Gary Ruskin  
4096 Piedmont Ave. #963  
Oakland, CA 94611  

Dear Mr. Ruskin:  

As we noted in our letter dated July 25, 2022, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552. Since our last letter, the Department of State ("Department") has processed in excess of 1,150 pages of material potentially responsive to your request. The Department has identified an additional 12 responsive records subject to the FOIA. We have determined the 12 records may be released in part.  

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.  

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Laurel Lum, Trial Attorney, at laurel.h.lum@usdoj.gov or (202) 305-8177. Please refer to the case number, FL-2021-00033, and the civil action number, 20-cv-08415, in all correspondence about this case.  

Sincerely,  

[Signature]  

Diamonece Hickson  
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch  
Office of Information Programs and Services  

Enclosures: As stated.
The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

(b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:

1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
1.4(b) Foreign government information
1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction

(b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency

(b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARMSEXP</td>
<td>Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)</td>
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<td>EXPORT CONTROL</td>
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<td>INA</td>
<td>Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f)</td>
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<td>IRAN</td>
<td>Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505</td>
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(b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information

(b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product

(b)(6) Personal privacy information

(b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:

(A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
(B) deprive a person of a fair trial
(C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
(D) disclose confidential sources
(E) disclose investigation techniques
(F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual

(b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions

(b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester
From: "SMART Archive" <>
To: SMART Core <>
Subject: United States Presses Priorities at the Resumed Virtual 73rd World Health Assembly
Date: Thu, 07 Jan 2021 16:17:36 GMT

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MRN: 21 GENEVA 14
Date/DTG: Jan 07, 2021 / 071615Z JAN 21
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Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: ECON, PREL, SHLH, KNCV, UN, WHO, FDA, HHS
Captions: SENSITIVE
Subject: United States Presses Priorities at the Resumed Virtual 73rd World Health Assembly

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar led the U.S. delegation to the resumed 73rd World Health Assembly (WHA) held in a virtual format, November 9-13, 2020. The United States achieved its key objectives for the WHA in stressing the importance of strengthening reforms for the World Health Organization (WHO) to improve transparency, accountability and improved communications; calling for greater transparency and progress in the investigation of the origins of the COVID-19 virus; advocating for Taiwan as an observer; calling for Member State reporting of health personnel under the Global Code of Practice; and delivering a joint statement on promoting women’s health and strengthening the family. Member States deferred consideration of most of the planned agenda items from the 73rd WHA in May to this resumed session of the Assembly.

2. (SBU) During the resumed session, the Assembly considered agenda items focused on the four pillars of the WHO General Program of Work: (1) Universal Health Coverage, (2) Health Emergencies, (3) Health and Well-being, and (4) Effective and Efficient WHO Support to Countries. Throughout the meeting, other Member States expressed appreciation for WHO’s leadership in the fight against COVID-19 and underscored the importance of strengthening the WHO with lessons learned from the response to the pandemic. WHO announced two new initiatives: (1) the Council on Economics of Health for All comprising top economists and health experts, will focus on investments in health, and achieving sustainable, inclusive and innovation-led economic growth and (2) a WHO Biorepository for pathogen
materials and sample sharing hosted in a Swiss Biosafety Level-4 (BSL-4). The United States also participated in the Resumed 147th Executive Board (EB) meeting that followed the resumed 73rd WHA on November 16, 2020. **END SUMMARY.**

(U) **United States Pressed WHO on its Role in Responding to COVID-19**

3. **(SBU)** The United States successfully engaged through a constructive and direct approach to the substantive issues of WHA73. In its remarks, the United States called out the WHO for not developing its COVID-19 origins investigation Terms of Reference (TOR) in a transparent or inclusive manner, as well as delays with the fielding the international team to China. The United States also underscored the need for independence and transparency on the part of WHO leadership, stressing that the WHO and State Parties to the International Health Regulations (2005) must improve preparedness and response and provide accurate, timely and complete information on outbreaks to WHO and other Member States. The United States also provided leadership on the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel by implicitly highlighting the failure of Cuba to report that it exports in excess of 30,000 medical professionals to 60 countries, often without proper remuneration and support.

(U) **Key Outcomes of the Resumed 73rd World Health Assembly**

4. **(U)** Over the summer 2020, the Assembly used a written procedure for the first time, approving 12 resolutions and decisions in advance of the resumed WHA meeting.

5. **(SBU)** The United States emphasized support for several adopted resolutions/decisions which the delegation co-sponsored at the 146th Executive Board meeting, including WHA73.3 *Global strategy for tuberculosis research and innovation*, WHA73.4 *Integrated people-centered eye care, including preventable vision impairment and blindness*, and WHA73.5 *Strengthening efforts on food safety*. The United States has played a critical role in advancing efforts on cervical cancer prevention and control and was supportive of the aims of the WHO Global Strategy on the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem (adopted under written silence procedure by the WHA in resolution WHA73.2). During the discussion of Pillar 1, “One Billion More People Benefiting from Universal Health Coverage,” the WHA reviewed 11 health topics, and two draft resolutions on a Global Vaccine Action Plan and Epilepsy. Under this pillar, the United States delivered a national statement supporting Primary Health Care, Non-Communicable Diseases, Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health Innovation and Intellectual Property, and the trilateral work of the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization in WHO. The United States also served as a co-sponsor of the Epilepsy Resolution, while endorsing and co-sponsoring the draft road map on NTDs. During the discussion of Pillar 3, “One Billion More People Enjoying Better Health and Well-Being,” the U.S. delegation helped shape the revised maternal, infant and young child nutrition decision and called on the Secretariat to provide clarity regarding its efforts to prepare a comprehensive report to understand the scope and impact of digital marketing strategies for the promotion of breast milk substitutes that may not be in accordance with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. The United States also highlighted its co-sponsorship of the resolution on strengthening efforts on food safety and thanked the European Union for its
leadership on the resolution.

(U) United States Introduces Geneva Consensus on Promoting Women’s Health

6. (SBU) The United States delivered a joint statement in partnership with like-minded countries, to enter the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women’s Health and Strengthening the Family into the official WHA record. The document was co-sponsored by the United States, Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda, and co-signed by 35 countries in October 2020.

7. (SBU) The United States also issued an explanation of position on Resolution EB146.R10, Strengthening Preparedness for Health Emergencies: Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005). The United States disassociated from preambular paragraph 25 due to the inclusion of the term “sexual and reproductive health”; however, we aligned with the remainder of the resolution highlighting the importance of preparedness for health emergencies.

(U) Member States Call for Strengthening, Transparency, and Accountability of WHO

8. (SBU) In the Pillar 2 Health Emergencies discussion, the Assembly heard technical updates from the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPR), the Chair of the Review Committee on the Functioning of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) during the COVID-19 Response, the Chair of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (IOAC), and the ACT-Accelerator. Notably, the IOAC reported that the WHO Health Emergencies Program has demonstrated significant operational capacity and established WHO’s crucial leadership in the context of the pandemic; however, more work needs to be done to improve funding, further strengthen internal administrative systems, and reconcile Member States’ expectations with WHO’s authorities and resources.

9. (SBU) In particular, these presentations emphasized efforts to coordinate across the IOAC, IPPR, and IHR Review Committee to ensure complementarity efforts. Member States expressed broad support for reporting in all three areas, but offered varying views on what the near term priorities should be in each area. Many Member States signaled support for reforms of WHO and called for critical reflection on the current strength of IHR compliance mechanisms. Some member states also expressed support for the US-Brazil Roadmap for WHO reform. Several Member States, including the United Kingdom, discussed the necessity of a robust and independent origins investigation mission. Meanwhile, Russia asserted that some proposals may violate sovereignty and stressed their interest in more narrow reforms. The United States stressed the importance of strengthening preparedness and response, raised concerns about the lack of transparency on the Terms of Reference for the investigations into the origins of the virus, and expressed the need to include Taiwan in technical WHO discussions so that Member States can learn from their experiences and success in controlling COVID-19. Belize, Eswatini, Japan, Nicaragua, and Honduras noted their support for learning from the Taiwan model.

(U) Member States Reiterate Commitment to Influenza, Cholera, and Polio
10. **(SBU)** The Assembly also covered influenza, cholera and polio in the Pillar 2 Health Emergencies discussion. Despite COVID constraints, Member States focused on preparedness capacities, domestic investment alongside international support, water sanitation and hygiene, and integration of polio into the Expanded Program on Immunization. Notably, Member States of the African Region (AFR) called for support for integrated surveillance, affordable vaccines, and encouraged the creation of an all-inclusive data system alongside support for vaccine access. The AFR group called for support on efforts toward eradicating cholera, and reiterated its support for sustained efforts against vaccine derived polio virus, while calling for sustained domestic commitments to polio eradication. The EU suggested looking at lessons learned from the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) framework that might apply to COVID-19. The EU, encouraged by efforts to eradicate wild polio progress, noted that polio programs form a crucial pillar of many national health systems and strategies and can be used to promote greater harmonization. China spoke about their Healthy China strategy and noted support for WHO activities in influenza, cholera and polio, including strengthening global influenza surveillance, as well as international cooperation on influenza (equitable access to treatment, diagnostics etc.). China also called on WHO to increase support for countries with weak health systems, focus on national contexts and increase financial and technical support accordingly.

**(U) WHO Director-General Tedros Announces Two New WHO Initiatives**

11. **(SBU)** During the closure of the Assembly, DG Tedros announced two new initiatives: (1) The Council on Economics of Health for All and (2) a WHO Repository for Pathogen Materials and Sample Sharing. The WHO is establishing a new Council on the Economics of Health for All, which will focus on the links between health and sustainable, inclusive, and innovation-led economic growth. The council will comprise leading economists and health experts and will hold its first virtual session in the coming weeks. DG Tedros also announced WHO is developing a new approach for sharing pathogen materials and clinical samples, which will include a repository for materials housed by WHO in a secure BSL-4 Swiss facility. He explained the COVID-19 pandemic has shown there is an urgent need for a globally agreed system for pathogen and clinical sample sharing to facilitate rapid development of medical countermeasures as global public goods. Sharing materials into this repository will be voluntary, and WHO will be able to facilitate the transfer and use of the materials following a set of criteria under which WHO would distribute them. [Comment: In follow-up with WHO and Switzerland, the sample repository is a new idea that is still being developed and more information will be shared in 2021. End Comment.]

**(U) Political Issues**

12. **(SBU)** The United States continued its support and advocacy for Taiwan’s participation as an observer in the WHA. The Assembly considered a supplementary agenda item, deferred in May, to restore Taiwan’s observer status to the resumed WHA and allow Taiwan to meaningfully participate in technical meetings at the WHO. The General Committee (GC), on which the United States sits, and the WHA plenary discussed the proposal during the adoption of the agenda and allocation of items. During the GC, Eswatini and Nauru participated in the debate in support of Taiwan, and the PRC and Cuba participated in opposition. During the
plenary, the Marshall Islands and Honduras spoke in support of Taiwan and the PRC and Pakistan against. The Assembly President expressed appreciation for the cooperation by stakeholders to organize the arrangement, noting the issue had been the subject of extensive consultations in the run up to the WHA. For this reconvened WHA session, the United States gathered signatures from 23 countries for a letter to WHO Director General Tedros arguing for Taiwan’s inclusion as an observer to the WHA. Although Tedros ultimately did not invite Taiwan to the WHA, this was an expansion of the coalition of like-minded partners (from 15 signatories on the earlier joint letter in May) in support of Taiwan in the WHO and other UN activities. Taiwan also held a successful WHA side event on cancer research and prevention with over 100 registrants on November 12 that will help create momentum to advance Taiwan’s continued participation in the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

13. (SBU) The Assembly deferred Agenda Item 20.2 on the Status of Collections to the May 2021 meeting of the 74th WHA via the January 2021 Executive Board meeting, avoiding an immediate debate on revoking the voting rights of countries in payment arrears. Iran had planned to propose an amendment naming unilateral coercive measures as an extenuating circumstance excusing payment arrears to the WHO and ensuring that their voting rights would continue. In consultation with interested parties in advance, the WHO Secretariat proposed the deferral to avoid political turbulence, as well as a likely vote during the session that would establish the precedent that unilateral coercive measures were an extenuating circumstance allowing for the maintenance of voting rights in spite of non-payment of arrears.

14. (SBU) The United States also successfully seconded Israel’s call on a vote regarding a report on “Health in the Occupied Territories” for politicizing the forum and not advancing peace; 78 member states voted in favor, 14 no (including the US) and 32 abstained, which was an improvement from the vote last year on the same agenda item.

(U) Resumed 147th Session of the Executive Board

15. (SBU) The United States participated in the Resumed 147th Executive Board (EB) on November 16, 2020. The EB considered agenda items focused on managerial, administrative, staffing and financial matters, and reports from expert committees and the Program, Budget, and Administration Committee (PBAC) of the EB. The Chair of the EB, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, India Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Science and Technology, and Earth Sciences, called for continued solidarity, commitment, and cooperation among Member States in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. WHO DG Tedros reiterated WHO’s commitment to better support Member States in responding to COVID-19, including ensuring access to a COVID-19 vaccine, once available, and getting back on track to achieve the SDG targets. Several Member States, including Germany, Botswana, Australia, the U.K., and the United States expressed frustration with delayed agenda management and meeting times that are inconsiderate to various regions. The United States joined Austria, the U.K., and WHO DG Tedros in reiterating support for holding an EB retreat aimed at improving the EB’s governance and leadership role. Lastly, the United States called for the upcoming PBAC (January 13—15, 2021) and EB (January 18-26, 2021) meetings to focus on WHO strengthening and reform, especially through the U.S. proposal to add an agenda item on “Strengthening the WHO’s Global Emergency Preparedness
and Response.” The 74th World Health Assembly will be held from May 24 through June 1, 2021, with many Member States expressing hopes to attend in-person in Geneva.

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| Signature: | BREMBERG |
| Drafted By: | HHS/OGA (h)(6) |
| Cleared By: | IO/EDA (b)(6) |
|            | IO/EDA (b)(6) |
|            | HHS/OGA (b)(6) (Geneva) |
| Approved By: | EXEC (h)(6) (Geneva) |
| Released By: | GENEVA (h)(6) (Geneva) |
| Info: | USUN NEW YORK, USMISSION ROUTINE; NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; ATLANTA GA, CDC ROUTINE; DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; IO COLLECTIVE ROUTINE; ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE ROUTINE |
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E.O.: 13526
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Captions: SENSITIVE
Correction Reason: CORRECTED COPY: Corrected drafter information

1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, PRC health officials expressed growing confidence in China’s public health emergency response capabilities following the 2003 SARS outbreak. Health officials regularly praised China’s enhanced ability to detect, monitor, and report on infectious diseases. As part of the 2018 Chinese government restructure, the PRC aimed to streamline its public health emergency response to epidemics. Various international and domestic assessments, however, indicated that the PRC still had gaps in its ability to effectively coordinate emergency responses to pandemics and other biological threats. China’s response to COVID-19 further confirmed shortcomings in Chinese public health emergency preparedness and raised concerns about the PRC’s ability to prevent future outbreaks. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

Significant Progress in China’s Epidemic Emergency Response Since SARS

2. (U) Prior to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, the Chinese government initiated a series of self-reflective changes to its emergency response structure for preventing and controlling infectious diseases. After garnering widespread criticism for its response to the 2003 SARS epidemic, which resulted in 5,327 cases and 348 deaths in China, PRC leadership publicly recognized shortcomings in its management of the outbreak. The PRC subsequently accelerated reforms to improve its infectious disease prevention system and emergency response to epidemics,
resulting in significant restructuring and a massive build-up in its capabilities.

3. (U) Within a decade, international experts praised China for its revamped pandemic emergency response system that demonstrated enhanced risk communication, infection prevention, control measures, and clinical management, particularly in its response to the 2013 H7N9 epidemic. From 2003 to 2012, Chinese government annual public health funding increased more than 10-fold from $1.28 billion to $17.46 billion RMB. In those 10 years, the PRC established a nationwide infectious disease surveillance system with over 3,000 outposts, including Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) branches, disease prevention and control laboratories, and public health supervision institutions throughout the country. The PRC’s 2006 “National Contingency Plan for Public Health Emergency Response” created an emergency management system that streamlined information flow, promoted interagency coordination, and required timely public notification.

