

Australia and Japan confirm first cases



TOKYO: Authorities scrambled yesterday to track travellers who arrived on the same flight as three people diagnosed with the country's first confirmed cases of H1N1 flu.

Australia also joined the ranks of affected countries with its first confirmed case.

Authorities here quarantined a high school teacher and two of his students who returned on Friday from a school trip to Canada on a flight from the United States after they tested positive at the airport.

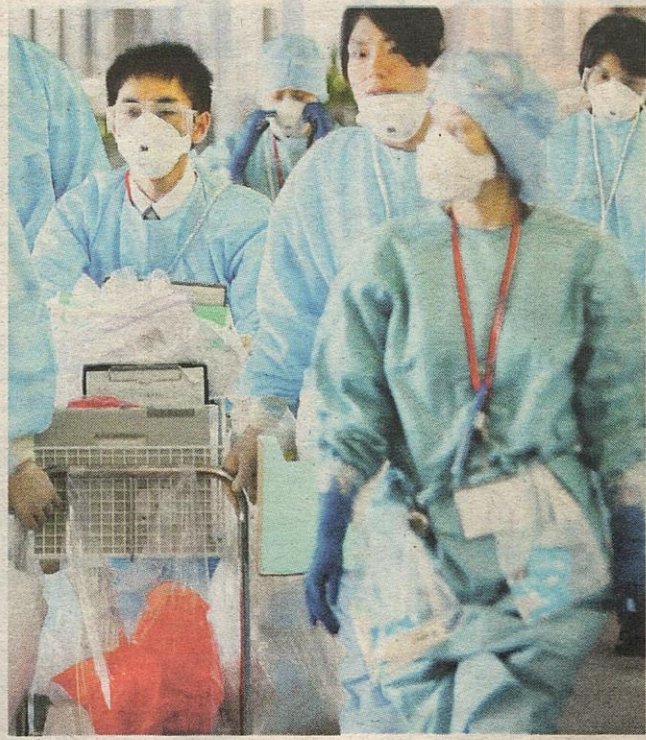
A lab at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases confirmed they had the virus that had killed at least 47 people and sickened more than 3,100 in 30 countries, mostly in the US and Mexico, Health and Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe said.

Since the outbreak began last month, several countries, including Japan, have screened air travellers for flu symptoms.

But news reports said as many as 11 people on the Northwest Airlines flight from Detroit that landed here on Friday avoided those screenings. Another 13 continued on to other destinations, including Thailand and Taiwan.

Japan's Health Ministry said it was checking into the reports.

Masuzoe acknowledged it



Quarantine officials making their way to a plane that has just arrived at Narita International Airport in Tokyo yesterday. — AP picture

would be difficult to trace all those who came into contact with the three infected Japanese, who were isolated and recovering at a hospital near Narita International Airport.

Asia has been largely spared from the virus that continues to claim lives in worst-hit Mexico, which announced its 45th death and 159 more cases on Friday even as it emerged from a national shutdown that closed schools and businesses and shuttered churches and soccer stadiums.

But a handful of cases have cropped up in the region, including in South Korea and Hong Kong. The Chinese terri-

tory quarantined more than 200 people in a hotel after confirming its first case in a guest a week ago.

They were released on Friday, and many were unable to contain their delight as they poured from the building for the first time in seven days. One man hugged a police officer and broke into song.

Australia reported its first case yesterday in a woman it said was no longer infectious. She first noticed her symptoms while travelling in the US, federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon said.

New Zealand reported two more cases yesterday, making the total number of cases seven. — AP