

HEALTH

Finance Ministry Allocates \$30 million For COVID-19 Fight

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PHNOM PENH — The Ministry of Economy and Finance announced on Thursday that it was working with the Health Ministry to allocate \$30 million to finance Cambodia's screening and monitoring efforts, as the novel coronavirus outbreak reached more than 70 countries.

The ministry said the allocation would be used for preventive and monitoring measures, as well as to treat potential patients testing positive for COVID-19.

"Through the establishment of the protection system and monitoring facilities, there is a need for [budget]," the statement read. "For example, to look for those who have the potential to spread the virus and to prevent and treat it in case of infection."

Or Vandine, Health Ministry spokesperson, said the funding would also be used to prepare doctors at provincial hospitals, drug procurement and other material acquisitions.

"There was an in-depth consideration about the demand for medical equipment, as well as the necessary remedies for patient care if we find someone positive for COVID-19," she said.

The announcement comes a day after Prime Minister Hun Sen called for all relevant ministries to prepare for a fight against the viral outbreak. He even asked ministries to cut expenditure, excluding salaries, by half to prepare for the virus spread in Cambodia.

This directive comes after Hun Sen has downplayed the seriousness of the outbreak, even travelling to China to show solidarity with a diplomatic ally. The Cambodian government has maintained that there has been only one confirmed case of COVID-19 in the country.

A Japanese man living in Siem Reap tested positive for the virus this week in Nagoya, Japan, resulting in 44 people being put in isolation to stem the spread of the disease in Cambodia.

Government accountability advocate San Chey said the \$30 million was not enough given the scale of the outbreak, especially if it were to spread fast in Cambodia.

“In addition, the use of preventive tools should be in communities, schools, and industrial areas, such as factories,” he said.
