PH records 3rd case of coronavirus

• Patient arrived in Cebu on Jan. 20
• Pinoy onboard cruise ship infected

By Macon Ramos-Araneta and Rey E. Requejo

A 60-YEAR-OLD Chinese woman, who was among the patients being monitored by the Department of Health, was declared the third confirmed case of the novel coronavirus (nCoV) in the Philippines, Health Undersecretary Eric Domingo said Wednesday.

In a press conference, Domingo said the third nCoV patient, who is from Wuhan, China, arrived in Cebu via Hong Kong on Jan. 20. She then traveled to Bohol. Results from one set of tests turned out negative and she was discharged and sent back to China, Domingo said, but another test showed she was a carrier after all.

In Japan, authorities said 10 people, including a Filipino sailor, on board a cruise ship were tested positive for nCoV. Japan Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told reporters in Tokyo that only the Filipino patient had severe symptoms.

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila confirmed that a Filipino seaman has been infected with nCoV virus aboard the Diamond Princess cruise liner in Japan.

Health officials said that while the infected patients were transferred to...
hospitals in Japan, the remainder of the passengers and crew on board the *Diamond Princess* were placed in quarantine.

The DFA said there were 538 Filipinos on board the ship, which has been docked in Yokohama Bay since Monday.

Japan quarantined the vessel carrying 3,711 people and began testing those on board for the virus after a former passenger who disembarked in Hong Kong was diagnosed with the illness.

In Manila, the DOH Epidemiology Bureau has started tracking people who may have interacted or were in close proximity to the third confirmed nCoV case, the Health department said.

Earlier, two Chinese travelers also tested positive for the virus in the Philippines, with one of them, a 44-year-old man becoming the first nCoV fatality outside of China.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said a funeral parlor in Quezon City agreed to cremate the body of the Chinese man on Wednesday, after his family in China gave their consent.

The body was supposed to be cremated within 12 hours of his death, but this was delayed when a Chinese-Filipino business group that initially agreed to shoulder the cost backed out of its promise.

But Duque said cadavers with the novel coronavirus are no longer infectious, citing the World Health Organization.

"WHO told me it won't be infectious once the patient dies. The corpse will also be sealed," he said.

The first two patients had come from Wuhan, where the virus was known to have spread from a wet market selling wild animals as delicacies. Both traveled to Cebu and Dumaguete before flying to Manila on Jan. 25. During their travel, they took PAL and Cebu Pacific.

The entry of the virus into the Philippines has prompted the government to ban foreign travelers from all of mainland China and its territories.

The DOH reported that as of noon Feb. 5, there were 133 patients under investigation for the novel coronavirus.

Of these, 115 are currently isolated, while 16 have been discharged under strict monitoring.

Among the patients, 63 are Filipinos, 54 are Chinese and 16 are other nationalities. Thirty-two had reported traveling to Wuhan.

As this developed, Duque directed the Epidemiology Bureau to conduct an "aggressive" contact tracing of fellow passengers of the Chinese couple that tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

He had come under fire Tuesday when he admitted that out of 331 passengers, only 17 percent or fewer than 60 had been contacted.

Duque said Wednesday he hoped the contact tracing would be completed in 48 hours.

"As soon as possible [I hope it would be finished]," he said, adding, "As I told them, they have to work with the PNP [Philippine National Police], the DILG [Department of the Interior and Local Government] to do aggressive contact tracing in 48 hours. We'll see if they can manage to do that.

He said the DOH Epidemiology Bureau has assessed 203 contacts and home quarantined 188 contacts from the first and second confirmed cases.

Of the 203 contacts, 15 are symptomatich where 14 were already isolated for monitoring.

He said the DOH is currently working with other concerned agencies to expedite the contact tracing process.

The Health department also called on passengers from Cebu Pacific Flight 5J241 from Hong Kong to Cebu on Jan. 20 and 21; Cebu Pacific Flight DG6519 from Cebu to Dumaguete on Jan. 21; and Philippine Airlines flight PR2542 from Dumaguete to Manila on Jan. 25 to cooperate with DOH representatives who will be getting in touch with them for assessment.

On Monday, President Rodrigo Duterte called for calm, saying the public should not be scared as the disease would "die a natural death."

Senator Francis Tolentino, meanwhile, urged the DOH to procure rapid test kits developed in China that he said can detect the virus within eight to 15 minutes, making it easier to confirm infections.

In related developments:

• A party-list legislator, CIBAC Partylist Rep. Domingo Rivera who recently traveled to Hong Kong has gone through self-quarantine. House Secretary General Jose Luis Montales said reports that Rivera was quarantined in Hong Kong were erroneous. "He practiced self-quarantine because he traveled to Hong Kong to attend a series of consultative meetings," Montales said.

• The Philippine Consulate in Hong Kong confirmed that another Filipino domestic worker was quarantined following exposure to her employer who tested positive for the novel coronavirus. The case would be the second Filipino put in quarantine in less than a month. Consul General Raly Tejada said the maid was "healthy and asymptomatic."

• Duque on Wednesday earned the ire of congressmen for failing to attend a hearing on the nCoV threat. The Health secretary, however, was in Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija to inspect a facility that will be used to quarantine Filipinos repatriated from China. With Maricel V. Cruz and AFP