authorities stressed "sneezing etiquette," while in the United States, doctors announced a clinical trial of a possible coronavirus treatment.

Around the world, as Christians marked the start of the holy season of Lent with Ash Wednesday, worshipers found churches closed and rituals changed by virus fears. Even in St. Peter's Square, many of those gathered for Pope Francis' weekly audience wore face masks and clergy appeared to refrain from embracing the pontiff or kissing his ring.



Officials wearing protective attire work to diagnose people with suspected symptoms of the new coronavirus at a hospital in Daegu, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The number of new virus infections in South Korea jumped again Wednesday and the U.S. military reported its first case among its soldiers based in the Asian country, with his case and many others connected to a southeastern city with an illness cluster. A sign reads "Emergency Medical Center." (Kim Hyun-tae/Yonhap via AP)

Services in Singapore were broadcast online to keep people from crowded sanctuaries where germs could spread, bishops in South Korea shuttered churches for what they said was the first time in the Catholic Church's 236-year history there, and in Malaysia and the Philippines, ashes were sprinkled on the heads of those marking the start of Lent instead of using a damp thumb to trace a cross of ashes.

"We would like to be cautious so that the coronavirus will not spread,"

said the Rev. Victorino Cueto, rector of the National Shrine of our Mother of Perpetual Help in Manila in the Philippines.

Major gatherings were eyed warily, with organizers scrambling to respond in the face of the epidemic. Looming largest of all are the Olympic games, whose opening ceremonies are scheduled for July 24 in Tokyo. A member of the International Olympic Committee, Richard Pound, sounded alarms a day earlier, saying the virus could force a cancellation of the games. The Japanese government, in turn, gave mixed signals, insisting they would go forward yet urging that sports events now be curtailed.



A worker wearing a protective suit sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the coronavirus at a bus garage in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The number of new virus infections in South Korea jumped again Wednesday

and the U.S. military reported its first case among its soldiers based in the Asian country, with his case and many others connected to a southeastern city with an illness cluster. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for major sports and cultural events in the coming two weeks to be canceled or postponed to stem further infections. Meanwhile, the top government spokesman said Olympics preparations would proceed and the games would go on as planned.

Among the other crowded places that had officials worried: Military bases.

The South Korean military announced additional infections among its troops, with 20 cases on its bases and some 9,570 people in isolation. The U.S. military, which has 28,500 troops in South Korea, confirmed the first infection of an American soldier, a 23-year-old man based at Camp Carroll near Daegu, a day after Americans said a military spouse also had contracted the illness. Bowling alleys, movie theaters and a golf course on four American bases in the country were closed.



A worker disinfects a public bus against coronavirus in Tehran, Iran, in early morning of Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Iran's government said Tuesday that more than a dozen people had died nationwide from the new coronavirus, rejecting claims of a much higher death toll of 50 by a lawmaker from the city of Qom that has been at the epicenter of the virus in the country. (AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)

"This is a setback, it's true, there's no getting around that. But it's not the end of the war," Col. Edward Ballanco, commander of the U.S. Army Garrison Daegu told troops in a video message. "We are very well equipped to fight this thing off."

Italy recorded 52 new infections on Wednesday and Greece became the newest country to see a case of the virus. South Korea announced 284

new cases, largely in Daegu, bringing its total to 1,261. China, still the epicenter of the crisis even as new outposts caught the world's attention, reported 406 new cases and 52 more deaths. The country has a total of 78,604 cases of the virus and 2,715 fatalities.

China said Wednesday that those sickened by the virus included 555 prisoners who officials said likely became infected by guards using the same bus station as a nearby pulmonary hospital. In a twist, China is now heavily regulating arrivals from abroad, with authorities placing South Koreans under monitoring, state broadcaster CCTV reported, after five people on a flight showed signs of fever.



A worker wearing a protective suit sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the COVID-19 at a market in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The number of new virus cases in South Korea jumped again Wednesday and the

first U.S. military soldier tested positive, with his infection and many others connected to a southeastern city where the outbreak has clustered. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



In this photo released by Malaysia's Ministry of Health, a health worker wearing a full protective suit waits for the arrival of evacuated Malaysians from China's Wuhan, the epicenter of the new coronavirus outbreak, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, Malaysia, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. U.S. health officials warned Tuesday that the burgeoning coronavirus is certain to spread more widely in the country at some point, even as their counterparts in Europe and Asia scrambled to contain new outbreaks of the illness. (Muzzafar Kasim/Malaysia's Ministry of Health via AP)



Workers disinfect subway trains against coronavirus in Tehran, Iran, in the early morning of Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Iran's government said Tuesday that more than a dozen people had died nationwide from the new coronavirus, rejecting claims of a much higher death toll of 50 by a lawmaker from the city of Qom that has been at the epicenter of the virus in the country. (AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)



In this photo taken and released by Malaysia's Ministry of Health, a health worker looks at a woman and children arrive at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, Malaysia, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020, after being evacuated from China's Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak. U.S. health officials warned Tuesday that the burgeoning coronavirus is certain to spread more widely in the country at some point, even as their counterparts in Europe and Asia scrambled to contain new outbreaks of the illness. (Muzzafar Kasim/Malaysia's Ministry of Health via AP)