Centralizing and Reforming Management of Public Health Emergencies

4. (U) After the government reshuffle in 2018, the National Health Commission (NHC) was reorganized and granted clear authority over the formulation of infectious disease control and prevention policy to optimize China’s response to public health emergencies. Chinese government ministries and provincial authorities were expected to implement NHC guidance at the local and regional level. In contrast, the newly created Ministry of Emergency Management (MEM) assumed responsibility for emergency responses to natural disasters, but also took over workplace safety and certain health functions that slightly overlapped with NHC’s responsibilities. According to the “National Contingency Plan for Public Health Emergency Response,” however, NHC retained responsibility to lead and coordinate interagency responses to epidemics.

Assessing Epidemic Emergency Preparedness with Chinese Characteristics

5. (SBU) In 2019, the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security released its Global Health Security Index (GHSI) assessing global emergency preparedness for catastrophic biological risks. The GHSI classified China as “more prepared” for a pandemic than most nations, ranking it 51 out of 195 countries evaluated for health security capabilities. China scored slightly below average in its ability to prevent the emergence of zoonotic diseases. [Note: Most Chinese and international experts agree that COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease. The source remains unknown, but some data have suggested bats or pangolins as the possible origin and intermediary. End Note.] However, China received the lowest possible score in the following public health areas that hold major implications for its emergency response during the current COVID-19 outbreak:

• Conducting emergency preparedness and response exercises.

• Linking public health and security authorities for rapid response.

• Overseeing dual-use research involving dangerous pathogens with pandemic potential.
• Carrying out a WHO Joint External Evaluation (JEE) to highlight critical gaps in capacity preparedness. [Note: China has not participated in a JEE, a process which enables countries to determine their gaps and weaknesses in preparing for and responding to infectious disease risks. More than 100 countries, including the United States, have voluntarily completed a JEE. The JEE is a key aspect of implementing the International Health Regulations (IHR), an agreement signed by all WHO member states, including China, to work together for global health security. The United States has encouraged China to conduct a JEE since 2005 but China has only participated as a technical observer to other country JEEs and has never agreed to conduct their own. End note.]

6. (SBU) During discussions with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services officials in 2018, NHC Director General of the Health Emergency Response Office Xu Shuqiang admitted that China needed to improve its diagnostic and treatment capabilities. Yet, he confidently asserted that China centered its emergency response system on joint prevention and control mechanisms, web-based reporting, rapid testing, human capacity, and strong interagency coordination. Publishing their own assessment, however, NHC-affiliated medical experts from the Chinese Preventive Medicine Association (CPMA) complained that China had excessively focused on improving medical treatment while failing to develop preventative measures against infectious diseases.

Seeking Truth from Facts: China’s COVID-19 Response

7. (SBU) China received mixed reviews over its initial emergency response to COVID-19, ranging from praise from the World Health Organization (WHO) for its “unprecedented” containment efforts, to domestic criticism over delayed risk communication. In reference to the Wuhan lockdown, a senior official at an international humanitarian aid organization told ESTHOFF that the PRC initially reacted like it had never dealt with an epidemic, suggesting the primary reasons for its stunted response were a lack of clarity on areas of responsibility following the government reshuffle, and central government intervention. The aid official said the PRC decision to seal off Wuhan on January 23 came too late as 5 million people had already left the city for the Chinese New Year. [Note: Other health officials noted that the containment measures helped slow transmission. Prominent Chinese epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan publicly claimed the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases would have tripled if China had not implemented these severe control measures. The WHO stated that PRC containment measures were “buying the world time” to handle the outbreak. End Note.]

8. (SBU) At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, Chinese government ministries appeared slightly confused about their emergency response functions, noted the aid official. NHC and MEM were still adjusting to their new responsibilities, the official observed, and fell short in emergency preparedness and response capabilities. Although the PRC was actively seeking supplies and aid needed to respond to the outbreak, the aid organization said that the NGOs the government designated to receive international donations appeared to be completely oblivious
to international standards for making such requests. The aid organization worked closely with the designated NGOs to develop standards for requesting contributions, such as including the type, quantity, and expected expiration dates for medicine and other emergency supplies. The aid official was surprised to find NHC initially scrambling to create clear standard operating procedures for their emergency response. NHC also rushed in setting nationwide standards for personal protective equipment (PPE), medicine, medical equipment, and consumable goods, lamented the aid official.

The Chinese Interagency Art of War against COVID-19

9. (SBU) Despite early challenges, the PRC quickly overcame logistical hurdles and provided a rapid emergency response ensuring that food, donations, and national resources were directed to Wuhan, assessed the senior aid official. After preliminary central government involvement, the NHC clearly took the lead for the emergency response while MEM and other relevant government ministries played a supporting role. MEM Division Director Yin Mingyu, overseeing the Department of International Cooperation and Rescue, told ESTHOFF MEM was providing logistical and personnel assistance to transport suspected COVID-19 patients to hospitals. MEM personnel travelled nationwide with NHC-led joint committees to assist factories and companies resume normal operations while providing instruction on health and prevention measures, elaborated Yin.

10. (SBU) The senior aid official spoke highly of the Chinese government’s overall interagency coordination and implementation of NHC guidance. She recounted that in a briefing to provide information on China’s COVID-19 interagency working group, Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) Department of International Trade and Economic Affairs (DITEA) Deputy Director General Liang Hong had claimed that the PRC General Administration of Customs (GAC) facilitated emergency shipment of goods far quicker than other countries that had experienced far less dire circumstances. In the briefing, Liang said that MOFCOM’s DITEA worked with GAC to handle international assistance while ensuring compliance with international standards and controlling market prices. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) managed medical stockpiles with support from provincial, regional, and municipal officials. [Note: Post received a request from the MEM on February 15 requesting basic information on how the U.S. managed its emergency stockpile system, indicating that the PRC’s mechanism had not been fully developed or implemented. End Note.] MIIT also reviewed the quality and compliance of special medicine and emergency equipment from bilateral and multilateral partners.

Criticism of PRC Health Security Capabilities and Transparency

11. (SBU) During its COVID-19 response, China faced internal criticism over its limited health capabilities and international disapproval for its lack of transparency. In a Chinese medical journal, CPMA Chinese medical experts pointed out that China CDC suffered from ongoing staff shortages of infectious disease experts and an outdated IT system for reporting on infectious diseases before the COVID-19 outbreak. ESTH health contacts said that low salaries for China CDC infectious disease experts resulted in retention problems. Dr. Zhong Nanshan publicly expressed dissatisfaction, saying China CDC should be elevated beyond merely a
technical branch of NHC. Most Chinese observers agreed that China CDC needed more resources and authority to conduct infectious disease surveillance, report on public health concerns, and engage in policy planning.

12. (SBU) The senior aid official voiced strong concerns over officials’ lack of transparency about the number of Chinese citizens requiring urgent medical, food, and financial assistance after the Wuhan lockdown. While the aid official positively assessed the NHC’s timely and transparent reporting of COVID-19 cases, the official felt that China’s emergency response completely ignored the need for humanitarian assistance to Chinese citizens stuck in Wuhan. The aid official also noted that they had offered to host a training session for MEM and NHC on emergency response to epidemics, but had never received a response.

Signature: Branstad

Drafted By: BEIJING
Cleared By: ESTH:Hendon
HHS/CDC/IRD
ECON
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Approved By: PD:A/DCM
Released By: BEIJING

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1. (SBU) **Summary and Comment:** On November 12, 2019, Chinese health officials announced that two individuals in Beijing had been diagnosed with pneumonic plague, the only form of the disease that can transmit from person to person. Limited initial details from the government, despite media interest, prompted discussion, concern, and rumors online. There was an insatiable public demand for detailed, accurate, and timely information that health authorities were not able to meet in the first few days after the announcement. China’s ability to respond to health crises and implement risk communication strategies has improved since the 2003 SARS epidemic, and the government’s medical response appears to have prevented further spread of the disease beyond the two patients. However, these plague cases showed communication gaps remain and the public still doubts the timeliness and transparency of government-provided health information. The PRC’s general impulse to control information – in this case related to health – can run counter to effective risk communication and may exacerbate the public’s suspicion that information is being purposefully withheld. **End Summary and Comment.**

**Case History**

2. (SBU) On November 3, Beijing’s Chaoyang Hospital admitted a married couple with severe pneumonia who had been transferred by ambulance from Inner Mongolia after their symptoms worsened. The hospital diagnosed the patients with pneumonic plague on November 11 and the
Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) confirmed the diagnoses on November 12. Authorities then transferred the couple to Beijing’s Ditan Hospital for specialized care. China CDC believes the husband likely contracted the disease while working the soil on his farm after a large rodent die-off in the area. Chinese authorities informed the World Health Organization (WHO) on November 13 and on the same day, WHO’s Coordinator for Disease Control in China told media that “the National Health Commission is implementing efforts to contain and treat the identified cases and increase surveillance.” The binding WHO International Health Regulations state national health commissions should inform WHO within the 24 hours of learning of a suspected plague case. 447 individuals in Beijing were quarantined for medical observation based on their possible exposure to the disease via the infected couple. Health officials notified one American citizen on November 13 that he had been potentially exposed to the plague and subsequently placed him in quarantine until November 20.

SARS Outbreak Highlighted Risk Communication Deficiencies

3. (SBU) Chaoyang Hospital is one of Beijing’s primary municipal hospitals and along with Ditan Hospital was involved in the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak that resulted in 5,327 cases and 349 deaths in China. The government’s initial lack of transparency, including a decision to deny SARS cases had reached Beijing in order to prevent disturbing a National People’s Congress meeting taking place in the capital, caused significant public and international doubts regarding China’s risk communication transparency. The controversy resulted in the firing of Beijing’s mayor and the health minister.

4. (SBU) After the SARS outbreak, WHO revised its International Health Regulations to include risk communication as one of the core capacity areas for national health commissions. Stung by criticism of its SARS response, China’s government sought to improve its operating procedures over the following years, including through a capacity building collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC). Beginning in 2006, the U.S. CDC and China CDC launched a Global Disease Detection program to strengthen China’s capacity to detect, respond to, and prevent emerging health threats. As part of this program, the United States placed U.S. CDC experts in China to support China CDC in training field epidemiologists to investigate disease outbreak as well as training health officials in risk communication during health outbreaks. U.S. CDC continues to provide technical support to China’s Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP), and in 2015, helped launch a Western FETP to strengthen the epidemiological capacity of underdeveloped provinces, including Inner Mongolia and provinces in western China. FETP graduates were among the responders to the plague investigation.

5. (U) The China National Health Commission integrated communication responses into its public crisis response plans, and the government’s actions during the 2013 H7N9 influenza outbreak received praise from the international community, while surveys showed that public trust in government health information had risen. China also scored high on the 2019 Global Health Security Index for risk communication, and its 2014 “Overall Contingency Plan for National Public Emergencies” enumerates communication methods to release information to the public. However, the summer 2018 vaccine scandal in which two Chinese vaccine makers sold poor-quality vaccines for infants, prompting China’s drug regulator to review all vaccine
producers in the country, and the April 2019 closing of a hospital for giving fake HPV vaccines to patients, renewed public doubt in the government’s ability to manage and share health crisis information in a timely and transparent manner.

State Media Remains Factual...

6. (U) The Beijing Chaoyang district government released a short statement the night of November 12, stating that two people had been diagnosed with plague and that, “relevant prevention and control measures have been implemented.” Following the statement, major state media outlets, news portals, and social media platforms widely reported and reprinted statements issued by health commissions in Beijing and Inner Mongolia as well as the China CDC. These press reports focused on the low risk of the disease spreading in Beijing and stated there was no need to panic. Many news stories also conveyed medical messages about plague, encouraging the public to take precautions to cut off epidemic transmission. News reports were timely and factual but lacking in detailed information. An op-ed in the November 13 China Daily English edition – the PRC’s messenger to external English-speaking audiences – called for the release of timely and transparent information about the plague cases to avoid rumors and the spreading of panic, citing the government’s poor response to the 2003 SARS epidemic.
Many international outlets also covered the story, often with more sensational headlines.

Social Media Reflects the Public’s Demand for Facts and Caution of Rumors

7. (SBU) On Chinese social media, two popular threads of conversation under hashtags related to plague were viewed collectively more than 60 million times. The Embassy’s Weibo account released a factual article about plague that was very popular. Many commenters were concerned about the plague and asked other netizens not to spread rumors and not to eat wild animals. Said one, “Do not eat wild animals, bamboo rat and groundhogs all contain pathogens.” Many also mentioned the Black Plague in the 13th century. On Weibo, most netizens blamed the plague on those who eat or touch wild animals.

8. (U) Many netizens speculated that Chinese censors controlled social media postings related to plague, as had been reported in international media. Some netizens complained that “cover-ups only make things worse!” Others reacted to reports that Chaoyang Hospital’s diagnosing physician had her November 13 social media post about the cases censored and wondered about the health of the doctors treating the patients. Media reported that the doctor, in a since-deleted social media post titled, “Are you afraid of plague? Beijing’s pneumonic plague patients first doctors have something to say,” described the patients arriving to Beijing on November 3 with severe pneumonia and noting that she originally had trouble diagnosing which pathogen caused the illness, but suspected it was rare. She defended health officials not making an announcement on the patients’ conditions sooner, stating that official health notices must be accurate and rigorous, and therefore, “cannot be issued casually.”

Signature: BRANSTAD

Sensitivity: SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED
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UNCLASSIFIED

Sender: "SMART Archive" <>
Recipient: SMART Core <>
1. **Summary and Comment:** China’s National Health Commission (NHC) reported 327 new confirmed cases in Mainland China on February 27, with nine new confirmed cases outside Hubei. This marks the second day in a row that there were fewer new cases in Mainland China than in the rest of the world. In addition, February 27 marked the 10th day in a row that the number of patients discharged from the hospital has exceeded the number of new reported cases. The MFA issued a DipNote on February 27 outlining procedures for how PRC authorities will handle any COVID-19 cases among diplomatic personnel in Beijing. The notice stated that infected personnel would be sent to one of Beijing City’s 20 designated treatment hospitals “where they are entitled to the same diagnosis and treatment procedures as the Chinese citizens...” The National Forest and Grassland Administration (NFGA) announced on February 26 that it would cancel the licenses for all facilities raising wild animals for food and strengthen the permitting, review, and supervision of non-food utilization of wildlife. Local governments continued to impose quarantine requirements on travelers from Japan and South Korea and urged vigilance around overseas visitors. The MFA announced that the PRC Embassy in Seoul had donated 25,000 surgical masks for use in Daegu, South Korea. Ports began to return to normal operations, but businesses continued to be challenged by labor shortages, cash-flow issues, and
travel restrictions. Closed management restrictions remained in place across much of the country, but there were signs of further loosening as more roadblocks were removed and roads reopened. 

End Summary and Comment.

(U) LATEST UPDATES

2. (U) Nationwide Cases: China’s National Health Commission (NHC) reported 327 new confirmed cases in Mainland China on February 27 as of 24:00, with nine new confirmed cases outside Hubei (link). The total number of confirmed cases to date rose to 78,824. Another 44 deaths in Mainland China were reported on February 27, bringing total reported deaths to 2,788. With an additional 3,622 patients discharged from the hospital, a total of 46 percent of reported cases have now recovered and been released. February 27 marked the 10th day in a row that the number of patients discharged from the hospital has exceeded the number of new reported cases. The number of current suspected cases dropped to 2,308, with 452 new suspected cases reported on February 27. The number of close contacts under medical observation fell to 65,225.

Figure 1: Daily Change in Number of Current Cases in Mainland China

Note: Due to the change in case definitions for “confirmed cases” and the lack of disaggregated data for clinically diagnosed and lab-confirmed cases from February 15 to 18 in Hubei, data are marked as missing for these dates. The NHC reverted the case definitions to remove the distinction between Hubei and the other provinces for data starting on February 19. Source: NHC and provincial health commissions.

Table: Cases Reported in Mainland China as of End of February 27

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<tr>
<th>Province/City/Region</th>
<th>Active Cases</th>
<th>Total Cases</th>
<th>New Cases</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>New Deaths</th>
<th>Total Discharged</th>
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</table>

Total (Provincial Reports) | 39,919 | 78,823 | 326 | 2,788 | 44 | 36,116 | 3,637 |
Total (NHC Reported) | 39,919 | 78,824 | 327 | 2,788 | 44 | 36,117 | 3,622 |

Notes: -- zero cases. Source: NHC and provincial health commissions

3. (U) MFA DipNote on Protocol for Handling Suspected COVID-19 Cases: The Protocol Department of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issued a DipNote on February 27 outlining procedures for how PRC authorities will handle any COVID-19 cases among diplomatic personnel in Beijing. Per the notice, any infected personnel shall be sent to one of Beijing City's 20 designated treatment hospitals for treatment of COVID-19 cases, “where they are entitled to
the same diagnosis and treatment procedures as the Chinese citizens…” [Note: MFA did not respond to MED’s request for clarification as to whether the Embassy’s Med Unit can take samples in-house and send them to Beijing CDC for testing. The notice was also silent as to the Mission’s request for clarity regarding permission to discharge patients for medical evacuation, and as to the provision of ambulance services. End note.] The notice further requests the “understanding and cooperation” of missions in allowing “Chinese professional medical and disease control personnel” to enter diplomats’ residences and embassy facilities to “sterilize the working place” of the infected personnel and “conduct the epidemiological surveys and close contact tracing and management.”

