

TOP NEWS

Coronavirus Outbreak

Signs seen of virus spread slowing down

Number of new cases of novel coronavirus nationwide drops for 12 consecutive days

By WANG XIAOYU

wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Increasing signs of a stable slowdown in the spread of novel coronavirus pneumonia in China appeared over the weekend, as health authorities pledged to maintain their assertive measures in Hubei province to avert the virus flaring up again at its epicenter.

Outside Hubei, the number of new infections nationwide had dropped for 12 consecutive days as of Saturday. In Hubei, new cases had declined for three days in a row, and the number of suspected cases awaiting diagnosis is also shrinking, according to figures released by the National Health Commission.

Meanwhile, the rate of severely ill patients has dropped significantly across the country, as in Wuhan, the provincial capital of Hubei. The proportion of patients in serious condition decreased to 21.6 percent on Sunday from a high of 32.4 percent on Jan 28, commission spokesman Mi Feng said on Sunday.

Across Hubei, the proportion of severe cases decreased to 11.1 percent on Saturday from the peak of 18.4 percent on Jan 27, and the percentage of severe cases across the rest of the country declined to 7.2 percent on Saturday, he said.

This was made possible by strengthened medical assistance, as well as centralized isolation and treatment, Mi said. "A substantial foundation has been laid to further increase the recovery rate and reduce the mortality rate," he added.

However, the positive signals are not eclipsing the fact that the overall confirmed cases and fatalities nationwide are still on the rise, and some instances of infection clusters in Hubei province are particularly concerning, according to health officials.

The commission registered 2,009 new confirmed infections and 142 additional deaths on the Chinese mainland on Saturday. In all, 68,500 people on the mainland have been infected and 1,665 have died.

The majority of new infections and fatalities are still concentrated in Hubei province, where 1,843 confirmed patients and 139 new deaths were added on Saturday.

Wang Hesheng, head of Hubei Provincial Health Commission, said on Saturday that refined control measures have subdued the outbreak and earned precious time for the country to brace for the most strenuous stretch in the fight against the disease.

"Wuhan remains the primary battlefield," he said, adding that the authorities must "make sure that no city will become a second

Wuhan" and ensure that "zero patients would go without treatment".

He spoke at a news conference held in Wuhan by the State Council Information Office.

Liang Wannian, head of the commission's institutional reform department who also leads the commission's disease control team, said on Saturday that a handful of provincial-level regions, including Shanxi, Jilin and Gansu provinces, had recorded fewer than five new cases for three consecutive days.

"In Wuhan, the rate of new infections had been slowing down since Feb 1. But for other regions in the province, including Xiaogan and Huanggang, the rate remains high, and the numbers of clustered infections in families and imported cases are relatively large," he said, adding that the risk of sustained transmission and a sudden surge in cases is considered low.

"At present, disease control work in Hubei province is at the most critical stage, and the tension is mounting," Liang said. "We must keep a firm grip on the region."

On Sunday, the Hubei provincial government announced the upgrading of its containment efforts, by implementing the strictest, around-the-clock lockdown policies across all villages, communities, neighborhoods and residential areas.

All nonessential public and group activities in Hubei will be halted, and a widespread screening that covers all residents will be launched, according to a government announcement.

The announcement reiterates that infected patients and people with fever who cannot be ruled out from contracting the virus must be isolated in designated facilities.

The use of all vehicles is prohibited except for public transportation and those for epidemic control purposes, such as cars carrying medical staff, delivering daily necessities, ambulances, and vehicles from the sanitation, firefighting and public security departments, it said.

In addition, there are 39,447 infected patients who need medical care in Hubei, with 8,439 of them in serious condition and 1,957 in critical condition, according to the provincial health commission.

Wang, head of the provincial health commission, said the authorities will continue to repurpose wards in some hospitals into designated centers for seriously ill patients and transform public facilities into temporary treatment centers.

