



# No sight of COVID-19 peaking

**Expert says containment measures too little, too late as US official hits Beijing's lack of transparency**

BEIJING/SIHANOUKVILLE, CAMBODIA—China's coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak showed no sign of peaking with health authorities on Friday reporting more than 5,000 new cases, while passengers on a cruise ship blocked from five countries due to virus fears finally disembarked in Cambodia.

Policymakers pledged to do more to stimulate Asian economies hit hard by the virus, helping Asia stock markets edge higher, with Chinese shares headed for their first weekly gain in four.

In its latest update, China's National Health Commission said it had recorded 121 new deaths and 5,090 new COVID-19 cases on the mainland on Feb. 13, taking the accumulated total infected to 63,851 people.

Some 55,748 people are currently undergoing treatment, while 1,380 people have died of the flu-like virus that emerged in Hubei province's capital, Wuhan, in December. The latest toll takes account of some deaths that had been double counted in Hubei, the health commission said.

The new figures give no indication the outbreak is



**DEAD TIRED** A medical worker takes a break during her night shift at a community health center in Wuhan, China, the epicenter of a deadly coronavirus outbreak. —REUTERS

nearing a peak, said Adam Kamradt-Scott, an infectious diseases expert at the Center for International Security Studies at the University of Sydney.

"Based on the current trend in confirmed cases, this appears to be a clear indication that while the Chinese authorities are doing their best to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the fairly drastic measures they have implemented to date would appear to have been too little, too late," he said.

China National Health

Commission Vice Minister Zeng Yixin said on Friday that 1,716 health workers had been infected by COVID-19 and six of them had died as of Tuesday.

Chinese officials and hospitals have repeatedly noted a shortage of protective equipment, including face masks, as the disease took hold in Hubei and spread throughout the country.

Chinese scientists are testing two antiviral drugs and preliminary results are weeks away.

The head of a hospital in Wuhan told reporters on Thursday that plasma infusions from recovered patients had shown some encouraging preliminary results.

While the World Health Organization has praised China's handling of the epidemic in contrast to its coverup of the SARS outbreak in 2002-2003, a top White House official on Thursday said Beijing should be more open.

"We are a little disappointed that we haven't been invited in and we're a little disappointed in the lack of transparency coming from the Chinese," Larry Kudlow, the director of the National Economic Council, told reporters.

Kudlow's comments contrasted with Trump's apparent confidence in China, with the US leader telling a radio show that Xi Jinping is "extremely capable" and that the United States was "working with them" and "sending a lot of people."

Japan confirmed its first coronavirus death on Thursday—a woman in her 80s living in Kanagawa prefecture near Tokyo. The death was the third outside mainland China, after two others in Hong Kong and the Philippines.

Japanese policymakers vowed to step up testing and containment efforts after the death and confirmation of new cases, including a doctor and a taxi driver.

A cruise liner quarantined off a Japanese port has more than 200 people confirmed with the disease. Authorities have said they will allow some elderly people to disembark on Friday.

Meanwhile, the 1,455 passengers and 802 crew of the MS Westerdam that spent two weeks at sea after being turned away by five countries over COVID-19 fears started disembarking at the Cambodian port in Sihanoukville on Friday after officials examined passengers for any signs of ill health or flu-like symptoms.

Separately, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. said it had canceled 18 cruises in Southeast Asia.

The rise in China's reported cases on Thursday reflected a decision by authorities there to reclassify a backlog of suspected cases by using patients' chest images, and did not necessarily indicate a wider epidemic, a World Health Organization official said on Thursday. —REUTERS