4. (U) For the monitoring of close contacts of infected patients, the MFA DipNote allows missions to decide whether to send personnel to institutional quarantine sites or to conduct at-home quarantine and observation. For at-home quarantine and observation, “Chinese medical and disease control institutions will inform [diplomatic missions] of the deadline, legal basis, and matters needing attention during the medical observation and the contact detail of the responsible medical institution.” Lastly, for diplomatic patients receiving treatment at one of the designated hospitals, the notice stipulates that “personnel from the diplomatic corps and their dependents are, in principle, not allowed to go to the hospital to visit or comfort the patients.” MGT will follow up with the Department and MFA regarding particulars, such as access to Mission China personnel in quarantine or treatment as well as access to residences and facilities for sterilization.

5. (U) Operating Licenses Revoked for All Wildlife Farms Selling Animals for Food: China’s National Forest and Grassland Administration (NFGA) announced on February 26 that it would conduct a “thorough stocktaking of all captive wildlife breeding facilities” currently in operation and cancel the licenses for all facilities raising wild animals for food. NFGA also pledged to “comprehensively strengthen the permitting, review, and supervision of non-food utilization of wildlife” (link). [Note: The announcement follows the decision by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress on February 24 outlawing the consumption and trade of wildlife for food. End note.] The sudden crackdown on wildlife farms raising animals for food has revealed the immense scale of the industry. According to remarks by NFGA Vice Administrator Wang Weisheng at a February 27 press briefing, as of February 26, authorities had inspected 153,000 captive breeding facilities and 3.5 million markets and restaurants selling wildlife (link). Regulators have also taken aim at online trading, shutting down 11,000 sellers and removing 1.4 million posts advertising wild animals for sale, according to a representative from the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR). Wang added that NFGA was in the process of revising the PRC’s Catalogue of Wildlife Species for National Key Protection as well as the national catalogue of species of special ecological, scientific, and social value.

(U) THIRD COUNTRY RESPONSE EFFORTS AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

6. (U) Local Policies Targeting Foreigners: The Shenzhen sub-district of Xiangmihu – a popular neighborhood for foreigners – announced stepped up efforts February 27 to screen South Koreans residing in or returning to the subdistrict, namely at-home self-isolation for 14 days upon return from South Korea. As of August 2019, 533 South Koreans resided in Xiangmihu. Meanwhile, Guangdong provincial authorities began recruiting Korean interpreters.
7. **Korean Arrivals Spark Public Outrage:** The February 26 arrival of 80 Korean passengers on a flight from Seoul sparked public outrage after Chengdu authorities did not require the passengers to self-quarantine. Members of the public reportedly filed complaints with the national State Council, accusing Sichuan and Chengdu authorities of risking public health.

8. **More cities impose quarantine requirements on travelers from Japan.** Suzhou, Kunshan, Nanjing, Changzhou, and Jiaxing are officially requiring people who have traveled recently to Japan to complete a 14-day self-quarantine, according to the Japanese Consulate and notices sent by local governments. Another five cities have given similar informal guidance, including Nantong, Lianyungang, and Jiangyin District in Wuxi in Jiangsu; Xiaoshang District of Hangzhou in Zhejiang, and part of the Shushan District in Hefei, Anhui.

**ECONOMIC AND SUPPLY CHAIN IMPACT**

9. **China to Accelerate Infrastructure Investment to Boost GDP:** Central government departments were accelerating infrastructure project assessment and approval, while local governments have mapped out trillions of RMB worth of investment plans, media reported. A Chinese economist told the *Global Times* that such large investments carry risks but would be effective, likely boosting GDP by 1-1.5 percentage points in 2020. A Ministry of Transportation official told media that China would initiate a flurry of infrastructure projects “ahead of schedule” (*Global Times*).

10. **State Council Convenes High-Level Joint Ministry Briefing to Reassure SMEs:** The central government was rolling out additional fiscal and monetary measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) affected by the coronavirus outbreak, senior officials from the People’s Bank of China, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, State Administration for Industry and Commerce, and the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission briefed to press on February 27. The officials said local governments would be encouraged to waive taxes and administrative fees for targeted SMEs, small commercial banks will issue loans to small businesses at a rate no higher than 4.55 percent, and SMEs that miss payments on utilities will still receive services. The central government encouraged banks to roll over loans due in the period between January 25 and June 30 (*China.com*).

11. **Government Prioritizing Assistance to Hard-Hit Food Service Industry:** The central government will expand credit lines for the $713.4 billion (5 trillion RMB) food service industry after the COVID-19 epidemic effectively wiped out the industry’s expected business during the Chinese Lunar New Year. In seven days during the holiday period, the Chinese restaurant industry suffered about $71 billion ($50 billion RMB) in losses, and the China Cuisine Association found that the restaurant industry has suffered a 93 percent closure rate of all restaurants during the ongoing outbreak. As of 2018, China had about eight million restaurants and the industry employed 30 million workers (*China Daily*).

12. **Epidemic Control in Beijing Tops Central Government’s Virus Battle:** The central government would prioritize efforts on epidemic prevention and control work, officials from the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) confirmed on February 27. Given Beijing’s dense population and role as a national center for medical services and education, China
CDC chief epidemiologist Zeng Guang cautioned the risk of an outbreak occurring in Beijing remained high. Chinese top leaders have stressed that containing the spread of the virus in Beijing is as important as safeguarding Wuhan (Global Times).

13. **(SBU) Guangzhou Ports Operating Normally**: Guangzhou’s main ports had resumed normal operations as of late February, according to South China port contacts. Shenzhen’s Yantian port was operating normally by February 17, and it handled over 7000 containers February 24, a similar volume compared to a year earlier, contacts noted. Ports across the region had various capacity to handle frozen containers, with 88 percent of reefer plugs available for containers to connect to at Guangzhou ports, 75 percent unoccupied at Xiamen, 68 percent at Shenzhen West, and 51 percent at Yantian. Guangzhou ports announced 30 percent discounts on storage and electricity charges for frozen containers, as well as continued waivers of some dockage fees. Meanwhile, smaller ports across the Pearl River Delta region continued to experience labor shortages and operational delays, contacts added.

14. **(U) Guangdong’s Agricultural Production Holds Steady**: Year on year, production was steady, provincial officials said February 27, adding that pork was the only commodity in short supply but that Guangdong targeted a return to near normal output by the end of 2020. In Guangzhou, 85 percent of the city’s 600 wet markets were open as of February 23, an industry official told media, adding that “emergency measures” were taken to stabilize supply and guarantee “three meals a day” for residents.

15. **(SBU) Seafood Importers Halt Purchases**: Weak restaurant demand and limited air cargo space prompted some south China fresh seafood importers to halt purchases, including geoduck clams from the U.S. Pacific Northwest, according to contacts. For their part, some Guangzhou poultry importers said they stepped up U.S. orders in February, hoping for a market rebound. With many restaurants and institutional caterers still closed or running at partial capacity, poultry sales prices were lower, and traders said cash flow was tight. Poultry contacts said nearly 100 containers originally bound for Shanghai and Tianjin ports had to divert to Busan or Malaysia, presumably because of congestion, and it was uncertain when the shipments would move. Shipping costs rose about $1400 per container in February, the contacts added, predicting an additional $1000 rise in March.

16. **(SBU) Shanghai Back in Business, But Labor and Cash-flow challenges remain**: Eighty-six percent of businesses are operating to some degree, with 90 percent of large companies open, though only 53 percent of small and medium enterprises are back to work, municipal officials told Shanghai-based Consuls General on February 27. They added that electricity use is only 70 percent of pre-crisis levels, indicating that even if businesses are open, productivity has not returned to normal. This could be because of human resource shortages, which officials noted is the largest problem companies face. They added that only 63 percent of workers have returned to their jobs and 60 percent of Shanghai’s 10-11 million migrant workers have returned to the city. A lack of operating capital is another major concern for businesses. To address these challenges, Shanghai authorities are working with companies to bring back workers from other parts of China and are working with financial institutions to increase cash flow.

17. **(U) AmCham Members Still Face Labor and Travel Challenges**: An AmCham China
survey of 169 large-, medium-, and small-sized enterprises conducted February 17-10 and released on February 27 found that travel disruptions and reduced staff productivity present the most significant challenges for respondents. Nearly half of respondents expect 2020 China revenues to decrease if business cannot return to usual before April 30, with nearly one-fifth reporting 2020 revenues will decline more than 50 percent if the epidemic extends through August 30. Approximately one-third of respondents say they already face increased costs and significantly reduced revenue. Eighty percent of the companies say they have provided some form of assistance to China to fight the COVID-19 epidemic and another 14 percent are planning to do so.

18. (U) Shanghai Customs Expands Green-Channel Access: In order to support industries and companies badly hit by the epidemic and help businesses to resume their industrial, supply, and logistics chains, Shanghai Customs authorities announced February 26 they will expand green-channel coverage from just epidemic prevention and control supplies to more fields, including raw materials, components, machines for resuming production, and items for agricultural use. The clearance of food and daily necessities will also speed up, they said.

19. (U) Sichuan Industry Up and Running: As of February 25, 92 percent of Sichuan’s 14,560 industrial enterprises had resumed operations and 61 percent of industrial workers have returned to work, according to a government press release.

(SBU) SUPPORT FOR U.S. CITIZENS

- Guangzhou

20. (SBU) Passport Workload Down: In the month since the start of authorized departure, ACS has seen a 50 percent year-over-year reduction in minor passport and consular record of birth abroad adjudications, and a 14 percent reduction in adult passport adjudications. Post expects to see a resulting higher demand later in the year.

(U) INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

21. (U) PRC Donates Masks to ROK: MFA Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said February 27 that the PRC Embassy in Seoul had donated 25,000 surgical masks for use in Daegu, South Korea.

(SBU) POST OPERATIONS

- Beijing

22. (U) Beijing Maintains Strict Closed-Management Measures: After the news of an infected ex-convict from Hubei slipping into Beijing, and 10 new cases reported on February 26, Beijing City Vice Secretary said that no residents from Hubei would be permitted to enter the city and that Beijing would continue to enforce strict closed-management measures. According to Global Times, local authorities would also begin to “implement all-day inspections” of residential areas. Furthermore, “Local authorities in the capital city are also urged to set up checkpoints at highway entrances to the city to screen incoming people and vehicles” (link).
23. (U) **Embassy Housing Community Requires Japan/ROK Quarantines:** A residential community housing Embassy community personnel announced February 28 that residents returning from South Korea or Japan are required to observe a 14-day home quarantine. On February 26, the community management said government authorities mandated residents must use a “special pass” to enter or exit until “the threat of coronavirus is over.”

**Chengdu**

24. (U) **Carries Resume Operations:** Several Chinese carriers announced they will resume operations of some international flights by February 29, including flights to Frankfurt, Cairo, and Tokyo. The only remaining viable direct flight from **Chongqing**, to Bangkok, has been canceled through March 5.

(U) **OTHER COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES**

**Chengdu**

25. (U) **Sichuan Party Secretary Urges Vigilance Around Overseas Visitors:** On February 26, Sichuan Party Secretary Peng Qinghua stressed that epidemic response efforts must not relax despite Sichuan’s downgraded emergency response level. With the virus spreading internationally, Sichuan should carefully monitor the temperatures of foreign visitors, he said.

26. (SBU) **Despite Official Guidance, Closed Management Continues:** District governments are maintaining strict access controls to residential compounds a week after Chongqing announced areas without COVID-19 cases could relax such measures, Canadian diplomats report. All persons arriving in Chongqing must self-isolate for 14 days and undergo daily temperature checks, or report to a government quarantine center if they do not have a permanent address.

27. (U) **Schools to Start Online Classes March 2:** Chongqing announced on February 26 that K-12 schools should begin online classes starting March 2. Post-secondary institutions will remain closed until COVID-19 is effectively under control, authorities said.

28. (SBU) **Small Business Remain Shuttered:** According to an informal survey conducted by Canadian diplomats, local Chongqing business contacts in manufacturing, retail, food service, and entertainment sectors were reportedly quite pessimistic about the possibility of re-opening, with only one of eight businesses having done so to date.

29. (U) **Guizhou to Go Back to School:** Guizhou province has announced that junior high and high school students will resume classes starting March 16.

**Shanghai**

30. (SBU) **Shanghai to Remain at Emergency Alert Level 1:** Shanghai officials told Consuls General (CGs) on February 27 that because Shanghai is still in an inward migration phase, is more urban, and has a higher public transportation utilization rate than the other areas of East
China, the city does not have immediate plans to reduce the emergency alert level down from the current level. [Note: Jiangsu and Anhui have reduced their alert level from 1 to 2 and some areas in Zhejiang have reduced their alert levels. End note.]

31. **Shanghai Expanding Medical Services and Sharing Experience with COVID-19 Treatment Success**: Medical services, including most routine services, are available throughout Shanghai through appointments, the Director of Shanghai’s Health Commission told Shanghai-based Consuls General on February 27. He emphasized that complex, non-COVID-19 related cases from elsewhere in China are being sent to Shanghai for treatment and surgery. Separately, Shanghai’s COVID-19 treatment methodology has attained a high success rate at preventing cases from escalating from mild to severe, he said. The Director noted Shanghai is sharing its experience with other areas. Officials announced the Shanghai CDC and 16 district offices in the city can perform rapid testing and fever clinics are now able to start treating COVID-19 patients prior to the patient being transferred to a central hospital.

32. **QR Code for Shanghai Metro and Buses Goes into Effect, City Tries to Manage Passenger Numbers**: Shanghai’s new QR code for Metros and buses goes into effect today. The system allows passengers to voluntarily scan a QR code and enter their phone number, enabling authorities to contact them if someone who rode in the same car, at the same time, later tests positive for COVID-19. A similar code was launched for taxis on February 21. The city is also increasing attempts to reduce crowding at busy metro stations. Transportation authorities told CGIs on February 27 that their goal is to reduce the passenger density of public transportation to 60 percent of pre-crisis levels.

Shenyang

33. **Heilongjiang Cities Remove Roadblocks**: Hegang lifted restrictions on all private vehicles, as well as roadblocks and checkpoints on main roads, to facilitate smooth flow of traffic. Qiqihar announced that checkpoints in villages will gradually be lifted, and Qitaibei, Heilongjiang’s second smallest city in terms of population, reopened one of its main highways. Jixi, which recently implemented a strict 24-hour watch system at all checkpoints, also said that roadblocks between low-risk villages will be removed.

34. **But Public Transportation Remains Idle in Many Places**: While many Heilongjiang cities are starting to lift onerous checkpoints and disruptive roadblocks, residents across Heilongjiang complain that public transportation system has not yet fully resumed. On Weibo, Heilongjiang residents living in small cities lamented that they were “stuck” in rural areas and had no way of getting to the cities. In Yichun, none of the city’s public transportation system had resumed, a contact told ConGenOff. In Shuangyashan, it was reported that only a few buses operate during certain times of the day.

35. **Jilin Ready for Spring Plowing**: In response to Premier Li Keqiang’s emphasis on the importance of facilitating spring plowing and farming preparation, Jilin officials said that the province is committed to guaranteeing loans and funds for farmers, as well as supporting agricultural enterprises resume production as soon as possible. So far, out 15 pesticide production companies in Jilin, 14 has resumed operations. Officials noted that Jilin had already purchased
32.66 billion kilograms of grain, a 6-billion-kilogram increase from previous year.

36. **SBU** Liaoning Maintains Closed Management in Residences: Contacts throughout Liaoning say that there has not been a significant change to closed management in residences despite Liaoning downgraded emergency alert level from 1 to 3. Most contacts in Shenyang and Dalian report that same measures, such as checking temperature and allowing only entry/exit access point, remain in place. Supermarkets throughout Shenyang still check for temperatures, and some Shenyang apartments continue to issue entry/exit passes for residents. Virtually all residences forbid delivery personnel from entering the compound. However, contacts in Fuxin city said restrictions seem to have somewhat relaxed, noting that few apartment complexes now permit entry of non-residents and no longer check body temperatures.

