

Thailand reports 1st local coronavirus case in 100 days

September 3 2020, by Busaba Sivasomboon



Office workers and construction workers with face masks walk in a side walk in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, Sept. 3, 2020. Thailand's prime minister on Wednesday congratulated his countrymen on the nation having achieved 100 days without a new confirmed locally transmitted case of the coronavirus, even as security along the border with Myanmar is being stepped up as a measure against the disease. (AP Photo/ Gemunu Amarasinghe)

A prison inmate in Thailand has tested positive for the coronavirus in the country's first confirmed locally transmitted case in 100 days, health officials said Thursday.

They identified the inmate as a 37-year-old man arrested for drug abuse who was brought to prison in Bangkok on Aug. 26 and tested positive Wednesday at the prison's health center.

Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha on Wednesday had congratulated the nation for having achieved 100 days without any confirmed local cases of the coronavirus. The last person to test positive was on May 24.

Dr. Suwannachai Wattanayingcharoenchai, director-general of the Health Ministry's Disease Control Department, said the infected man had been kept in a small group of quarantined inmates in a standard procedure to limit the possible spread of the virus. In another routine procedure, he was tested as part of a group of 34 new inmates. He had only a mild possible symptom, excessive mucous. The infected man lived in Bangkok and worked as a DJ in several bars.

Thailand has sustained relatively light health damage from the pandemic, even though in January it was the first country outside China to confirm a case. But its economy has been devastated by the absence of foreign tourists, who are banned from entry, and by a drop in exports.



In this handout photo released by the Thai Department of Corrections, a health worker collects a nasal swab from Thai Corrections officers to test for the coronavirus in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, Sept. 3, 2020. A prison inmate in Thailand has tested positive for the coronavirus in the country's first confirmed locally transmitted case in 100 days, health officials said Thursday. (Department of Corrections via AP)

The country finds itself in a position similar to that of New Zealand, which had a 102-day streak without local transmissions, and Vietnam, which had 99 days.

Both countries learned that keeping the virus at bay is not the same as defeating it, and when new cases sprung up they were forced to reinstate

socially restrictive measures, including lockdowns in affected urban areas.

Thai officials in recent weeks have suggested various plans to allow the entry of visitors from abroad to revive the tourist industry, a major employer and revenue earner.

Thira Woratanarat, a preventive medicine expert with the Faculty of Medicine at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, praised the government for how it has contained the health threat by making it a priority, but expressed concern that foreign tourists should not be admitted until the coronavirus has been better contained worldwide.

He cited Vietnam as an example of how 100 days with no local transmissions is a meaningless benchmark.



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"After the first wave subsided, many people said it was time to rebuild the economy, but, for me, it was not. Unless the pandemic is better controlled, rebuilding the economy through the globalization approach will definitely bring about disaster again and again and again," Thira said

in an email interview.

The latest suggestion for hosting foreigners involves a still-unapproved plan to bring in tourists starting Oct. 1 to the southern resort island of Phuket. The visitors should be from countries with low numbers of coronavirus cases, be subject to a 14-day quarantine and be tracked for the duration of their stay.

In the past week, concern has been raised about the coronavirus spreading from Thailand's western neighbor, Myanmar, with which it shares a 2,000-kilometer (1,245-mile) border. Thai industries employ hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from Myanmar.

The number of [coronavirus](#) cases in Myanmar has soared in the past few weeks. More than 600 cases in the western state of Rakhine have pushed the country's total to about 1,000, and as the infections hit other parts of the country, various restrictions including lockdowns have been reinstated in several cities, including Yangon, the country's biggest.

The Thai government has ordered authorities in 10 provinces on the Thai-Myanmar border to beef up security to control the number of people crossing between the two countries. Border checkpoints have been temporarily closed to traffic and students coming from Myanmar have been told to keep out.

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