Gov'ts see new virus pandemic

SYDNEY/SEOUL—Governments ramped up measures on Thursday to battle a looming global pandemic of the coronavirus as the number of infections outside China, the source of the outbreak, for the first time surpassed those appearing inside the country.

Australia initiated emergency measures and Taiwan raised its epidemic response level to its highest, a day after US President Donald Trump put his vice president, Mike Pence, in charge of the US response to the looming global health crisis.

The United States and South Korea postponed joint military drills to limit the spread of the virus, which has emerged far beyond China, where it originated late last year, apparently in a market selling wildlife in the city of Wuhan.

**Pandemic phase**

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his country, which has 23 cases of the virus, was operating on the basis of a pandemic and hospitals were under orders to ensure enough medical supplies, personal protective equipment and staff.

"There is every indication that the world will soon enter a pandemic phase of the coronavirus," Morrison told a news conference in Canberra. "As a result we have agreed today and initiated the coronavirus emergency response plan."

The coronavirus has infected more than 80,000 people and killed nearly 2,800, the majority in China.

Much remains unknown about the virus but it is clear the ramifications of the world's
DRIVE-THROUGH CLINIC Medical staff take samples from passengers with suspected symptoms of the new coronavirus at a drive-through screening clinic of a hospital in Daegu, South Korea, where officials reported 334 new cases on Thursday. The country’s total cases swelled to 1,595, still the largest in the world outside China, where the disease first emerged. –AFP

second-biggest economy in lockdown for a month or more are vast.

The rapid spread of the virus in different places—notably Italy, Iran and South Korea—in recent days has met the definition for a pandemic, and raised alarm.

There have been 3,246 cases outside China, including 51 deaths, according to a Reuters tally.

Denmark confirmed its first case, in a man who returned from a ski holiday in Italy, while Estonia found its first, a man returning from Iran, media reported.

First cases

Brazil confirmed Latin America’s first infection on Wednesday, while several other countries including Pakistan, Romania, Estonia and Algeria also reported their first cases.

China reported 433 new cases on Thursday, against 406 a day earlier.

South Korea reported another 334 new coronavirus cases, pushing its total to 1,595, the most in any country other than China.

The US Department of State issued a new travel warning for South Korea after the US military reported on Wednesday its first case of the coronavirus, in a 23-year-old soldier based near the South Korean city of Daegu.

The South Korean military has also reported a number of infections and confined most troops to base.

A “command post training,” usually conducted by members of the two militaries’ Combined Forces Command, will be postponed until further notice, the command said.

The outbreak has played havoc with international aviation with airlines canceling flights as countries ban visitors from hot spots and nervous passengers put off travel plans.

News that a Korean Air flight attendant who worked on flights between Seoul and Los Angeles later tested positive is likely to unnervc passengers further.

Community transmission in US

US health authorities reported the first possible case of community transmission in the United States involving someone who had no relevant travel history or exposure to another known patient.

The United States is managing 59 cases—most of them Americans repatriated from a cruise ship in Japan.

The number of confirmed
QUARANTINED CASH. A bank clerk disinfects banknotes in the headquarters of Suining Bank in Suining city in southwest China’s Sichuan province on Wednesday. China’s central bank has ordered banks to ensure the safety of the cash circulation through putting money through quarantine period or disinfection and destroying cash from places like hospital and public transport services to curb the spread of the coronavirus. —AP

cases of the virus on the British-registered ‘Diamond Princess’ approached 700 with four deaths since the ship docked at a Japanese port on Feb. 3.

Trump, seeking to calm US stock markets, said the risk from the virus was “very low” in the United States, and it was “very very ready” to face the threat.

Chinese authorities said the number of new deaths stood at 29 on Thursday, the lowest daily tally since Jan. 28.

The virus that can lead to pneumonia has now killed a total of 2,744 people in China, most in the central province of Hubei.

Italian hot spot

Italy reported another 100 cases nationwide, taking the total in Europe’s biggest hot spot to more than 400, while its death toll rose to 12.

A hotel in Tenerife, in Spain’s Canary Islands, remained locked down for a second day on Wednesday with more than 700 guests, over cases linked to Italy.

Many of the cases appearing in the Middle East have been linked to Iran, which has had 141 cases and 22 deaths, the most outside China.

Iraq has reported six cases, and its first in the capital, Baghdad, in a man who had been in Iran. Iraq on Wednesday banned public gatherings and entry by travelers from Kuwait and Bahrain because of the spread of the virus.

Kuwait reported 43 confirmed cases while Saudi Arabia suspended foreigners’ entry for the Umrah pilgrimage and tourism from countries with new coronavirus cases. The kingdom has no cases. —Reuters