37. **SBU** Liaoning Reopens Toll Stations and Expressways: All Liaoning toll stations are now fully open. No fees will be charged at any toll station. Authorities will register vehicles entering from high-risk areas, and vehicles transporting PPE and other daily supplies will not be inspected. All of Liaoning’s 293 expressways were also reopened. Shenyang FAO told ConGenOff that except for vehicles coming from other provinces, Liaoning residents traveling within the province will not be stopped for inspection. A contact [b](6) told ConGenOff that opening toll stations and highways have greatly reduced burdens on delivering products.
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Info:
SEoul, amBAssAy route; TAIPei, aIT route; HaNoi,
AmBAssAy route; SIngApore, AmBAssAy route;
ulaanbaatar, AmBAssAy route; phnom penh,
AmBAssAy route; BAngkOK, AmBAssAy route; hong kong,
AmConsul route; manila, AmBAssAy route; Paris,
AmBAssAy route; vladivostok, AmConsul route; nAtionAl
SecurIty council wASHINGTON DC route; aTlanta ga,
Cdc route; dia wASHINGTON DC route; CIA wASHINGTON
dc route; pacom IDHS honolulu hi route; cHIcAgO posts
collective route; eNVironment science and technoloHy
collective route

XMT:
caracas, AmBAssAy; st peterburg, AmConsul

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UNCLASSIFIED
SBU

| Sender:    | "SMART Archive" <> |
| Recipient: | SMART Core <>      |
**UNCLASSIFIED**

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1. **Summary and comment:** China’s National Health Commission (NHC) released new case definition guidelines, reverting the confirmed case definition for Hubei province to no longer include “clinically diagnosed” cases in its confirmed case count and will only include lab-confirmed cases, consistent with other provinces. As a result, all provinces in China will now use a “lab-confirmed” case definition for reporting purposes. The change, which resulted in a decline in officially reported national cases, was made without explanation in the official documents. The NHC reported 394 new cases on February 19, bringing the total number of officially reported cases to 74,576. The number of newly reported cases on February 19 dropped to 394, or 1,490 fewer than the average for the previous three days, due to the change. President Xi Jinping said in public remarks that there exists a greater need to protect and care for medical workers to ensure they stay healthy and are not infected with COVID-19. Contacts at several ministries informed the Embassy that national government offices had reopened and were operating under rotating shifts.
2. Summary and comment, cont.: Businesses throughout China continue to reopen, though many face labor shortages, logistics challenges and a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). More municipal and provincial governments continue relaxing restrictions on intra-city and intra-provincial transport, though strict movement restrictions continue in many cities. A CG Wuhan contact reported the arrival of military guards at residential communities in Wuhan has resulted in stricter quarantine enforcement. A number of government officials outside of Hubei have cautioned against overzealous implementation of epidemic response measures. China’s Global Times reported that the PRC government has donated COVID-19 nucleic acid testing kits to Japan. The Peoples’ Bank of China (PBOC) listed the control of the epidemic as its top priority and asserted, however optimistically, that the impact of the coronavirus on the economy will be limited “as the epidemic has not changed the country’s economic fundamentals.” PBOC stated it will help companies affected by the epidemic by lowering lending rates, increasing credit support, and providing more loans. Social media users continued to criticize a propaganda video released by authorities in Gansu province showing female health workers crying as their heads are shaved; central government authorities have allowed this criticism of overzealous Gansu officials to continue for two days without obvious censorship of most comments. End Summary and comment.

(U) LATEST UPDATES

3. New Coronavirus Guidelines Released, Case Definition Changed Again. The PRC National Health Commission (NHC) and National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine February 19 released the 6th Edition of the Diagnosis and Treatment Scheme for Pneumonia from Novel Coronavirus (Trial Version). Under the updated guidelines, Hubei province will no longer include “clinically diagnosed” cases in its confirmed case count and will only include lab-confirmed cases, consistent with other provinces (figure 1). The Hubei Provincial Health Commission announced February 13 that it had amended case definitions for COVID-19 to include the new “clinically diagnosed” category which did not require lab-confirmation but did require clinical characteristics and radiographic evidence of pneumonia. As a result, the total number of confirmed cases reported from Hubei province initially increased significantly, with 14,840 new cases (of which 13,332 were clinically diagnosed and 1508 were laboratory confirmed) on February 13. The inclusion of clinically diagnosed cases for Hubei followed the guidelines set forth in the 5th Edition of the Diagnosis and Treatment Scheme for Pneumonia from Novel Coronavirus (Trial Version) issued February 5. The NHC said at the time that it had changed the case definition for Hubei to allow more patients to receive earlier treatment, as there was a lag in lab-tested confirmation. The NHC did not state in the new 6th Edition guidelines why they had changed the confirmed case definition for Hubei back to only including lab-confirmed cases. According to Professor Feng Zhichun, of the School of Medicine and Health Management of Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, reasons for the change included considerations such as chest imaging alone not being the standard for diagnosis and limited availability of testing kits and testing capabilities in Hubei province [NOTE: It is unclear if he is speaking in a capacity as someone who had a role in the changing of these guidelines or if this is related to the official reason for the change].

(U) Updated NHC Case Definition Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Provinces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Epidemiological history 14 days before the onset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1: travel to or resident in Wuhan or area nearby, or an affected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Suspected case

- A2: exposed to infected person who has tested positive
- A3: exposed to person with fever or other respiratory symptoms and who is from Wuhan or an area nearby, or an affected community
- A4: cluster

### B- Clinical criteria

- B1: fever and / or respiratory symptoms
- B2: radiographic pneumonia
- B3: Normal or decreased white blood cell count in the early stages of onset; or decreased lymphocyte count

### Suspected case if:

1. Meets any one of the epidemiological histories and any two of the clinical criteria

   **OR**

2. Meets all three clinical criteria

### Confirmed case

**Suspected case + one of the following test results:**

- Respiratory or blood specimens test
  - RT-PCR positive for SARS-CoV-2
  - Viral gene sequencing is highly homologous with known SARS-CoV-2

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*Data source: The 6th Edition of the Diagnosis and Treatment Scheme for Pneumonia of New Coronavirus Infection issued by the National Health Commission*

http://www.nhc.gov.cn/yzygj/s7652m/202002/54e1ad5c2aae45e19eb541799bf637e9.shtml

http://www.nhc.gov.cn/yzygj/s7653p/202002/8334a8326dd94d329df351d7da8ae6c2.shtml

4. (U) **Decline in Officially Reported Nationwide Cases As Definitions Changed Again:** China’s National Health Commission (NHC) reported 394 new cases in Mainland China on February 19 as of 24:00, bringing the total number of officially reported cases to 74,576 (link). The number of newly reported cases on February 19 dropped by 1,490 compared to the average for the previous three days. [Note: The sudden drop appears to reflect yet another change in the definition of confirmed cases, introduced by the NHC on February 19 (link). Per the newly revised guidelines for diagnosis and treatment (the sixth edition), only
cases confirmed in the laboratory through a respiratory or blood sample test will be counted as “confirmed,” thus removing the difference in the definition for confirmed cases between Hubei and other provinces. Hubei Health Commission’s latest case report issued on February 20, after the publication of the new NHC guidelines, does not mention the change, however [link]. End note.] Total deaths rose to 2,118, an increase of 114 over the previous day. In addition, 1,277 new suspected cases were reported on February 19, with the total number of currently suspected cases now down to 4,922. The number of close contacts under medical observation declined to 126,363.

Table 1: Total and Active Cases in Mainland China as of End of February 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province/City/Region</th>
<th>Active Cases</th>
<th>Total Cases</th>
<th>New Cases</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>New Deaths</th>
<th>Total Discharged</th>
<th>Newly Discharged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>Beijing</td>
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<td>395</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>274</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
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<td>--</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>--</td>
<td>619</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>123</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hubei*</td>
<td>49,665</td>
<td>62,031</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>2,029</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>10,337</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Yunnan  111  172  --  1  1  60  --
Zhejiang  566  1,175  2  --  --  609  65
Total (Provincial Reports)  56,298  74,576  396  2,118  114  16,160  1,776
Total (NHC Reported)  56,303  74,576  394  2,118  114  16,155  1,779

Note: * Per the new NHC diagnosis guidelines (6th edition), clinically diagnosed cases for Hubei are no longer included in the total number of confirmed cases. Only lab-confirmed cases are included for all provinces: "Active cases" are total confirmed cases net of deaths and the number of patients treated and discharged from the hospital. Sources: NHC and provincial health commissions.

Beijing
5. (U) **Xi Calls for Greater Protections for Healthcare Workers:** President Xi Jinping said in public remarks that there exists a greater need to protect and care for medical workers to ensure they stay healthy and are not infected with COVID-19. Xi made the remarks at a recent event to train military medics participating in the COVID-19 prevention and control.

6. (U) **Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences President Warns Coronavirus May Be Here to Stay:** Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences president Wang Chen February 19 told CCTV in an interview that COVID-19 “may become a long-term disease that coexists with humans, just like flu.”

7. (U) **Government Offices Resume Partial Operation:** Contacts at China’s Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), and Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) told Embassy Beijing that national government offices had reopened and are currently operating under rotating shifts, with only some staff reporting to work each day.

Chengdu
8. (U) **Chongqing** municipal health authorities report that in recent days, most newly confirmed cases have been asymptomatic carriers identified through epidemiological studies.

Guangzhou
9. (SBU) Guangdong will make all-out efforts to promote economic stability and development, first by pushing forward the safe resumption of production, Party Secretary Li Xi said during a February 19 party meeting, echoing Governor Ma Xingrui’s February 15 and 16 calls for the same. In this spirit, more Guangdong municipalities announced companies could resume operations without special approval, including Zhongshan, Jiangmen, and several more districts in Shenzhen and Zhuhai. In an early sign that Guangdong cities may be moving to ease monitoring of inter-city travel, Zhongshan announced February 19 it would remove 41 checkpoints on inter-city highways and roads, and Shenzhen announced loosened procedures for frequent travelers. In Guangxi, Jinjing town (Mashan county, Nanning municipality) has closed all inbound and outbound vehicular traffic effective February 18 following a confirmed cluster of nine COVID-19 cases. To date, Post has not noticed easing of residential closed management procedures in South China.

Shanghai
10. (SBU) Active cases of COVID-19 continue to track downward across East China, according to official
statistics. Businesses across Shanghai and the region continue to reopen, though many face labor shortages and logistics challenges. Local governments across East China are using chartered trains, buses, and planes to bring back workers from low-risk regions to address the labor shortage. More public transportation routes and roads are resuming operations across the region.

11. (U) In a February 19 briefing for Consuls General organized by the Shanghai FAO, officials provided the following updates:

- (U) According to the Shanghai Health Commission, Shanghai has not experienced sustained person-to-person transmission. Shanghai has received permission from the National Health Commission to develop its own treatment protocols, which are not identical with the National Treatment Guidelines but have proven to be equally effective. The demographics of Shanghai’s cases are statistically the same as the national averages.

- (U) Shanghai Party Secretary Li Qiang has noted it is urgent to verify the reliability of COVID-19 tests and has instructed officials to strengthen capabilities to detect new infections by linking epidemiology studies with testing and with the efforts of the district, local, and neighborhood units. Checkpoints in the city will focus on identifying people from high-risk areas to ensure they follow the required quarantine protocols. Local and neighborhood units will provide assistance in sterilizing, ventilating, and cleaning public spaces.

- (SBU) A Shanghai Civil Affairs Office official acknowledged that some neighborhood committees have taken measures much more stringent than required by official guidelines, so the Civil Affairs Bureau is reminding them not to go beyond the official guidance. Only foreigners returning to Shanghai who have traveled to high-risk areas are required to self-quarantine. (Note: As reported previously, some neighborhoods are barring all outsiders from entering a residential area, are requiring quarantines for individuals beyond those recommended by the city, are requiring passes for residents to enter or leave, etc. End note.) Officials noted neighborhoods should establish checkpoints at the point of entry; measure the temperature of anyone seeking to enter, optionally registering people seeking to enter or depart; and enforce contactless deliveries of food and goods. Anecdotal information from American citizens and other foreigners who have returned to Shanghai suggests that despite municipal officials directing neighborhood committees not to implement measures stricter than required by the guidelines, many neighborhood committees continue to do so. When FAO has been contacted about these cases, they have continued to advise that while self-quarantine is not required, residents should follow the directions of neighborhood committees.

- (U) A senior official with the Development and Opening Commission said Beijing has issued instructions to boost the growth of the construction sector and consumption. As a result, the Commission is actively looking for shovel-ready construction and infrastructure projects that can be commenced as soon as possible after the crisis.

12. (U) The Zhejiang Health Commission updated its Five-color Risk Map on February 19, moving Yueqing from red ("high-risk") down to orange ("relatively high-risk"). There are currently no areas categorized as high-risk. The total number of areas categorized as high- or higher-risk was reduced from 11 to seven.

13. (SBU) More municipal and provincial governments continue relaxing restrictions on intra-city and intra-provincial transport. Additional public bus routes in Wenzhou and Ningbo in Zhejiang, and Lu’an, Anhui, and Yancheng, in Jiangsu resumed on February 20. Additional expressways opened in Hangzhou
and Suzhou. Suzhou announced some local parks are reopening on February 20, with additional parks opening on February 26.

**Shenyang**

**Heilongjiang**

14. (U) **Officials caution against blanket closed management:** Heilongjiang’s People’s Congress held a meeting to discuss the closed management mechanisms currently implemented throughout the province. While the People’s Congress emphasized that Heilongjiang must continue to apply stringent measures to control the spread of the virus, members also cautioned that officials do not have a blank check to implement any and all measures that could potentially impact economic activities and infringe upon peoples’ livelihoods. Rather than applying blanket measures city-wide, members of the People’s Congress encouraged officials to strategically implement measures only in key areas of concern.

15. (U) **Heilongjiang Focuses on Supporting Four Types of Enterprises Resuming Operations:** On February 18, the Department of Industry and Information Technology of Heilongjiang conducted a video conference meeting to promote the resumption of industrial enterprises in the province to minimize the impact of the epidemic on the industrial economy. The top priority discussed was to highlight the support of four types of enterprises to resume operations: 1) Prevention and control material production enterprises, 2) Basic needs production enterprises, 3) Agricultural and animal husbandry production enterprises, and 4) Enterprises that support regional economic growth. Officials also noted that masks, disinfectant, and other protective equipment is “stabilizing” and medical supply reserves are expanding as the province continues to increase funding for PPE production.

16. (U) **Harbin dispatches robots to hospitals:** Harbin announced that the city has dispatched “highly intelligent” robots to Harbin’s People’s Hospital and the Central Isolated Hotel in Pingfang district to be used for delivering food and medicine to patients. Developed by Lingyuan Technology Co. of the Institute of Automation of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, officials said that using robots for patients’ basic needs would greatly reduce the risk of medical personnel contracting the virus and improve quality of treatment.

**Jilin**

17. (U) **Development of COVID-19 Antibody Detection Kit in Jilin Enters Clinical Trial Stage:** A new COVID-19 antibody detection kit was recently developed by Jilin Shuang Zheng Medical Technology Company and the Joint Research Institute of Transitional Medicine at Jilin University. Clinical evaluation was completed in relevant medical institutions and is currently in the application stage for emergency approval through green channels of the State Drug Administration. The detection kit provides a simple, accurate and rapid tool that can be complemented with nucleic acid reagents to shorten the detection of COVID-19, accelerate the diagnosis of suspected cases and fast-track screening of close contacts.

**Liaoning**

18. (U) **Liaoning Party Secretary visits foreign companies:** Liaoning Party Secretary Chen Qiufa on February 19 visited South Korean companies POSCO Auto Parts Manufacturing and CJ Biotechnology, as well as German-owned Mubea Auto Parts Company to thank South Korea and Germany for supporting Liaoning and to learn about how foreign companies are preparing to resume operations. Both the ROK and German Consul Generals thanked Chen for his support and expressed confidence in Liaoning’s effort to control the spread of the virus.
19. (SBU) Dandong contacts relieved businesses are reopening but concerned about PPE shortage: After a 22-day suspension, eight bus routes in Dandong city in Liaoning have resumed operations (Note: Dandong is the focal point for China-DPRK commerce that sits at the mouth of the Yalu River and across the border from North Korea. End Note). According to officials, each bus will have a police officer on board to ensure every passenger is wearing a mask and to prevent overcrowding and close contacts between riders. Media reported that senior citizen cards and cash were no longer acceptable forms of payment; therefore, elders were forced to either download WeChat or obtain a metro card—the only two accepted methods of payment. Dandong officials also announced that large department stores were permitted to resume operations, but cautioned that all businesses must take proper precautions to ensure safety of all customers and employees. Dandong contacts told ConGenOffs that while they are relieved to see more businesses and transportations resuming operation, Dandong residents’ primary concern is PPE shortage. Some contacts asked ConGenOffs if Consulate Shenyang could provide medical supplies or help purchase PPEs online.