In this photo released by Malaysia's Ministry of Health, health workers prepare for the arrival of evacuated Malaysians from China's Wuhan, the epicenter of the new coronavirus outbreak, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, Malaysia, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. U.S. health officials warned Tuesday that the burgeoning coronavirus is certain to spread more widely in the country at some point, even as their counterparts in Europe and Asia scrambled to contain new outbreaks of the illness. (Muzzafar Kasim/Malaysia's Ministry of Health via AP)



A taxi drives past pedestrians wearing masks as they wait at traffic light in Ginza shopping district Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020, in Tokyo. At a government task force meeting Wednesday on the virus outbreak, Prime Minister Abe said he was asking organizers to cancel or postpone major sports or cultural events over the next two weeks. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



A worker disinfects a public bus against coronavirus in Tehran, Iran, in early morning of Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Iran's government said Tuesday that more than a dozen people had died nationwide from the new coronavirus, rejecting claims of a much higher death toll of 50 by a lawmaker from the city of Qom that has been at the epicenter of the virus in the country. (AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)



Visitors wear protective masks Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020, in Tokyo. At a government task force meeting Wednesday on the virus outbreak, Japan's Prime Minister Abe said he was asking organizers to cancel or postpone major sports or cultural events over the next two weeks. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



South Korean army soldiers wearing face masks check the temperature of a driver at a checkpoint of a military base in Daegu, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The number of new virus infections in South Korea jumped again Wednesday and the U.S. military reported its first case among its soldiers based in the Asian country, with his case and many others connected to a southeastern city with an illness cluster. (Ryu Hyung-seok/Yonhap via AP)



Police patrol in front of the High School Bundesgymnasium und Bundesrealgymnasium, BGRG 8, after the school was shut down by authorities after a teacher was suspected to be infected with the new coronavirus in Vienna, Austria, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Roland Zak)



People stand on their balconies of the H10 Costa Adeje Palace hotel in La Caleta, in the Canary Island of Tenerife, Spain, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Spanish officials say a tourist hotel on the Canary Island of Tenerife has been placed in quarantine after an Italian doctor staying there tested positive for the COVID-19 virus and Spanish news media says some 1,000 tourists staying at the complex are not allowed to leave. (AP Photo)



A member from an emergency anti-epidemic headquarters in Mangyongdae District disinfects a tramcar of Songsan Tram Station to prevent new coronavirus infection in Pyongyang, North Korea Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Uncertainly remained over how best to stem the spread of the illness. (AP Photo/Cha Song Ho)



In this Monday Feb. 24, 2020 image made from video the head of Iran's counter-coronavirus task force, Iraj Harirchi, left, wipes his face during a press briefing with government spokesman Ali Rabiei, in Tehran, Iran. Harirchi, has tested positive for the virus himself, authorities announced Tuesday, amid concerns the outbreak may be far wider than officially acknowledged. The announcement regarding Harirchi came after the news conference seeking to minimize the danger posed by the outbreak. (APTN via AP)



People wear masks to protect from a new coronavirus as they walk through the Kwangbok Street in Pyongyang, North Korea Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Uncertainly remained over how best to stem the spread of the illness. (AP Photo/Jon Chol Jin)



In this photo released Indonesian Military, military personnel in protective suits direct a life boat carrying Indonesian crew members from the World Dream cruise ship as they are transferred to hospital ship KRI Dr. Soeharso on the waters of Durian Bay, Indonesia, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Indonesia evacuates 188 of its citizens from the cruise ship Wednesday after they were released from quarantine in Hong Kong following tests that found no infections of COVID-19. (Indonesian Military via AP)



The stadium's seats are empty during the Korean Basketball League between Incheon Electroland Elephants and Anyang KGC clubs in Incheon, South Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. The basketball game held without spectators as a precaution against the COVID-19. (Yun Tai-hyun/Yonhap via AP)



Ambulances are park at the H10 Costa Adeje Palace hotel in La Caleta, in the Canary Island of Tenerife, Spain, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020. Spanish officials say a tourist hotel on the Canary Island of Tenerife has been placed in quarantine after an Italian doctor staying there tested positive for the COVID-19 virus and Spanish news media says some 1,000 tourists staying at the complex are not allowed to leave. (AP Photo)

Indonesia said it evacuated 188 crew members from the World Dream cruise ship and planned to take them to remote Sebaru Island. The workers were released from quarantine in Hong Kong after finding no infections, but authorities mandated an additional observation period.

And on the opposite side of the world, the MSC Meraviglia was denied permission to land in Grand Cayman, where it was due to arrive

Wednesday, following a decision by Jamaica to refuse it entry. The cruise line expressed frustration with the moves, which came after it reported one crew member from the Philippines was sick with common seasonal flu.

It brought reminders of the MS Westerdam, which was repeatedly denied entry to Asian ports before Cambodia welcomed its passengers.

MSC Cruises said the Meraviglia was sailing onward to Mexico.

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