3rd nCoV case in PH

Chinese woman back in Wuhan

BY GERARD NAVAL

A 60-YEAR-OLD Chinese female tourist who returned to Wuhan last Jan. 31 has tested positive for the novel coronavirus (nCoV) at the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM), becoming the third confirmed case of the virus in the country, according to the Department of Health (DOH).

The tourist, who arrived in Cebu City last Jan. 20 from Hong Kong, went straight to Bohol and checked into a private hospital there two days later, suffering from fever and colds. Samples taken from her on Jan. 23 tested positive for the virus, according to DOH Undersecretary Eric Domingo.

No Filipino in the Philippines has tested positive for the virus that has so far claimed the lives of 490 persons but a Filipino crew member of a cruise ship anchored off Japan tested positive for the virus on Wednesday, one of 10 infected people on the ship, which has been prevented from leaving port. Also testing positive were three Japanese, three from Hong Kong, two Australians, and one American.

"The DOH was notified by the RITM that a sample taken earlier, Jan. 23, tested positive for 2019-nCoV, making her the third confirmed case in the Philippines," Domingo said in a press conference.

Another sample taken from the Chinese tourist taken last Jan. 24 and sent to the Victorian Infectious Disease Reference Laboratory in Melbourne, Australia tested negative, according to Domingo. He said the patient was discharged and allowed to return to Wuhan last Jan. 31.

Surprised by the results of the Jan. 24 sample sent to Australia, Domingo said the RITM decided to run another test on the samples taken from the Chinese and confirmed she was positive of the virus.

"After doing all the testing (of pending samples), they (RITM) ......... See CHINESE ➔ Page B3
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decided to run the old samples they had. And one of her samples was from January 30, an earlier sample. So, apparently, this is what turned out to be positive," said Domingo.

Adding other samples subjected to retesting were negative.

Asked why two samples taken just days apart showed differing results, Domingo said it could be because she was already "towards the end of the illness."

"The clinical explanation is that the patient was probably towards the end of the illness at that time, that is why she was positive (in the Jan. 30 sample) while the subsequent test (on Jan. 26) was negative," Domingo explained.

He said the DOH Epidemiology Bureau (EB) and Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ) are tracing persons who may have interacted with or were in close proximity with her while she was in the country.

In particular, Domingo said they are coordinating with Cebu Pacific for Flight 5241 from Hong Kong to Cebu while the Central Visayas Center for Health Development is coordinating with the hotel where the patient stayed and the hospital where she was admitted. He said the companions of the patient showed symptoms of the virus.

The DOH said the remains of the second confirmed case in the country, a 38-year-old Chinese male who died last Feb. 1, is set to be cremated today at an undisclosed crematorium.

"The family already gave their permission for the cremation," Domingo said.

The first confirmed case in the country, a 38-year-old Chinese female, is still under observation. Domingo said.

"The patient has yet to test negative of the virus so we caution discharge her yet," he Domingo.

All 133 persons have now been probed for the virus in the Philippines, with 115 will admitted at hospitals, including the first confirmed case, while 16 have been discharged, including the third confirmed case.

The two others were the two mor-

tables, namely, the second confirmed case and the two fatal positive of human immunodeficiency virus.

The DOH said that of the 133 PULs, 63 are Filipino while 24 are Chinese, and the other 16 others various nationalities.

Domingo said that among the PULs, 13 had close contact with the first two confirmed cases. Of the 13, three are health workers, who are currently in stable condition. In all, the first two confirmed cases had close contact with 203 persons.

The remaining 188 close contacts, Domingo said, have been told to remain at home and undergo self quarantine for 14 days.

He also appealed to persons who were in the same flights as the first two confirmed cases to cooperate with health authorities.

"DOH urges the passengers from Cebu Pacific flight DG6319 from Cebu to Davao on January 21, 2020, and Philippine Airlines flight PR2542 from Davao to Manila on January 25, 2020 to cooperate with DOH representatives, who will be getting in touch with them for assessment," said Domingo.

The PNP Criminal Investigation and Detention Group yesterday secured the manifest of the three flights that included a Chinese couple who had tested positive for the virus. The CIDG got hold of the manifest after Interior Secretary Eduardo Año ordered the PNP to assist the Department of Health in the conduct of "contact-tracing" of the passengers.

In a press briefing in Camp Crame, CIDG director Maj. Gen. Joel Napoleon Comendador said CIDG received the manifest – two from the Cebu Pacific and one from Philippine Airlines – yesterday morning.

He said the 331 total passengers included foreigners.

"We will do our best to locate and contact them individually... We are going to contact every passenger. We'll tell them they are the flight with the flight where there is a confirmed NCoV virus patient and we'll ask them a few questions based on checklist and parameters given by the DOH," said Comendador.

The Bureau of Immigration yesterday said it will strictly screen travelers coming from China as well as its special administrative regions who pass countries without travel restrictions.

In an interview with ABS-CBN News Channel, Grefish Medina, BI spokesperson, said travelers have been circumventing their trips so they can enter the Philippines. He said some travelers from China, Hong Kong, and Macau first take a trip in countries which do not impose travel bans such as Singapore and Thailand and later fly to the Philippines.

To stop travelers from China getting into the country, Medina said the BI will enhance passenger information system and the passenger name record that he said can track the travel history of a traveler.

Medina clarified that Filipinos and permanent visa holders coming from nCoV affected countries can come home but will be required to undergo a 14-day quarantine upon arrival.

He said foreigners will be granted entry to the country on the condition they did not travel to China, Hong Kong, and Macau for the past 14 days.

Classes in public schools in all levels in Negros Oriental have been suspended from Wednesday to Friday amid the threat of the virus, Negros Oriental Gov. Boleda Degano said the order is a precautionary measure against the spread of the virus.

The order and public schools can suspend their classes based on their own discretion.

Silliman University also suspended classes in all levels. The university said it will issue an advisory on or before February 7 if the suspension of classes and work will be extended.

The local government of Las Piñas is set to meet with representatives of Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators in the city while Mandaluyong City will inspect Chinese restaurants under its jurisdiction as part of precautionary measure against the virus. — With

Raymond Alfon, Veejay Reyes and Rod Lagmay