20. (U) Liaoning has not yet decided when schools can return: Correction regarding yesterday’s sitrep: CG Shenyang reported February 19 that “Liaoning authorities released a statement that high school and middle school students who are taking entrance exams this summer may resume classes on March 2, while rest of the high school and middle school students could not return until March 9. Elementary students from grades 4-6 could resume classes on March 16 but authorities have not yet announced a specific date for grades 1-3 and kindergarten. Liaoning officials noted that having students return in different stages would help minimize the risk of students and teachers contracting the virus.” Liaoning has not released any statement detailing when students can return to school. Liaoning Department of Education on January 31 said schools were not allowed to reopen before February 17, and that specific dates for resuming classes would be announced later. While international schools in Shenyang are planning to resume classes in March, since January 31, Liaoning has not released any information on when schools could reopen. CG Shenyang LES said that they also have not heard from schools when their children would be able to return to class.

21. (U) Shenyang’s First Batch of Automatic Mask Production Lines to Launch Soon: Shenyang Xinsong Group formed a project team to streamline automatic mask production lines in order to meet the current mask supply demands in the market. The company successfully developed fully automated medical and surgical mask production lines using state-of-the-art technology. The first batches of masks will be off the production lines soon and are expected to assist greatly with mask supply needs in the area.

Wuhan

22. (SBU) Military Enforcing Wuhan Residential Quarantines: A contact of an evacuated CG Wuhan officer reported that the arrival of military guards at residential communities in Wuhan has resulted in stricter quarantine enforcement. The contact, a PRC citizen, said military guards augmented the housing development’s private guard force on February 17. She previously could only leave her house once every three days but could still freely move from one part of the large housing development to another (the housing development was built in stages, with each stage housing thousands of people). However, starting February 17, the newly arrived military guards began strictly enforcing the rule on leaving your house once every three days.

23. (SBU) Tell-tale Drop in Nearby Wuhan City Cases: In a satellite city one hour outside of Wuhan said city’s strict 21-day home quarantine is
coming to an end. New cases in the city had dropped from dozens a day to two a day and hopeful that the quarantine would end soon.

(U) COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS

Guangzhou
24. (U) Zhong Nanshan, the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Health, and Shenzhen-based Evergrande property developer has joined forces with Harvard Medical School (HMS) to establish the “Sino-U.S. New Coronavirus Scientific Research Expert Group,” according to press reporting. The group held its second video conference February 19 to exchange and discuss cooperation on rapid detection and diagnosis, clinical treatment, drug screening, and vaccine development, according to separate reporting. HMS participants included George Q. Daley, MD, PhD, Dean; David Golan, MD, PhD, Dean for Research Operations and Global Programs; Arlene Sharpe, MD, PhD, Director of the Department of Immunology (HMS) and Co-Director of the Evergrande Center for Immunologic Diseases at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women’s Hospital; Bruce Walker, Director of the Ragon Institute of Mass General, MIT, and Harvard. Evergrande committed 800 million RMB (118 million USD) over five years to support the research. Over the long-term, the group will focus on virus traceability, infection and pathogenic mechanisms, rapid immunological detection methods, scientific research cooperation in ten major fields including genomic mutation and evolution.

25. (U) Guangdong provincial health authorities said February 19 at the daily press conference that about 89 percent of patients taking traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) medications have either recovered or exhibited improvements in their condition. The application of TCM in Hubei by a team of 312 Guangdong TCM medical professionals has shown that - combined with Western medicine - TCM shortens the treatment process, increases recovery rates, and reduces mortality. In Guangdong, TCM treatment combined with Western medicine has been applied to 93 percent of COVID-19 patients to help lower fevers and relieve fatigue. TCM treatment is reportedly most effective in early and mid-stages of infection.

Chengdu

Sichuan
26. (U) From February 17-18, Sichuan Party Chief Peng Qinghua conducted an inspection tour in rural areas surrounding Leshan and Liangshan, during which he focused on epidemic response, poverty reduction, resumption of business, and aid for migrant workers returning to their places of employment. Peng directed local authorities to focus on the following issues:

- Preventing social gatherings.
- Improving local capacity to receive suspected COVID-19 cases.
- Improving “health-data systems” to review migrant workers’ health status.
- Managing charter buses for migrant workers returning to work.

27. (U) Peng also said that local officials should “resolutely prevent and correct” extreme behaviors, including the overzealous implementation of epidemic response measures and excessive use of law
enforcement. Peng said that local governments should continue to protect people’s legitimate interests and rights; gain the people’s understanding and support; proactively deal with employment issues arising from the COVID-19 epidemic; and further ideological education and propaganda work.

28. (U) On February 19 the Chengdu Municipal COVID-19 Epidemic Response Command issued a notice announcing the resumption of some passenger train lines previously shut down as a result of the epidemic.

29. (U) On February 19, Sichuan’s provincial government issued guidance on the reopening of enterprises in key sectors. Districts and counties without confirmed COVID-19 cases should begin pushing for private enterprises to reopen, particularly companies in sectors focusing on energy, transportation, and the production of essential commodities, so long as they maintain a well-controlled and safe work environment. SOEs should take the lead in returning to work, according to the guidance. Owners of enterprises will assume full responsibility for a safe and healthy work environment. All facilities which plan on reopening should implement epidemic prevention measures and emergency reaction plans. The provincial government said it will closely work with other stakeholders to provide transportation to migrant workers.

30. (U) Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Western Sichuan remains the most severely impacted region of the province outside of metropolitan areas. On February 19, Tawu (Daofu) County in Kardze had 60 confirmed cases, 34 suspected patients, and 391 close contacts are under medical observation. Local health officials reportedly administered 8,309 viral RNA tests among close contacts of persons associated with the two initial cluster outbreak sites between February 12-18. The Sichuan provincial and Kardze prefectural CDC offices have sent 660 personnel to Daofu, along with PPE supplies, according to official statements. Authorities have designated the Kardze Prefecture People’s Hospital and Daofu County People’s Hospital as appropriate facilities for receiving COVID-19 patients, with technical support provided by Chengdu-based Huaxi Hospital. The county has also renovated another hospital and a government facility in Daofu, and reportedly has 129 beds on standby. The county is also planning to build another makeshift hospital using other facilities.

31. (U) Health authorities in Nanchong city have reported no further cases of H5N6 avian flu outbreak since February 9. While the outbreak of avian flu impacted several thousand poultry stock in the area, there were no reported cases of human transmission.

**Chongqing**

32. (U) All residents of Chongqing continue to face strict movement controls and are only permitted to leave their residential areas to procure basic supplies every few days or to report for essential work, according to Canadian diplomats. All people entering Chongqing are required to self-isolate for 14 days or report to a government isolation center if they do not have a permanent Chongqing address. Diplomats are exempt only if they arrive directly from another country. The vast majority of businesses remain closed, and the process to receive approval to reopen is strict and unclear. Hotels are closed to short-term guests, with a
possible handful of exceptions among luxury hotels.

33. (U) Chongqing Party Secretary Chen Min’er chaired an extended meeting of the Chongqing municipal party standing committee on February 18, during which he said the city has achieved “positive results” in previous phases of epidemic response, and is now moving into a new phase of “combining epidemic response with the resumption of production.” Districts and counties should make sound judgements on the risk level that they are facing to avoid unnecessarily onerous restrictions and one size fits all approaches, Chen said.

34. (U) During the same February 18 meeting of the municipal party standing committee, Chen Min’er announced that Chongqing will initiate preferable tax policies, ensure the sufficient supply of energy and utilities, and facilitate project financing for enterprises affected by the virus outbreak. The municipal government also will support migrant workers returning to their places of employment and match workers with local job opportunities, he said. Chen again emphasized the importance of Xi Jinping’s leadership in the combat against the epidemic.

35. (U) On February 18, Chongqing Mayor Tang Liangzhi met with a visiting State Council Epidemic Response Group. Tang thanked the group for its guidance in the prevention and control efforts in Chongqing. Sun Xinhua, head of the visiting group, praised Chongqing for its quick action.

36. (U) Following a similar announcement by the Sichuan government on February 19, the Chongqing municipal government said that it will roll out a “four-tiered, risk-based assessment system” to advise firms on resumption of normal operations. According to the classification system, firms in “low-risk zones” that have had no COVID-19 cases in the last 14 days can resume work. Firms in “medium-risk” zones with fewer than 50 COVID-19 cases can reopen in a “quick but orderly” manner. Firms in high-risk zones with more than 50 cases or in zones with clustered outbreaks in the last 14 days can only resume production “gradually and on a case by case basis.”

37. (U) Following similar moves in Yunnan, the Chongqing government announced on February 19 that it will introduce a health QR code system to monitor citizens’ health status. Residents will be required to swipe a QR code when entering or exiting public spaces and communal workspaces. Foreign residents are being advised to register on Chongqing’s official WeChat account. The system will be piloted by a series of companies starting February 22.

38. (U) On February 19 Chongqing’s Finance Bureau noted that the municipal government had spent 1.9 billion RMB ($270 million) on epidemic response so far, an increase of 350 million RMB ($50 million) over the last 11 days.

Yunnan

39. (U) Yunnan Party Secretary Chen Hao, who so far has maintained a low profile during the COVID-19 epidemic, visited the Yunnan Central Water Diversion Project Administration Bureau on February 19, during which he highlighted the importance of resuming major infrastructure projects.

40. (U) According to a February 19 press release, Kunming municipality will continue rigid closed management practices in rural areas and re-issued a list of 12 epidemic control measures.
41. (U) On February 19, **Yunnan province announced the gradual resumption of inter-provincial bus services** starting February 21, with the exception of lines to Hubei or destinations over 800 km.

42. (U) The Yunnan government announced on February 19 that it will roll out the same four-tiered, risk-based assessment system recently announced in Chongqing and Sichuan, in which authorities will allow enterprises to reopen depending on whether they are located in low-risk, medium-risk, or high-risk areas. Risk levels are determined by the number of COVID-19 cases in a given area during the preceding 14-day period.

**Guizhou**

43. (U) **Traffic in Guizhou has reportedly tripled after the removal of road blockades on February 16** and is expected to continue growing rapidly, according to a statement issued by the Guizhou Provincial Transportation Department on February 18. The Department’s current priorities include preventing individuals infected with COVID-19 from entering the province, containing the spread of the virus, and normalizing traffic to ensure logistics and supply chains.

(U) INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

44. (U) **China Sends Testing Kits to Japan:** China’s *Global Times* reported that the PRC government has donated COVID-19 nucleic acid testing kits to Japan (link). A spokesperson at the PRC Embassy in Japan told press that BGI in Shenzhen and Shenzhen MengMa Charity Foundation had donated the kits to National Institute of Infectious Diseases of Japan.

45. (U) Fosun Pharma’s Vice President announced they ordered 140 non-invasive ventilators, with a total value of RMB 15 million (USD 2.1 million), from their affiliate Breas Medical Group in Sweden for donation to 14 Hubei hospitals. *(CG Shanghai)*

46. (U) Essilor Group, a French visual health company, donated RMB 1.5 million (USD 210,000) and 200,000 pairs of goggles to medical staff in Hubei Province, fever clinics in other parts of the country, and traffic and medical staff at Shanghai’s highway checkpoints. *(CG Shanghai)*

47. (U) Shanghai-headquartered video sharing site Bilibili is donating RMB 10 million (USD 1.4 million) to Wuhan, together with RMB 300,000 (USD 42,200) worth of medical supplies. The company is also offering free monthly subscriptions to 100,000 housebound viewers in Hubei and Sichuan provinces. *(CG Shanghai)*

(U) THIRD COUNTRY RESPONSE EFFORTS AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

48. (U) Nothing to report.

(U) ECONOMIC AND SUPPLY CHAIN IMPACT

49. (U) **PBOC Claims Strong Fundamentals and Limited Impact of Virus on the Economy:** In a report release by PRC’s central bank the PBOC (People’s Bank of China) February 19, the PBOC listed the control
of the epidemic as its top priority and asserted that the impact of the coronavirus on the economy will be limited “as the epidemic has not changed the country's economic fundamentals.” PBOC stated it will help companies affected by the epidemic by lowering lending rates, increasing credit support, and providing more medium- to long-term loans. It urged national and local banks to take full advantage of the liquidity released through the central bank re-lending program to provide targeted credit support for companies that directly participate in epidemic control effort. The central bank said it would monitor short-term fluctuations in the consumer prices, adding that "there is no basis for long-term inflation or deflation."

50. (U) SMEs Struggle to Stay Afloat Despite Government Relief Policies To address the plight of SMEs, local authorities have reduced or exempted rents and payment of social insurance. PRC’s State Council announced it would eliminate or reduce required corporate contributions to employee social, medical, and unemployment funds for a period of time. However, many SME owners said these policies alone will not help address their immediate cash flow issues.

51. (U) Closed Schools and Self-Quarantined Teleworkers A Boon for Alibaba and Tencent APPs: Closed schools and homebound office workers have created a huge demand for virtual office tools, with Chinese tech firms Alibaba and Tencent being the main service providers. Alibaba's DingTalk is the most download free App in China's iOS App store, followed by Tencent Conference. DingTalk has been particularly swift in spotting the emerging need in the education sector. Nearly 600,000 teachers reported using DingTalk to conduct their online classes. According to media reports, some international schools have had to moved away from foreign online platforms due to slow Internet speed or VPN problems and instead have been using “more local friendly” online tools such as DingTalk and Tencent Conference. On February 17, PRC’s Ministry of Education launched a national cloud learning platform for millions of students who are restricted to their homes over safety concerns arising from the Covid-19 outbreak.

52. (U) Covid-19 Outbreak Reduced Spring Festival Travel by Half: Passenger trips during the Chinese New Year Spring Festival period dropped by more than 50 percent this year, the country's top transport authority said on Wednesday. In December 2019, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) forecasted 3 billion trips during the holiday travel period from January 10 to February 18, however the actual figure was approximately 1.48 billion. The country recorded 210 million rail trips during the period — 196 million fewer than during the same period a year ago, a decrease of 48.3 percent, according to China State Railway Group.

53. (U) Heavily indebted private-sector conglomerate HNA Group will be taken over by the Hainan provincial government and its assets divided, according to international press reports. The Hainan-based HNA operates Hainan Airlines – which has 13 China-U.S. routes, all of which were suspended amid COVID-19. HNA Group has been shedding foreign assets since 2018.

54. (U) State-owned Guangzhou Auto Corp. (GAC) announced it would begin mass production of facemasks on February 20 using five production lines. GAC said the masks would be distributed by Guangzhou authorities to medical personnel and public transit workers. The firm on February 12 had said it wanted 12 production lines running by February 22, with eventual goal of 30.

55. (U) Hainan Governor Shen Xiaoming visited Qionghai city February 18, home of the Bo'ao Forum for Asia, to observe epidemic-control efforts on the site, according to press reports. The Forum, which annually convenes senior Chinese officials and high-level foreign attendees, is currently scheduled for March 24-27.
56. (U) Officials at a State Council press conference on February 19 announced more than 50 percent of large enterprises in Shanghai and Jiangsu had returned to work, while small and medium-sized enterprises faced more challenges resuming work and production. Meanwhile, the Shanghai Commerce Commission also reported on February 19 that of 697 companies surveyed, 86 percent had received permission to restart. Breaking the numbers down, approximately 93 percent of service sector businesses surveyed are working, including retail, food, delivery, and accounting firms. Deloitte and UPS are among the firms that authorities highlighted as open. However, officials noted that the service sector, which they said accounts for 70 percent of GDP, has been hit very hard in the short-term (though online grocery shopping more than doubled). Eighty percent of manufacturing firms surveyed have received approval to restart, including Tesla and J&J. Fortune 500 companies are doing better than average — over 90 percent surveyed have received permission to restart. (Note: It is unclear how representative surveyed companies are of the overall business landscape in Shanghai. End note.) Shanghai and State Council officials both acknowledged problems related to a shortage of returning workers, poor transportation and logistics, and difficulty in supporting the industrial chain. Officials in Shanghai encouraged eligible companies to take advantage of 28 business support policies issued by the city on February 5.

