2 more Pinoys in Singapore test positive for coronavirus

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Two more Filipinos in Singapore have tested positive for the new coronavirus even as the first Filipino case in the city-state has fully recovered, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) reported on Wednesday.

Citing a report from the Philippine Embassy in Singapore, the DFA said a second Filipino was confirmed to have contracted the disease on Feb. 29. The test result on a third Filipino confirmed case was announced on Monday.

Both patients are confined in a government hospital for “appropriate treatment,” the DFA said.

It belatedly announced that the first Filipino who was diagnosed as positive for the new coronavirus was discharged from the hospital on Feb. 28.

The Philippine Embassy was closely coordinating with Singapore’s Ministry of Health and “stands ready to extend assistance” to the infected Filipinos, it said.

**Discrimination**

On Tuesday, the DFA said cases of discrimination against Filipinos abroad due to the coronavirus scare were “not prevalent.”

The agency was commenting on reports that some Filipinos in Italy had been targeted due to fears of the epidemic.

“Many governments and personalities even in the Philippines have denounced "reports of discrimination and violence against those appearing to be from where the virus is found," said Assistant Foreign Secretary Eduardo Menez.

“We observe that such reprehensible acts against Filipinos are not prevalent and believe that all governments will do their best to maintain peace and order to protect every law-abiding person in their respective countries,” he said.

“The DFA will certainly raise these issues with the foreign authorities when necessary,” he added.

A video was shared on YouTube on Feb. 16 showing an Asian man getting punched in the face by another at a supermarket in Casalpusterlengo town, one of the areas under lockdown in Italy’s Lombardy region.

The Asian man fought back, shouting he was a Filipino and not Chinese, and the brawl went on for several minutes before other shoppers intervened.

A news report also quoted a Filipino migrant worker in Milan, Italy, as saying he had witnessed “rampant” instances of discrimination against Asians...
due to the virus scare, and that some employers had told Filipino workers not to come to work temporarily.

Italy has the most number of coronavirus cases in Europe—2,502 as of Wednesday, with 79 deaths.

According to the DFA, none of the 161,885 Filipinos in Italy was among the coronavirus sufferers in the country.

**Iran ban not necessary**

In the Middle East, Iran has the most coronavirus cases—2,922 as of Wednesday, with 92 deaths—but Health Secretary Francisco Duque III told reporters that there was still no need to impose restrictions on travel to and from the Islamic republic because of the small number of Iranians coming to the Philippines.

Duque, head of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, confirmed that the DFA had stopped issuing visas upon arrival to Iranians. He, however, left it to the DFA to explain why it imposed restrictions on Iranians and not on foreigners who had been to Iran recently.

The interagency task force, he said, also did not see the necessity of imposing restrictions on travel to Japan, Italy and Singapore, as it had found these countries to be of “medium risk.”

Within the week, the government will fly out of Macau 148 Filipino tourists and 48 migrant workers who have requested repatriation. Once in the country, the Filipinos will be made to undergo home quarantine, under monitoring by their local governments.

Also on Wednesday, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said the government would scale down deployment of Filipino workers to Kuwait after the Gulf state required them to show coronavirus clearance before they would be allowed entry.

"It's not a retaliatory order. It's a practical order because we will be requiring so many additional requirements from our workers. That's giving more burden to our workers. [We might as well go to other countries where there are not so many requirements," Bello said.

**More cases than PH**

Apart from the Philippines, Kuwait's order mostly covers labor-exporting countries India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Georgia and Lebanon.

Interestingly, Kuwait has more confirmed coronavirus cases than the Philippines. As of Wednesday, Kuwait has 56 cases while the Philippines has three. —WITH A REPORT FROM JOVIC YEE ING