As of Saturday, nine temporary hospitals with more than 6,900 beds were operational, receiving over 5,600 patients with mild symptoms, Wang said.

evacuate Japanese nationals. The plane was loaded with urgently needed medical supplies.

On Feb 7, secretaries of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito Party visited the Chinese embassy in Japan, expressing Japan's willingness to provide China with all assistance.

On Feb 10, the LDP announced funding support, with each LDP member donating 5,000 yen (\$45) to China.

Local governments have started to provide "targeted support" to their Chinese sister cities. For example, Oita, the capital of Oita Prefecture, has been providing support to Wuhan. Other cities providing help to sister cities are

Dance therapy



Patients exercise while listening to music at the "Wuhan living room", a mobile cabin hospital, in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Saturday. It's the biggest converted hospital in China, where doctors from all over the country work together to fight against the novel coronavirus. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Volunteers chip in by raising funds

By ZHANG XIAOMIN in Dalian and YANG JUN in Guiyang

ABOVE & BEYOND

67.69 million yuan

Amount raised by a project, called "Support Wuhan, Safeguard Dalian", organized by the Dalian Charity Federation

Wang Guansheng, a volunteer in Dalian, Northeast China's Liaoning province, has been busy raising funds and collecting protective equipment amid the nationwide battle against the novel coronavirus pneumonia outbreak.

"I've been wearing this mask for five days. You know it is in short supply," said Wang.

Together with seven other volunteers, Wang was uploading 1,000 sets of protective clothing and 50,000 pairs of gloves donated by a medical company onto a truck sent by the local health commission on Jan 31.

They had already collected and sent more than 10,000 masks to local welfare institutions, cleaning staff, and those in need.

Wang, 32, who runs a chain of stores that deals in noodles in the coastal city, is a key volunteer of the project, called "Support Wuhan, Safeguard Dalian", organized by the Dalian Charity Federation.

The project had raised more than 67.69 million yuan (\$9.69 million) up to Feb 15.

On Jan 24, Wang read a report about a doctor who was on duty in Wuhan, Hubei province, the epicenter of the disease now named COVID-19, although his son was not keeping well, and he needed to be taken care of.

He decided to do something. Wang contacted his friends, Lai Qingxin, Han Wei, Liu Jie, and many others. Together with the charity federation, they initiated a fundraising project on Jan 25.

"Within three hours, people donated more than 100,000 yuan. People are really caring," said Wang.

According to him, an entrepreneur donated healthcare products. The entrepreneur herself was allowed by a shop owner to print for free hundreds of stickers with the title, "Support Dalian".

People want to do something in their own way, said Wang, whose cellphone was constantly ringing. "Some want to donate money, while some want to donate materials.

more than 100 stores in Thailand and Laos.

"In this task, we received help from several overseas Chinese. I deeply feel their love for the motherland," said Bai Duolu, president of a Zunyi-based construction company, who took this initiative.

"We found that masks were in short supply, and most of them were to be sent to Wuhan. So we turned to other countries and contacted friends in the neighboring countries first," he said.

According to Bai, they have been receiving support from customs departments, airlines and local government in Huichuan district in the city of Zunyi.

Xie Guolei, deputy director of the district, gave the thumbs-up to their initiative. "We're proud that we have such an excellent group of people in Huichuan district."

Xie said the first consignment of more than 40,000 masks has been distributed among front-line medical workers and police officers. The rest will be sent to hospitals, village clinics, and police.

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.

Contact the writer at zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn



Volunteers Guo Zhaowei (second from left) and Li Kun (left), from Guizhou province, purchase masks at a pharmacy in Thailand on Jan 29. CHEN FENGPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Wang says US posing threat via suppression

By ZHOU JIN
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

It is the United States that poses threats to China through repeated suppression, accusation and smearing, and not the other way around, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in an exclusive interview with Reuters on Friday.

Wang cited cases — such as the US Congress reviewing and adopting bills that interfere in China's internal affairs, US naval ships and airplanes flexing muscles at China's doorstep and the US suppressing Chinese companies — and said the issue is how to address the US threat to China.