57. (U) Shanghai law enforcement officials announced on February 19 that 14 percent of small vendors that have reopened (approximately 12,000) have been ordered to improve virus prevention measures. These measures include registering health information for all employees, ensuring those returning from key areas complete a 14-day self-quarantine, wearing facemasks, performing daily temperature checks, and disinfecting the business every day.

58. (U) Shanghai officials announced on February 19 that chartered trains and buses can be used to bring workers back to the city. These trains will transport migrant workers from areas where the epidemic has been brought under control and remains stable, such as Sichuan, to the Yangtze River Delta region through March 31. The Municipal Road Transportation Management Bureau announced businesses can apply to arrange chartered buses to bring back employees. Since Sunday, trial trains ran from Guizhou, Henan, Anhui, and Sichuan provinces to transport migrant workers to Hangzhou and Ningbo in Zhejiang. Local governments in Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces can apply for such trains and buses. Similarly, Taizhou, Zhejiang announced February 16 it will charter flights to bring workers from Chongqing, Guiyang, Chengdu, Kunming, and Xi’an back to Taizhou.

59. (SBU) The Shanghai and Ningbo ports are facing a shortage of reefer plugs, leading to delays and additional costs for importing items in refrigerated containers. These challenges are leading international container and shipping companies to suggest customers change the destination of shipments, especially for fresh and chilled commodities. One diary importer reported to CG Shanghai’s Agricultural Trade Office that supply chain challenges associated with coronavirus had caused recent shipments from Europe to be diverted or delayed due to labor shortages.

60. (U) Ningbo launched China’s first epidemic prevention insurance policies for small and micro enterprises. The policies will pay up to RMB 100,000 (USD 14,200) for enterprises that stop work or stop production due to infectious diseases. The government will subsidize half of the RMB 2,000 (USD 285) premium for each enterprise.

61. (U) Suzhou on February 18 announced additional measures to help businesses resume operations,
including employment subsidies per worker, subsidizing unemployment insurance, deferring payment of social security premiums, reducing interest rates on loans, etc.

62. (SUB) COVID-19 Impact on JD.com Shenyang: A delivery personnel at JD.Com Shenyang branch told ConGenOff that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the company’s operations. JD Shenyang’s inventory is rapidly decreasing since many manufacturing companies have not yet resumed operations, and those that have resumed were behind schedule. Additionally, delivery service and supply chain continue to be a challenge, as JD trucks from other provinces face difficulty entering Shenyang due to roadblocks and highway closures. He lamented that delivery service within Shenyang has also slowed down because trucks are stopped multiple times at checkpoints for body temperatures and questioning by the authorities. Moreover, customers take longer time to pick up their packages due to closed management, forcing delivery personnel to wait much longer than usual at residential complexes. Checkpoints and movement restrictions combined with dwindling inventory has led JD Shenyang to reduce its daily delivery schedules.

63. (SUB) Contact says company’s delivery process significantly impacted by COVID-19 and closed management: A contact at the Zhengsheng Husbandry Co, a Shenyang-based animal feed production company, told ConGenOff that one of the biggest challenges the company faces is transportation and delivery. The contact noted that in addition to roadblocks and highways, another major problem for the company is that some truck drivers are unwilling to drive across provinces to deliver the products because they think they are at higher risk of contracting the virus driving long distances through multiple provinces (Note: CG Shenyang was told by other business contacts that their operations have also been impacted due to workers’ fear of the virus. For example, Walmart Liaoning said that nearly half of Sam’s Club Shenyang employees have resigned since COVID-19 outbreak, and a contact in Dalian told ConGenOff that seafood processing companies are concerned about resuming their businesses because many of their workers are hesitant to return due to growing fear of the virus. End Note). Additionally, contact noted that delivering products to rural areas are even more problematic since authorities there are generally stricter about allowing entry to outside trucks and personnel. In some rural areas, authorities require delivery personnel to drop off supplies at the border and force the customers to come pick up the packages themselves which slows down the overall delivery process that is already delayed due to roadblocks and checkpoints.

64. (U) While the central government has introduced a series of measures to ensure an adequate supply of animal feed to help agricultural companies restore production as soon as possible, in Sichuan local contacts report their business operations remain at 70 percent of their normal capacity. The national Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs have reportedly instructed local governments not to intercept or detain vehicles transporting feed, live animals, or animal products if they have a necessary traffic permit.

65. (U) According to CG Chengdu contacts at China Xiangtai Food Co., Ltd., the company has seen a 300 percent increase in supermarket sales over the 2020 Chinese New Year season compared to the same period last year, despite the COVID-19 outbreak. Headquartered in Chongqing, China Xiangtai is a new food company primarily engaged in pork processing, as well as selling beef, lamb and poultry products.

(SBU) SUPPORT FOR U.S. CITIZENS

Chengdu

66. (SUB) As of February 20, Chengdu ACS has received no new information of American citizens who
have been ordered to self-quarantine or been sent to a controlled quarantine facility. Chengdu ACS has observed more discussions on AmCit WeChat groups about people planning their return to China. As AmCits return, they will likely face a 14-day period of self-quarantine in most major cities in Southwest China. Many AmCits who have remained in China throughout the epidemic note that their residential communities have implemented “closed-management” restrictions. Many Americans in Chengdu are only allowed to leave their apartment once per day or once every two days to get supplies.

Shanghai

67. (SBU) The Consulate continues to reach out to the FAO to get clarity on self-quarantine regulations in Shanghai on behalf of returning American citizens who have been ordered by their neighborhood committee to complete a 14-day quarantine. As reported above, while Shanghai only requires this for those who have traveled to high-risk areas, in practice, many locations are requiring an in-home quarantine for anyone returning to Shanghai, regardless of from where.

Wuhan

68. (U) Wuhan Maternity Hospital Unable to Provide Birth Certificate to U.S. Citizen: An American citizen reported that a private maternity hospital in Wuhan was unable to provide a birth certificate after she gave birth. The hospital said they had too few staff to handle administrative tasks such as birth records. The hospital could not give a date for when they would be able to provide a birth certificate.

69. (SBU) U.S. Citizen in Changsha Reports Free Movement: A U.S. citizen in Changsha reported that he was able to move around freely as long as he carried a resident’s card. He reported that American Citizen WeChat groups in the city were largely concerned with how to get paid for missed work, how to work from home, and, in some cases, more restrictive housing policies. He noted that he had not heard of any problems from U.S. citizens in Changsha and that those who have stayed in the city to this point are not planning on leaving.

(SBU) POST OPERATIONS

Chengdu

70. (U) Civil aviation is still operating from Chengdu, though with decreased viable flights for USG personnel to depart Chengdu for the United States. Viable transit destinations remaining include Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul, and Hong Kong. Only two international flights from Chongqing, to Bangkok and Hong Kong, remain in operation.

Guangzhou

71. (SBU) Post Medical Provider returned to Guangzhou February 19 with medical equipment that can test for a variety of respiratory viruses and bacteria. While it cannot test for COVID-19, it can test for 22 other respiratory pathogens and give medical personnel a better picture of any illnesses that occur at Post.

(U) MEDIA RUNDOWN

72. (SBU) South China PAS media contacts posted satirical comments on the government’s response to COVID-19. The manager of an online media outlet in Guangzhou noted that with the increasing closed management policies of cities and provinces in the COVID-19 campaign, there has also been an uptick in the
blocking of WeChat groups, Weibo posts, and other websites. A leader of a WeChat public account in Guangzhou posted commentary that the government should gain respect and authority to govern by not completely squashing rumors. A Guangzhou-based blogger had written about a January order given by the Director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology to the staff in January to not discuss COVID-19. This post has since been blocked on social media. (CG Guangzhou)

73. (U) Guangzhou netizens shared comments made by Wang Chen, the Vice-President of the Chinese Academy of Engineering who said that society should prepare for long-term co-existence with COVID-19 after this year, with commenters expressing concern. They also discussed reports that nine individuals are being investigated by the Guangzhou police for obstructing the COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control measures, including deliberate concealment of symptoms and refusal to quarantine, with some netizens commenting that these individuals should be severely punished for their actions. (CG Guangzhou)

74. (U) On February 16, Wuhan authorities announced that a medical team from Liaoning will take over management of 17 of the 32 wards at Leishenshan Hospital, one of two emergency hospitals built in Hubei in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Since early February, Liaoning province has sent more than more than 1,000 workers to Hubei to assist with relief efforts. Media reports and updates regarding the news quickly went viral on social media platforms in Northeast China under the hashtag #Liaoning Medical Team Takes Over Management at Leishenshan Hospital#. By February 20, it had become a top trending topic with a viewership of 15 million and more than 11,000 comments. Chinese netizens in the region expressed mixed opinions on the issue. Most praised the high-caliber medical skills of Liaoning medical personnel and welcomed the inspiring and positive news, however some netizens complained about underreporting of the actual contribution of relief efforts from Liaoning and national bias towards people from Northeast China. Others voiced concerns about the impact sending medical workers to Hubei would have on local medical services and unequal access to medical treatment in the country. The following additional topics were also trending on social media sites in Northeast China: 1) Over 100 patients cured and discharged in Heilongjiang, 2) 1,100 milliliters of plasma donated by healed patients in Jilin, and 3) Changchun medical waste treatment plant runs around-the-clock. (CG Shenyang)

75. (U) Social media users continued to criticize a propaganda video released by authorities in Gansu province showing female health workers crying as their heads are shaved, ostensibly to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Social media users questioned whether such measures were necessary and urged local government officials to remember that health workers are still human beings.
UNCLASSIFIED

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MRN: 20 KUALA LUMPUR 700
Date/DTG: Aug 18, 2020 / 180207Z AUG 20
From: AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: ECON, TBIO, KNCV, SRLH, CDC, SENV, KCWT, MY
Captions: SENSITIVE
Reference: A) 20 Kuala Lumpur 686
B) 20 Kuala Lumpur 744
C) 20 Kuala Lumpur 340
Subject: Malaysia: Health Experts Overview Zoonotic Risks and Assess Government Detection Capabilities

1. **Summary and Comment.** Following the outbreak of COVID-19, Malaysian government health officials, wildlife agencies, and NGOs are increasingly concerned about the potential of zoonotic diseases emerging within Malaysia. The country’s role as the origin of the 1998 Nipah virus, as well as ongoing local zoonotic disease outbreaks, has left a lasting impact on health officials’ approach to public health policies. Health experts are also concerned that land-use change, human-animal contact, and wildlife trafficking exacerbate risks of zoonotic diseases making the leap from animals to humans. While Malaysia does not host large scale wet markets serving exotic wildlife products, small scale wet markets proliferate in rural and indigenous communities, especially in Malaysian Borneo. Recognizing this threat, Malaysia’s federal and Sabah and Sarawak state governments have or are developing labs specialized for zoonotic disease and wildlife forensics. USG support through USAID’s PREDICT program was instrumental in the establishment of these labs, paving the way for Malaysia’s early COVID-19 responses (Tab 1). Post continues to highlight our public health and research assistance, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, which resonates positively with Malaysian audiences. **End Summary.**

As Forests Recede, So Does the Boundary Between Wildlife and Its Viruses
2. **(SBU)** EcoHealth Alliance, an NGO focused on infectious disease, shared their concern that land-use change, such as deforestation for new developments and plantation agriculture, are increasing human-animal contact and thus opportunities for zoonotic disease transmission. As Malaysians push further into the forests, wildlife like rodents and monkeys move into urbanized zones. While Peninsular Malaysia experiences more human-wildlife contact due to its population density, Malaysian Borneo is the site of ongoing deforestation. Sabah’s push to double its non-palm oil agricultural production and construction of the pan-Borneo highway will raise the level of human-wildlife contact further. Leptospirosis, which has led to hundreds of deaths over the past few years, is spread from animal urine in water bodies and has been exacerbated by increased flooding and urban development. The state of Sarawak has also reported 22 rabies cases and 21 deaths since 2019, with the origin of the outbreak believed to be feral dogs from West Kalimantan.

3. **(SBU)** Animal husbandry also poses major zoonotic risk. The 1998 Nipah outbreak in Malaysia was contracted by humans through consumption of local pigs, though researchers now believe the virus originated in native flying foxes. Health experts explain that Malaysia’s experience with Nipah and SARS deeply shaped the Ministry of Health’s (MOH) awareness of and preparations for future outbreaks. Wildlife officials in Sarawak shared that some rural communities are farming exotic wildlife for consumption, which faces little regulation. Swiftlet nest collection, driven by high demand from consumers in China, has become a lucrative industry for locals in Malaysian Borneo and poses a significant risk through potential contacts with bats at collection sites.

**Wet Markets Not A Serious Concern in Peninsular Malaysia.***

4. **(SBU)** Both NGOs and wildlife officials believe wet markets are not a serious concern in Peninsular Malaysia, since live animals and exotic wildlife products are not openly present in Malaysia’s large urban areas. Wet markets that sell agricultural produce, seafood, and livestock products are regulated by local councils and state health departments. TRAFFIC, a counter wildlife trafficking NGO, has identified restaurants that sell wildlife goods illegally, but enforcement operations remain rare, as goods are marketed privately and sold online. Malaysia’s indigenous populations have hunting rights but are prohibited from selling bushmeat, although prohibitions are difficult to enforce. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN) Director General privately acknowledged that bushmeat trading in the villages along the central forest spine of Peninsular Malaysia occurs, but uncovering local networks is difficult.

**...But Proliferate in Rural Borneo**

5. **(SBU)** Wet markets present a more significant concern in rural Malaysian Borneo, especially in the state of Sarawak. Officials from the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) and Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) engage in weekly undercover raids of wet markets and frequently find protected species for sale as pets or for consumption. SFC officers shared that indigenous communities consume flying foxes, a high-risk species for zoonotic disease, believing that its meat resolves asthmatic symptoms. One health expert noted that indigenous people may have developed immunities to zoonotic diseases that could affect those outside the communities.
Online sales are expanding the local trade outside of physical wet markets, exacerbated by shortcomings in current legislation which provides limited online enforcement authorities for wildlife officials (REF A). The outreach director of the SFC commented that public outreach to indigenous communities, which make up a substantial portion of the population, would be effective in dissuading them from consuming exotic wildlife, but it was challenging given the diversity of their language and remoteness of some settlements. The government is also reluctant to impose severe penalties on indigenous people due to their relatively low income and their traditional interactions with wildlife. The SFC official noted that COVID-19 is leading to greater local concerns for wet markets among locals and several mayors had shut down local markets due to fears of local zoonotic risks.

**Wildlife Trafficking Risks Spreading Viruses Beyond Malaysia’s Borders**

6. (\textbf{Subj}) The PERHILITAN Director General noted with displeasure that some Chinese scientists and media had identified Malaysian (Sunda) pangolins as a potential origin of COVID-19. PERHILITAN’s wildlife forensics lab, which has received previous support from USG programs and is considered among the best in the region (REF B), performed subsequent studies on seized Malaysian pangolin parts and found no signs of COVID-19 strains within their genetic material. Health experts and wildlife officials, however, raise concerns that smuggled Malaysian pangolins do risk spreading zoonotic diseases beyond Malaysia’s borders.

EcoHealth Alliance shared that TRACE, a wildlife forensics NGO, is working with the PERHILITAN lab to identify markers for Malaysian (Sunda) pangolins to determine if they originate in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, or Sarawak, to aid wildlife crime investigations as well as zoonotic disease tracing. In addition to pangolins, other trafficked wildlife that have tested positive for potential viruses include civets, certain rodent species, primates, and to a lesser extent some reptile species; the latter two are linked to the exotic pet trade. Tests on other species, such as clouded leopards, are also ongoing within Malaysia to determine additional potential vectors. Exotic eating houses catering to tourists in Sabah often serve pangolins and other high-risk species, and some NGOs expect demand for exotic eating to increase as China and Vietnam crackdown on exotic wildlife products, and Sabah reopens to foreign tourists (REFs C and D). Wildlife contacts note that law enforcement’s growing wildlife forensics units and labs, which is utilized in wildlife trafficking investigations, is also bolstering zoonotic disease detection capabilities.

