

# Virus alarms sound worldwide, but China sees crisis ebbing

March 3 2020, by Ken Moritsugu and Matt Sedensky



Hundreds of people line up to buy face masks to protect themselves from the coronavirus in front of a department store in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. China's coronavirus caseload continued to wane Tuesday even as the epidemic took a firmer hold beyond Asia, with three countries now exceeding 1,000 cases and the U.S. reporting its sixth death. (Hong Hae-in/Yonhap via AP)

The virus epidemic spread through Iran's parliament, travel warnings broadened to include Italy and other parts of Europe, and South Korea prepared to pump billions into relief efforts Tuesday as the epidemic firmed its hold around the globe.

Mushrooming outbreaks in the Mideast, Europe and South Korea contrasted with optimism in China, where thousands of recovered patients were going home. A growing outbreak in the United States led schools and subways to sanitize, quickened a search for a vaccine, and spread fears of vulnerability for nursing home residents.

"We are in uncharted territory," World Health Organization leader Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Iran's supreme leader put the Islamic Republic on war footing by ordering its armed forces to assist health officials in combating the outbreak, which authorities say has killed 77 people—the deadliest outbreak outside China. The virus has killed a confidant of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's former ambassador to the Vatican, as well as a recently elected member of parliament.

State television quoted a lawmaker saying 23 members of parliament were infected.

Iran's judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi, said some people were stockpiling medical supplies for profit, and urged prosecutors to show no mercy.



Medical staff members in protective gears arrive for a duty shift at Dongsan Hospital in Daegu, South Korea, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. China's coronavirus caseload continued to wane Tuesday even as the epidemic took a firmer hold beyond Asia, with three countries now exceeding 1,000 cases and the U.S. reporting its sixth death. (Lee Moo-ryul/Newsis via AP)

"Hoarding sanitizing items is playing with people's lives and it is not ignorable," Raisi said.

South Korea saw its largest daily increase in new cases Tuesday, with 851 new infections reported, largely in and around the southeastern city of Daegu. In all, 5,186 in South Korea have tested positive for the virus.

In the capital of Seoul, drive-through virus testing centers began



operating, with workers dressed head-to-toe in white protective suits leaning into cars with mouth swabs, a move meant to limit contact with possible carriers of the illness. Troops were also dispatched across the city to spray streets and alleys with disinfectants.

The country's death toll rose to 31 and President Moon Jae-in, calling the outbreak "a grave situation," said his government would push to inject more than 30 trillion won (\$25 billion) to fund clinics, aid for small businesses and other measures related to the virus. It requires parliamentary approval.



A tourist wearing a protective mask takes a photo with the Olympic rings in the background Tuesday, March 3, 2020, at Tokyo's Odaiba district. The spreading virus from China has put the Tokyo Olympics at risk. The Olympics are to open on July 24 - less than five months away. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

"The entire country has entered a war against an infectious disease," he said.

Most Asian and European stock indexes rose, following the Dow Jones Industrial Average surging nearly 1,300 points, or 5%. Finance ministers and central bank leaders from the Group of Seven major industrial countries were to convene by phone Tuesday to discuss their response to the virus outbreak.

"The fear factor is still very high," said Kirk Hartman, president of Wells Fargo Asset Management.

Worldwide, more than 90,000 people have been sickened and 3,100 have died from the virus. A constantly expanding list of at least 70 countries have been affected, with Ukraine the latest to report a first case.

In China, the count of new virus cases dropped again Tuesday, with just 125 new cases after a six-week low of 202 a day earlier. It's still by far the hardest-hit country, with 80,151 cases and 2,943 deaths.



A worker wears a mask at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Wash., near Seattle, walks near a UPS truck during a package delivery, Monday, March 2, 2020. Several of the people who have died in Washington state from the COVID-19 coronavirus were tied to the long-term care facility, where dozens of residents were sick. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

China's ambassador to the United Nations said the country was winning its battle against COVID-19.

"We are not far from the coming of the victory," said Zhang Jun.

In Italy, the count of infected people continued rising to 2,036 and officials said it could take up to two weeks to know whether measures including quarantines in 11 northern towns were working.



The U.S. count of COVID-19 cases surpassed 100 in at least 11 states. There have been six deaths in Washington state.

On Capitol Hill, aides said negotiations were nearing completion on an emergency funding bill to fund a vaccine development and offer disaster loans to businesses hurt by the crisis.

Surgeon General Jerome Adams, a leading public health official in the U.S., urged calm.

"Caution, preparedness, but not panic," he said.

In Japan, questions continued to build about how the virus might affect the Olympics.



A tourist wearing a protective mask takes a photo of flower blooming Tuesday, March 3, 2020, at a park in Tokyo. The number of infections of the COVID-19 disease spread around the globe. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



A large crowd wearing masks commutes through Shinagawa Station in Tokyo, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. The Japanese government has indicated it sees the next couple of weeks as crucial to containing the spread of COVID-19, which began in China late last year. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)





A security guard with a mask stands on Shibuya Sky observation deck in Tokyo, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. The Japanese government has indicated it sees the next couple of weeks as crucial to containing the spread of COVID-19, which began in China late last year. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Government official wearing face masks make a phone call to the members of Shincheonji Church of Jesus to check if they have symptoms of suspected COBID-19 illness or not, at Goyang City Hall in Goyang, South Korea, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. The coronavirus spread to ever more countries and world capitals. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



A security official checks the body temperature of a woman at a building in Jakarta, Indonesia, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. Indonesia confirmed its first cases Monday, in two people who contracted the illness from a foreign traveler. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)





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People line up to buy face masks to protect themselves from the new coronavirus in front of Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. China's coronavirus caseload continued to wane Tuesday even as the epidemic took a firmer hold beyond Asia. (Hong Hae-in/Yonhap via AP)





A man wearing a mask views Tokyo's skyline from Shibuya Sky observation deck as the New National Stadium, a venue for the opening and closing ceremonies at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, is visible in the distance in Tokyo, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. The Japanese government has indicated it sees the next couple of weeks as crucial to containing the spread of COVID-19, which began in China late last year. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)





Staff members check students' body temperatures upon their arrival at Jakarta Nanyang School in Serpong on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. Indonesia confirmed its first cases of the coronavirus Monday in two people who contracted the illness from a foreign traveler. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana)



Vice President Mike Pence, center, with, from left, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Robert Redfield, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health Anthony Fauci, White House coronavirus response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx, Pence, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Seema Verma, Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, and U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Stephen Hahn, speaks to reporters in the Brady press briefing room of the White House, Monday, March 2, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)



President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence meet with pharmaceutical executives in the Cabinet Room of the White House, Monday, March 2, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)





South Korean soldiers wearing protective gears walk to spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. China's coronavirus caseload continued to wane Tuesday even as the epidemic took a firmer hold beyond Asia. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



A masked man looks out near a national flag outside a traditional medicine hospital in Beijing on Tuesday, March 3, 2020. Mushrooming outbreaks in the Mideast, Europe and South Korea contrasted with optimism in China, where thousands of recovered patients were going home and new virus cases drop to a new low. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

The country's Olympic minister, Seiko Hashimoto, said Tuesday the country was "making the utmost effort" to proceed with the games' planned opening on July 24 in Tokyo. But she told parliament the country's contract with the International Olympic Committee only specifies that the games be held during the year 2020, and that they could be delayed to later in the year if necessary.

An Irish bookmaker has been taking bets: 4/6 the opening ceremony will

not go ahead in Tokyo or 11/10 that it will.

The games' CEO, Toshiro Muto, was planning a Wednesday teleconference with IOC's executive board.

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