In the far-ranging interview in Berlin, Wang said that countries with different social systems will not pose a threat to each other as long as they adhere to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, in particular the principle of noninterference in internal affairs, and respect each other's sovereignty.

Asked whether the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic would influence the recently signed China-US phase one trade deal, Wang said China is ready to implement the deal, and he urged the US to fulfill its commitment.

The epidemic will affect China's economy temporarily, but afterward, the Chinese economy will rebound and the Chinese market will continue to expand, he said.

There will be better conditions to implement the consensus in the deal as China deepens reforms and expands opening-up in accordance with its own timetable and road map, he said.

However, Wang added, the US curbs on movement of people between the two countries will objectively bring some difficulties in implementing the agreement.

Wang said he hopes the US will respect the World Health Organization's recommendation and avoids unnecessary travel and trade restrictions.

Regarding US accusations against Chinese telecommunications company Huawei, Wang said they are neither reasonable nor moral.

The US cannot accept other countries' companies displaying economic and technological talent because it doesn't want to see other countries and their businesses develop and flourish, Wang said.

Fu Ying, vice-chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of China's 13th National People's Congress, dismissed US accusations that Huawei poses a threat to global political stability at the Munich Security Conference on Friday.

Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi said at the conference that China is seeking to export digital autocracy through Huawei.

While introducing technologies from Western countries, China has maintained its political system and it is not threatened by these technologies, Fu said, asking Pelosi, "Do you really think the democratic system is so fragile it could be threatened by this single high-tech company, Huawei?"

The US has heavily lobbied other countries to follow suit and boycott the Chinese company.

German lawmakers remain divided on the Huawei question, and the United Kingdom ruled last month that Huawei may continue to operate in a restricted capacity.

There is no doubt that all countries should safeguard the security of their own telecommunications infrastructure, and also companies from all countries should be offered a level playing field and non-discriminatory business environment, Wang said in a Q&A session after his speech at the security conference.

Ties: Local governments in Japan providing assistance to sister cities

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masks to Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport in Sichuan province.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Japan is willing to make every effort to provide China with all-around support to help tide over the situation.

On Jan 27, Japan announced that it would designate the disease as a "specific infection", which means the medical expenses of all the infected people there, regardless of their nationality, will be covered by the government.

On Jan 28, Japan sent a special plane to Wuhan, Hubei province, the epicenter of the outbreak, to

Tomakomai, to Qinhuangdao, Hebei province; Yurihonjo and Akashi, to Wuxi, Jiangsu province; Mito and Hiroshima, to Chongqing; Kawasaki, to Shenyang, Liaoning province; Hamamatsu, to Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, as well as Shenyang; Hikone, to Xiangtan, Hunan province; Kagoshima, to Changsha, Hunan province; and Satsumasendai, to Changsha. In addition, Hiroshima Prefecture has been providing aid to Sichuan province.

Fundraising activities were organized by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Japan, alumni associations of universities, scientific institutions, Ito-Yokado and Toyota, among others.

"It is the virus, not the people, that is bad," an official at Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare said at a news conference in response to reports of discriminations abroad.

Public health crises can serve as an opportunity to improve relations. After the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Japan sent a rescue team to China and provided 1 billion yen in assistance.

When an earthquake struck Japan in March 2011, China sent a professional rescue team to the disaster zone and provided 30 million yuan (\$4.3 million) in assistance. It also provided Japan with 10,000 tons of gasoline and 10,000 tons of diesel for free, and an additional 20

million yuan of assistance. China's total aid to Japan was estimated at more than 200 million yuan.

China-Japan relations will embrace a warm spring. Social governance, people's livelihoods, public health and global governance are expected to become new highlights of bilateral cooperation in the future.

Since China and Japan are close neighbors with growing common interests, the future of their relations lies in peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

The author is director of the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views do not necessarily reflect