**Federal and State Government Labs Bolstering Detection Capabilities**

7. (\textbf{Subj}) The Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN), which is directly under the purview of the federal government, cooperates closely with the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Veterinary Department, as well as several universities and EcoHealth Alliance, in its zoonotic detection research. All of Malaysia’s labs are certified in accordance with the Biosafety in Microbiology and Biomedical Laboratories, the United States standard used by the CDC and NIH. NGO contacts note that PERHILITAN’s wildlife lab ranks as one of the best in the SouthEast Asia (REF B). One contact working with the lab shared that although the Ministry hopes to raise the lab to a Level 3 Biosafety Lab (BSL-3), the current priority should be funding for repairs to maintain its Level 2 Biosafety Lab (BSL-2) certification and assure it
can maintain its real-time wildlife forensics and zoonotic detection capabilities. He noted privately that although the government invests significant funding for new equipment, the government does not provide sufficient funding for maintenance leading to frequent breakdowns of critical equipment. MOH’s Sungai Buloh medical center already hosts a BSL-3 lab which conducts diagnostics for zoonotics diseases in human subjects and coordinates closely with PERHILITAN’s lab in detecting viral transmissions between wildlife and humans.

8. (SBU) EcoHealth Alliance expressed concern that Sabah and Sarawak have to file formal requests, which face lower priority then Peninsular samples and additional bureaucratic hurdles, to have wildlife products tested in the PERHILITAN lab, leading to delays in results and biosafety risks while samples are in transit. As part of a partnership with EcoHealth Alliance and with the support of PREDICT, the SWD has founded the Sabah Wildlife Health, Genetic and Forensic Laboratory (WHGFL) which has received a BSL-2 certification seven years running, although it lacks some of the capabilities of its Peninsular counterpart. While this lab faced risks to its physical structural integrity due to soil erosion at its location, the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) is stabilizing its structural foundation. The University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is also launching a Borneo Medical Health and Research Center, which will include its own BSL-2 lab to complement the WHGFL, which, when complete, will increase the state’s testing and diagnostic capacity, allowing for research, and providing training facilities to nurture local talent. Through a Sabah-based Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) program, the lab is bolstering its wildlife forensics capabilities, receiving training for its forensic unit, and developing connections with international experts. The lab also tests wildlife products from northern Sarawak, the federal territory of Labuan, and Brunei, due to its relative proximity. UMS also hosts a BSL-3 lab which has a similar relationship with the Sabah wildlife labs as the Sungai Buloh facility in Peninsular Malaysia.

9. (SBU) The University of Malaysia Sarawak, in cooperation with the SFC, are in the process of developing a lab for Sarawak, though it is at least two years from completion. Sarawak is seeking international partners in the development of the lab and has begun studies on local bat populations near the state capital of Kuching.

USG PREDICT Program Bolsters Zoonotic Detection and Prepared Officials for COVID-19

10. (SBU) USAID’s PREDICT program facilitated over 80,000 tests in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia, identifying 76 new viruses and 29 known viruses, including 11 of zoonotic origin. Sixty-six of the new viruses were identified in Sabah and 11 in Peninsular Malaysia; testing has not yet taken place in Sarawak. Eight new coronaviruses were detected in Malaysian bats and rats, with three genetically related to SARS CoV, and three viruses were detected within 15 human subjects. 627 health care experts from government, universities, and NGOs have participated in PREDICT trainings, boosting skills such as detection, surveillance, and SOP development.

11. (SBU) Alumni of PREDICT programs have played a critical role in Malaysia’s COVID-19 outbreak response. A health contact privately shared that the first three cases of COVID-19 in Malaysia were diagnosed by health officials using the PREDICT Quan protocol. Once the World Health Organization (WHO) released the COVID-19 Berlin qPCR protocol for testings, the PREDICT implementors arranged for the protocol’s distribution for the federal National
Public Health Lab, University of Malaysia Sarawak, and the Kota Kinabalu Public Health Lab for testing. Additionally, due to long turnaround times for tests processed in Peninsular Malaysia during the early stages of the outbreak, local labs in Sabah informally utilized its own testing protocols developed under PREDICT for initial screenings (REF D).

**Public Messaging**

12. (U) Since April, the Public Affairs section has continued to promote U.S.-Malaysia cooperation on combating zoonotic diseases. In the early days of the pandemic, the Chinese Embassy expended significant effort to showcase healthcare diplomacy outreach; however, post-sponsored focus group discussions with Malaysians of all backgrounds reflected that Malaysians still hold the Chinese responsible for the pandemic and distrust Chinese messaging. Post deployed targeted social media content to showcase how the United States has been a long-time healthcare partner, including infographics describing over $2 million in U.S.-funded COVID-19 relief efforts and USAID implementer EcoHealth Alliance’s work with the USAID PREDICT program. The Ambassador highlighted the USG’s support for PREDICT as part of her widely-read (in three languages) July 4 op-ed that underscored the longstanding strength of our bilateral cooperation in this incredibly important area. Additionally, in April, the Public Diplomacy section hosted a Virtual Talk with Dr. Peter Daszak, the president of EcoHealth Alliance highlighting longstanding U.S. health and humanitarian assistance in Malaysia.

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Kuala Lumpur: Lakhdir, Kamala S

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Date/DTG: May 26, 2017 / 260619Z MAY 17
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Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: SENV, SHLH, NIH, WHO, PHS, KGHI, MY
Captions: SENSITIVE
Subject: Malaysia Launches Joint Five-Year Zoonotic Research Project with U.S. Funding

1. (U) Summary: The U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) launched a five-year, $3.9M zoonotic research project in collaboration with the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH), the Department of Wildlife and Natural Parks (DWNP), and other stakeholders. Funded entirely by DTRA, the project will improve Malaysia’s capacity to detect and respond to zoonotic disease starting with targeted surveillance of bats in Malaysia for viruses that could potentially spillover to humans and other animals. This project also supports the White House’s Global Health Security Agenda, which identifies Malaysia as a partner country in efforts to strengthen global capacity to detect, prevent, and respond to emerging infectious disease threats. End Summary.

Malaysia’s 1999 Nipah Virus Outbreak and the “One Health” Approach

2. (U) The 1999 Nipah virus outbreak in Malaysia and Singapore originated in bats, was transmitted to pigs, and ultimately spilled over to infect humans. It caused 105 human deaths and had a devastating impact on the pork industry in Malaysia. The government paid USD $35 million in compensation for the 1.1 million pigs it destroyed and lost an estimated USD $105 million in tax revenue. Increased urbanization, land use change, and human encroachment on wildlife habitats have led to more interactions between people and wildlife, resulting in increased potential for zoonotic disease transmission like the Nipah virus. In response, international health researchers have adopted the “One Health” model, which recognizes human health is connected to the health of animals and the environment and integrates these sectors to
prevent, detect and respond to disease threats. In 2009, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched the ongoing Emerging Pandemic Threats PREDICT program, which aims to integrate wildlife surveillance into the public health infrastructure to create an early warning system for zoonotic disease spillover. The New York-based EcoHealth Alliance (EHA) is the One Health lead implementer for PREDICT Malaysia and partners with the Ministry of Health, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Sabah Wildlife Department, and Department of Veterinary Services.

Malaysia Is Building Its Capacity to Detect and Respond to Zoonotic Viruses

3. (U) In collaboration with EHA and the Government of Malaysia, the DTRA project, launched on May 4th, will investigate zoonotic transmission risks by conducting biological surveillance of henipaviruses and filoviruses in bats, livestock and humans. It will track the distribution and spillover of these viruses at local agricultural operations and among aboriginal communities in peninsular Malaysia. Virus samples collected will be screened, and additional targeted surveillance in wildlife, livestock and people in indigenous communities and on farms will occur. Once the samples are analyzed and catalogued, the Malaysian government will receive this information before they are published. In coordination with USAID’s PREDICT program, it will also fill critical gaps in Malaysia’s “One Health” capacity by engaging all three sectors of wildlife, livestock, and human health through a coordinated surveillance strategy. By strengthening the integration between those sectors, disease detection, diagnosis and reporting will become streamlined and expedited, speed up decision-making, and reduce unnecessary duplication of infrastructure and communication.

4. (U) Malaysian government officials have identified better coordination on surveillance between human and animal health officials as a priority for the country’s participation in the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA). Current efforts in this regard include a Zoonosis Technical Working Group consisting of the Ministries of Health and Natural Resources and Environment (NRE). Following the DTRA project launch, Econoffs visited NRE’s new National Wildlife Forensic Laboratory (NWFL), a state-of-the-art facility opened in 2015 to conduct forensic investigations of wildlife crime. The lab aims to become a global leader in wildlife disease and DNA research. NWFL holds over 17,000 virus samples in its Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank and collaborates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s pathology lab in Oregon and the Wildlife Forensic Network initiative run by UK-based TRACE to combat international wildlife trafficking. DTRA researchers noted the newly-outfitted lab’s impressive apparatus and one visiting U.S. Army medical researcher remarked, “this place makes my lab look like a run-down garage.”

Further Gaps in “One Health” Approach Remain

5. (SBU) Comment: Malaysia has relatively high animal and human spillover risks due to its biodiversity, climate and close proximity of animals to humans. Therefore, the DTRA project and its “One Health” focus is a promising start and focuses on a subset of sampling sites, chosen to best illustrate potential zoonotic spillover risk. However, future work will have to include broader sampling - both in geographic area covered and species sampled (outside peninsular Malaysia and beyond bats) - in order to paint a complete picture of the risk of zoonotic spillover
and its effects on human health. Close and continuing coordination among public health and zoonotic officials and laboratories can provide insights into where additional resources need to be focused and areas for future action, such as field and laboratory training, equipment, SOPs, legislative support for disease surveillance, and coordination and communication among government departments. The GHSA identifies zoonotic health as an action package, focusing on practices that minimize the spillover of zoonotic diseases from animals into human populations. In GHSA discussions, the Malaysian Health Ministry has identified greater coordination between human and animal health officials as a top priority for building its global health security capacity. Post will continue to work with Malaysian government agencies to ensure this “One Health” approach remains at the forefront of combating infectious disease threats. End Comment.

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1. The Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) respectfully requests U.S. Embassy clearance from the standpoint of American foreign policy objectives and its responsibilities under Title V of the International Relations Authorization Act, to make a grant award to the: Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The title of the Grant is Conducting Public Health Research in China.

2. Funding/Performance Period information: $1,046,976 Award Date: September 30, 2017; Project Period: September 30, 2017 to September 29, 2022; Principal Researcher: Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Beijing, China, CHINA

3. Purpose of the Project

There are seven research projects:

a) The Development of Norovirus Laboratory Network in China (CaliciNet China): This project aims to develop and implement CaliciNetChina in a selected number of sentinel sites in six provinces. This new project can help better evaluate the emergence of new strains as well as improve our understanding of the temporal trends and transmission routes of norovirus that result in outbreaks.
b) Spatio-temporal Study of Human Brucellosis in Liaoning and Shandong. The long-term goal is to improve the understanding of human brucellosis prevalence in the study areas and to identify high-risk hotspots areas. This information can help to improve national strategies on prevention and control of human brucellosis in China.

c) Pilot Study on evaluating the effectiveness of using SMS and hotline service provided by 12320 health hotline to Improve PTB patients Treatment Compliance in Yunnan and Gansu: This pilot project has three specific aims: 1) Estimate the impact of using 12320 Health Hotline interventions on: a. the percentage of patients missing TB medication and b. Treatment dropout rate (over time), 2) Evaluate the increase of patient’s awareness/knowledge following Health Hotline interventions. 3) Assess the acceptability and feasibility of the 12320 Health Hotline services from perspective of TB patients and doctors participating in the project.

d) Identifying the Etiology of Acute Febrile Illnesses - a Multi-Sentinel Site Surveillance; Project in Guangdong and Yunnan Provinces, China: 1. Determine whether Zika virus is circulating or co-circulating with other infections 2. Assess which pathogens are most likely to cause of symptomatic AFI (and those more likely to circulate among asymptomatic persons). 3. Evaluate the performance of TAC compared to the Trioplex platform as a surveillance tool for identification of Zika, dengue, and Chikungunya viruses as well as other AFI related etiologies.

e) Active surveillance for respiratory illness associated with influenza among pregnant women in Suzhou, China: The long-term goal is to understand the risk of laboratory-confirmed influenza virus infection and illness development among pregnant women during influenza season in Suzhou, China.

f) Influenza illness and hospitalizations averted by influenza vaccination among young children in Suzhou, China: This study’s specific aims are: To estimate the direct effect of influenza vaccination for children aged <5 years in Suzhou, China in terms of averted number of influenza cases, including hospitalized cases, cases who received outpatient medical care, and influenza like illness cases who did not seek care, from 2011-2016; To evaluate direct and indirect costs associated with influenza illness among children < 5 years to estimate the averted economic burden of influenza-associated ILI cases who did not seek medical attention, medically attended influenza cases and hospitalizations in this age group from 2011–2016 from the societal perspective; and To maintain SARI surveillance for future averted outcome, averted cost and cost-effectiveness analyses for influenza associated pediatric hospitalizations.
g) Laboratory Capacity Building and Follow-up on Congenital Cytomegalovirus Infection in China: this project are designed to examine geographic variations in congenital CMV infection, characterize permanent sequelae from congenital CMV infection, and delineate CMV shedding during pregnancy.

4. Human subjects: All projects have been reviewed and approved by ethical boards within Chinese Center for Disease Control & Prevention, Beijing, China and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia.

5. Animal information: N/A

6. Contacts Information

Principal Investigator: Director, China-U.S. Collaborative Program on Emerging and Re-Emerging Infectious Diseases, (b)(6)

For additional information, please contact Project Manager, China-U.S. Collaborative Program on Emerging and Re-Emerging Infectious Diseases:

E-mail: (b)(6) Phone: (b)(6)

CDC Project Officer: Division of Global Health Protection, (b)(6) (b)(6) Email: (b)(6) Phone: (b)(6)

7. Grant funds should be awarded by September 30, 2017. If no response is received by September 15, 2017, CDC will assume Embassy has no objection to funds being awarded.

8. In order to ensure prompt receipt of cable response at CDC, please transmit cable reply or cable request for additional information directly to CDC ATLANTA GA attn.: Patrick Chong

9. CDC appreciates Embassy consideration and reply.

10. If additional information is needed, please contact: Stephanie Gonsahn, phone 404-718-8934, email sx5@cdc.gov.

MARTIN
Post Posture

- Post held an EAC January 27. No recommended change in posture. Cable forthcoming. The next EAC will be held January 28 at 3:00.

- ConGenOffs are conducting daily assessments of healthcare facilities, public transportation, and food availability.

- Consular circulated a MASCOT Message for clearance following Guangdong CDC’s January 26 announcement face masks are mandatory in most public spaces. Pending Embassy Beijing clearance.

- The American International School of Guangzhou (AISG) issued a survey mandated of all schools regarding recent travel and students and faculty and any exposure to visitors from Hubei.

- The Kuwaiti Consulate in Guangzhou told Post January 27 they have drawn down to “minimal diplomatic staff.” The UK Consul General reached out from London to inquire about Post posture.

Medical
• Case incidence as of 0800: Guangdong - 188 (including 51 in Guangzhou), Guangxi - 51, Fujian - 59, Hainan – 33

• A senior Guangdong provincial public health official confirmed to ESTHOFF January 27 that increases in the number of cases in Guangdong Province are “more and more evident” of human-to-human transmission.

• ESTHOFF conducted windshield assessments of four hospital fever clinics designated by the health authority as 2019-nCoV treatment locations January 27. The conditions were much the same as the previous day—all facilities appeared to have capacity, and there were no lines in the waiting rooms or outside. The atmosphere was calm, and security presence was normal at all facilities. (Caveat: the GZ population is very low due to holiday travel—these conditions may change once people start to return to GZ). [This summary already appears in Mission China January 27 cable; updates from January 28 will be sent later in the day to ESTH]

• Official provincial mouthpieces reported facemask manufacturers in Guangdong were operating during the holiday season to ensure adequate supplies of facemasks.

• BGI, the Shenzhen-based biotechnology company, has a stockpile of 100,000 sets of rapid detection kits for the 2019-nCov they are supplying to Wuhan and other key epidemic areas, after receiving China FDA approvals January 26, according to official media. See attached.

• Medical teams from Hainan (137 people) and Guangxi (145 people) deployed to Wuhan January 27, according to press. The Hainan team included veteran crisis responders.

Food & Water Supplies
• No observable change from last reporting. Stores are open, but fresh produce moves off the shelves quickly. ConGenOff observed some instances of panic shopping January 27 with customers buying multiple carts of groceries.

