

Virus Outbreak: Taiwan does not need China for WHO, ministry says

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Australia expresses its willingness to cooperate with Taiwan in the fight against COVID-19 in a post on the Facebook page of the Australian Office in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Lu Yi-hsuan, Taipei Times

Taiwan will negotiate with the WHO about its participation without Beijing's help and intervention as more countries, including Australia and Japan, are partnering with Taiwan to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a telephonic roundtable with reporters on Monday also supported Taiwan's role in the WHO, saying the US Department of State would do its best to assist Taiwan's "appropriate role" in the world's highest health policy setting body, Voice of America reported.

In a Japan Business Press report published on Sunday, Chinese Ambassador to Japan Kong Xuanyou (孔祥雲) said that Beijing plans to accept Taiwan as a regular observer in the WHO and is initiating related discussions and adjustments.

Asked about Kong's remarks, ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou (歐蕙娟) said that Taiwan would negotiate for its participation by itself.

As Taiwan is winning wider acclaim for its achievements in containing COVID-19, the government will strive to win support from other countries to join the WHO, as well as other global organizations, she told a news briefing in Taipei.

Ou urged Beijing not to meddle with Taiwan's negotiations with the WHO and urged the global health body to demonstrate its professionalism, instead of giving in to political considerations.

"The question of Taiwanese membership in WHO is up to WHO Member States, not WHO staff," the global body said in a statement on Sunday, after a video of a WHO official dodging a

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Hong Kong reporter's question about Taiwan's participation went viral.

In related news, Australia is to exchange medical supplies with Taiwan, after Taiwan and the US earlier this month jointly announced that they would enhance cooperation to contain the disease.

Taiwan is to purchase 1 million liters of alcohol from Australia to produce 4.22 million bottles of sanitizers, while Australia is to purchase 3 tonnes of non-woven fabric from Taiwan to make masks, once the nation's mask production is sufficient, the Ministry of Economic Affairs said on Facebook on Monday.

"Thank you, Taiwan. In facing this global COVID-19 pandemic, we are pleased to work with you to keep open the supply of critical inputs to our medical systems, bolstering health outcomes for our people," the Australian Office in Taipei said on Facebook yesterday.

The foreign ministry helped negotiate the matter and is glad to see Taiwan and Australia boost their bilateral friendship through reciprocal collaboration, Ou said.

In other developments, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in India is working with Japanese airlines to fly Taiwanese travelers back home, after India closed its borders on Wednesday last week.

The Japanese government has arranged Delhi-Tokyo flights via Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways from Tuesday last week to Wednesday next week to evacuate its nationals, with Japan Airlines allowing Taiwanese travelers in India to board its flights when seats are available, Ou said.

Japan Airlines said it could help Taiwanese in Tokyo book flights to Taipei, she said.

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