Transportation
• Public transportation is running normal. At a press conference January 27, Guangdong Vice Governor Zhang Guanjian committed that no cities in Guangdong would be locked down, assuring that land and air transport would remain open. The announcement comes the day after Shantou city briefly announced a lockdown January 26, only to backtrack within hours. The Vice Governor reiterated the call for people to stay home whenever possible. [Note: Guangdong is the most populated province in China with some 113 million people. End Note]

• According to news reports, non-Guangdong plated cars are being stopped at the toll plaza to access Baiyun Guangzhou (CAN) airport for temperature screenings.

American Citizens
• There is an uptick in new emails to Guangzhou ACS related to the virus, although
overall volume remains low. Inquiries including guidance on whether to travel for scheduled ACS appointments, advice on helping non-citizen LPRs or NIV holders in Wuhan, and American Citizens in our consular district requesting general advice or expressing concern. ACS is responding daily and referring people to newest Mission guidance, CDC guidance, and encouraging STEP registration. Post expects that as the Lunar New Year period winds down, there will be an uptick in inquiries by February 3.

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Attachments: BGI Real-Time Kit for 2019-nCoV.pdf

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France in Focus for: Monday, April 20, 2020 UNCLASSIFIED

- (U) COVID-19: Outbreak Continues to Ease, but Challenges Persist
- (U) France Says No COVID-19 Link to Wuhan Research Lab Set Up with French Help
- (U) Council of State Limits Localities' Ability to Impose COVID-19 Restrictions

(U) COVID-19: Outbreak Continues to Ease, but Challenges Persist

(U) COVID-19 cases were up 0.7 percent, to 152,894 (1,101 new cases). Patients in hospital totaled 30,610, down for the fifth day, by 0.1 percent. ICU cases dropped for the 11th straight day, to 5,744 (down by 89), with a total drop of 20 percent since the peak on April 9. Deaths increased by 2 percent, to 19,718 (395 new). In a two-hour press conference, Prime Minister Philippe and Health Minister Veran overviewed an upcoming plan for deconfinement, which will be finalized by the end of April. Veran focused on the need for vast capacity for diagnostic testing, contact tracing, and isolating infected individuals after lockdown is lifted. He added France is meeting its needs for masks and ventilators, but there is an ongoing shortage of other PPE as well as of drugs needed to treat patients in ICUs.

(U) France Says No COVID-19 Link to Wuhan Research Lab Set Up with French Help
(U) On April 17 an Elysee official disputed U.S. press reports linking COVID-19 and the P4 research laboratory in Wuhan, China which France helped set up. The French government’s International Center for Research in Infectious Diseases (CIRI) in Lyon collaborated with the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) National Bio-safety Laboratory to create the $44 million facility. CIRI provided conceptual, engineering and logistical support for the construction of the first biosafety level 4 laboratory at the WIV, which was commissioned in 2018. (b)(6)

(U) Council of State Limits Localities’ Ability to Impose COVID-19 Restrictions

(U) The Council of State, France’s highest administrative court, ruled April 17 mayors cannot impose COVID-19 measures beyond those determined by the federal government. Exceptions can be granted based on local circumstances as long as they don’t compromise national measures. The ruling overturns a decree by the Mayor of Sceaux, south of Paris, to require residents over the age of ten to wear masks outside their homes starting April 15. The Human Rights League (LDH) filed a complaint because the Mayor’s rule violated individual freedoms, and Cergy-Pontoise administrative court overturned the measure. The city of Sceaux then appealed to the Council of State, which upheld the lower court’s ruling. Interior Minister Castaner had previously warned that mayors should not issue unilateral orders on masks. (b)(6)
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Good afternoon Jessica,

This email is to formalize the DOS clearance sent to you September 27, 2016 on the attached MOU with tracked edits, which you sent to us for review on September 21, 2016. L/OES, L/T, OES/ITHB, OES/STC, and the China desk reviewed the document.

Additional changes require DOS’s affirmative concurrence prior to signature of the final MOC. If a Chinese version is being produced for signature, the Department’s Office of Language Services MUST do a translation and conformance of the texts.

Please remember to send us a PDF copy of the MOU upon signature for our records.

Thank you,

(b)(6)

Drafted By: OES_EX
Approved By: OES-DRL/EX
Released By: OES EX
Attachments: MOU_China_US_CDC Sept 21 -L-.doc
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1. (U) **Summary**

- **Cases**: On April 29, as of 1800 local time, Italian authorities reported a total (cumulative) of 203,591 cases (+2,086, +1.04%) and 27,682 total deaths (+323, +1.18%). Italy has 104,657 active cases (-548, -0.52%) and 71,252 recoveries (+2,311, +3.35%). Rome has a total (cumulative) of 4,694 cases (+52, +1.11%). The Tri-Mission/Mission Italy has no cases of COVID-19.

- **Health**: Senior Italian health officials briefed that the increase in daily figures was expected as a result of ramped up screening-- on April 28, 57,272 swabs were taken, up from 25,000 on April 27. The number of infected people nationwide rose to 201,505 (105,205 infections are in progress.) Officials noted the daily increase in infections in Lombardy is also due to the surge in screening. Officials noted intensive care patients fell for the 25th consecutive day. The extraordinary commissioner for the COVID-19 emergency issued an order setting the maximum retail price of Type I medical face masks at no more than €0.50 each.

- **Political/Economic**: Coalition member Italia Viva’s leader Matteo Renzi lashed out at PM Giuseppe Conte’s handling of the crisis in an April 28 television interview, claiming the reopening is too slow and infringes on the rights of Italians. The Partito Democratico (PD) was also reportedly critical of Conte’s reliance on decrees that bypass Parliament. On April 28, during his second day visiting hard-hit northern provinces, PM Conte urged banks to provide liquidity to struggling businesses. The Fitch credit rating agency revised Italy’s sovereign rating downward one notch to ‘BBB minus’ from ‘BBB,’ and changed its outlook from “negative” to “stable.”

- **Vatican**: Pope Francis called for patience with governments’ plans to ease the lockdowns to
ensure the pandemic does not return.

- **U.S. Mission to UN Agencies in Rome**: The World Food Program announced the first cargo flight as part of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 is scheduled for May. The Food and Agriculture Organization announced its phased return of staff to its headquarters starting May 12.

- **Consular**: Consular issued a MASCOT Health Alert on the Government of Italy April 26 decree regarding workplace protocols and public safety.

- **Transportation & Travel**: Alitalia advised that its daily flights between Rome (FCO) and JFK will continue into May. United Airlines announced the cancellation of seasonal service to Naples (NAP) and Venice from Newark (EWR).

- **U.S. Military Update**: Mission DoD personnel are coordinating with EUCOM and the Italian Joint Operational Command to support the overall humanitarian assistance effort.

- **Public Affairs**: Italian media extensively report on the Phase 2 timeline amid public and political tensions. Media highlight widespread criticism of PM Conte’s decree, which continues to be portrayed as unclear, as well as the Fitch downgrade for Italy. Today’s analysis focuses on COVID-19’s repercussion on the stability of the Italian government and on the global balance of power. One writer noted: “In the post-COVID-19 world, Italy must define and defend its national interests like never before.” An Embassy tweet yesterday highlighted President Trump’s recognition, during his April 27 Coronavirus Task Force briefing, of Italy’s recovery phase and support for PM Conte.

**End Summary.**

2. *(U) Health: COVID-19 Cases Update*

As of 1800 local time, the Italian Civil Protection Department website reports the following data:

**April 29**

A total (cumulative) of 203,591 cases (+2,086, +1.04%) and 27,682 total deaths (+323, +1.18%). Italy has 104,657 active cases (-548, -0.52%) and 71,252 recoveries (+2,311, +3.35%). Rome has a total (cumulative) of 4,694 cases (+52, +1.11%). The Tri-Mission/Mission Italy has no cases of COVID-19.

**April 28**

On April 28, as of 1800 local time, Italian authorities reported a total (cumulative) of 201,505 cases (+2,091, +1.05%) and 27,359 total deaths (+382, +1.42%). Italy has 105,205 active cases (-608, -0.57%) and 68,941 recoveries (+2,317, +3.48%). Rome has a total (cumulative) of 4,642 cases (+73, +1.59%).
• On April 28, senior health officials noted a slight rise in the daily figures: an increase of 1% on April 28 compared to an increase of 0.8% on April 27. Officials noted the increase was expected as the number of swabs collected increased from 32,003 on April 27 to 57,272 on April 28. The number of infected people rose to 201,505, while 105,205 infections are in progress. The number of intensive care patients fell for the 25th consecutive day: 1,863 compared to 1,956 on April 27. A similar dynamic was noted in Lombardy: the curve increased 1.1% (over April 27 at + 0.8%) with the notable increase of 3,520 swabs taken over those taken on April 27 (+52%). In Lombardy, the number of hospitalized patients and those in intensive care are still decreasing.

• Italy’s extraordinary commissioner for the COVID-19 emergency, Domenico Arcuri issued an order (no.11/2020) fixing the maximum retail price of Type I medical face masks at no more than €0.50 each (manufacturing, design and performance requirements according to UNI EN 14683:2019).

• **Lazio (Rome)** had 6,545 cumulative cases (+78, +1.20%) as of April 29. The number of COVID-19 patients (130) decreased by 2 cases in Lazio ICU’s on April 29.

• **Lombardy** had 75,134 cumulative cases (+786, +1.06%) and 13,679 deaths (+104, +0.76%), as of April 29. The province of Milan had 19,121 cumulative cases (+284, +1.50%), as of
April 29.
- As of April 29, there were 9,292 total cases in Tuscany (+61, +0.66%), including 3,079 in Florence.
- As of April 29, there were 4,410 cases in Campania, of which 2,416 were in Naples.
- As of April 28, there were 448 total cases in the Republic of San Marino.

3. (U) Political and Economic Update
- **Tensions Persist within Governing Coalition:** Despite being a member of the governing coalition, Italia Viva leader (and former Prime Minister) Matteo Renzi once again lashed out at Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte’s handling of the crisis in an April 28 television interview, claiming the re-opening is too slow and infringes on the rights of Italians. “A Prime Minister cannot change the Constitution with his own decree,” he said. “Health is important,” he conceded, but “freedom cannot be questioned by a prime minister; it sets a precedent.” According to unnamed sources cited in the press, coalition member Partito Democratico (PD) does not want to call into question Conte’s leadership but is also dissatisfied: “it is not possible to announce a new decree and then waste time explaining it in the following days.” The PD was also reportedly critical of Conte’s reliance on decrees that bypass parliament.
- **PM Conte Continues Visit to Northern Italy:** PM Conte visited the hard-hit provinces of Cremona, Piacenza, and Lodi on April 28, and met with the mayor of Codogno where the outbreak began in February. Conte took the opportunity to urge banks to provide liquidity to struggling businesses.
- **Fitch Credit Rating Agency Revises Italy’s Rating Downward:** On April 28 in an unscheduled update on Italy’s creditworthiness, the Fitch credit rating agency revised Italy’s sovereign rating downward one notch to ‘BBB minus’ from ‘BBB.’ Fitch also changed its outlook from “negative” to "stable." The new rating puts Italian sovereign bonds just one level above non-investment grade. Fitch expects the country’s ratio of debt to GDP to rise around 20 percentage points this year to 156%, due to a surge in spending combined with an 8 per cent contraction in the economy. Fitch’s statement noted “according to our baseline debt dynamics scenario, the [debt] to GDP ratio will only stabilize at very high level over the medium term, underlying debt sustainability risks”
- **April Car Sales Hint at Economic Devastation and Urgency of Phase 2:** UNRAE, the association of foreign car manufacturers, reported just 2,073 cars were sold during the first 24 days of April, down from 175,000 sold in April 2019. Michele Crisci, President of UNRAE, said he was "stunned" at the near 99% decrease in sales during April thus far (Note: March car sales had already decreased 85% year-on-year. End Note.)
- **Café Owner’s Protest in Bologna Goes National:** On April 28 in Bologna, a Five Star Movement politician and café owner started a protest against the national government’s decision to keep restaurants closed until at least June 1. The protest gained steam on April 29, as restaurant and café owners across the country handed over the keys to their establishments to their respective mayors. The movement was particularly widespread in Florence, with 6,000 merchants briefly opening their shops in protest and 1,500 restaurant owners giving their keys to Mayor Nardella.
- **Pope Francis Asks for Prudence and Obedience of Government Restrictions:** Media reported Pope Francis asked for “prudence and obedience of the provisions [adopted by the government] to stop the pandemic.” Commentators interpreted the Pope’s statement as a way to abate the Italian Episcopal Conference’s harsh criticism April 26 of the government’s continued
restrictions on religious services. Press reports the Ministry of Interior is negotiating an agreement with Catholic bishops to allow the resumption of masses celebrated outdoors beginning May 11 and indoors by the end of May. In an April 29 interview with leading, left-leaning daily La Repubblica, Islamic religious community chairman Yahya Pallavicini noted PM Conte has not consulted other religious communities and hoped mosques can be reopened between May 12 and 22 to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

4. (U) Embassy to the Holy See
   - A tenth Vatican employee tested positive for the coronavirus.
   - The Pontifical Salesian University in Rome reported 39 positive cases. The entire university remains an isolated “red zone.”

5. (U) US Mission to UN Agencies in Rome
   - World Food Program (WFP): WFP recently announced the first cargo flight scheduled for May as part of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.
   - Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): FAO announced its phased HQ plan to return to the workplace. The first phase from May 5-15 have no more than 30-40 personnel on premises.

6. (U) Consular Update
   - Messaging: CONS issued a MASCOT Health Alert, posted to the mission home page, on the Government of Italy April 26 decree regarding workplace protocols and public safety.
   - Requests for U.S. government-assisted evacuation (current): 0.
   - Number of cruise ships tracked by posts and the number of U.S. citizens on board: One ship (the MSC Opera) with one U.S. citizen crew member.

7. (U) Transportation & Travel
   - Fiumicino International (FCO) U.S. Flights -- April 29.
     - Alitalia Airlines one flight from JFK: CANCELED.
     - Alitalia Airlines one flight to JFK: 16 PAX.
     - Post expects to see intermittent service cancellations on Alitalia’s JFK-FCO route until U.S. and EU border restrictions ease.
   - Alitalia advised that the daily flight from FCO to JFK will continue in May.
   - United Airlines announced the cancellation of their seasonal service between Napoli (NAP) and Newark (EWR). The flight was to resume on July 7.
   - United Airlines announced the cancellation of its seasonal service between Venice (VCE) and Newark (EWR). The flight was to resume on October 18.

8. (U) U.S. Military Update
   - Mission DoD personnel are coordinating with EUCOM to execute the U.S. military’s portion of the overall assistance effort. ODC is identifying the correct Italian agency to coordinate local procurement of assistance supplies and place items on contract. Mission military liaison officers are coordinating with the Italian Joint Operational Command to support strategic and localized DoD humanitarian assistance activities.

9. (U) Public Affairs Afternoon Update
Italian Media

- Extensively report on the Phase 2 timeline amid public and political tensions. Media highlight widespread criticism of PM Conte’s decree, which continues to be portrayed as unclear, and the Fitch downgrade for Italy.

Commentary

- Today’s analysis focuses on COVID-19’s repercussion on the stability of the Italian government and on the global balance of power. Under headline “The Post-Virus World Without a Leading Power,” centrist, top-circulation Corriere della Sera’s Franco Venturini opines that the emergency has damaged the United States, China, and Russia, and to some extent Europe: “The world could really change for Europe in November if America elects...a pro-Europe president...In the post-COVID-19 world, Italy must define and defend its national interests like never before.” Angelo Panebianco comments in Corriere della Sera: “The future political scenario in Italy as envisioned by some of our most attentive observers is not reassuring. After the catastrophic drop in GDP and of the inevitable social and political knock-on effects, it is likely that the current government will not endure much longer...It will likely be replaced by the usual technical government.”

Chinese Public Messaging

- The Chinese Embassy shared a tweet by Fareed Zakaria, Host of CNN’s news commentary program GPS, featuring the scientist and President of EcoHealth Alliance Peter Daszak’s comments refuting the conspiracy theories spread by those who believe that the coronavirus was developed in a lab.

International Assistance/Russia

- Under headline: “Russians? No, Thank You. The Military Mission is About to Come to an End,” leading, left-leaning La Repubblica’s Deputy Managing Editor Gianluca Di Feo reports that “the Italian government intends to respond ‘no, thank you’ to a hypothetical extension of Moscow’s military mission in Italy for the simple reason that...no region has requested the intervention of Russian soldiers.”

Social Media Amplification

- An Embassy tweet yesterday highlighted President Trump’s recognition, during Monday’s Coronavirus Task Force briefing, of Italy’s recovery phase and support for PM Conte.

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