

Gatherings of over 50 banned in Delhi

NDTV ONLINE

Night-clubs, gyms and spas will be shut in Delhi till March 31 over coronavirus, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal declared yesterday announcing a new set of bans to limit the spread of the highly contagious disease. He also urged the people of Delhi to postpone weddings and other functions.

"All religious, social, cultural gatherings with more than 50 people have been banned," said Arvind Kejriwal. The ban would not apply to weddings, said the Chief Minister, asking people to avoid them voluntarily.

Weekly bazaars have been suspended. Three hotels have been identified for people to pay and use for quarantine, he said.

The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases across India is 116, with maximum cases recorded in Maharashtra (37). The only other death has been reported in Karnataka.



A member of a non-governmental organisation puts a face mask on a man as a precaution against the spread of coronavirus, at a traffic junction in Ahmedabad, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US ramps up virus response

New York, Los Angeles order schools, restaurants, theatres to close; Federal Reserve slashes rates to stem fallout

AFP, Washington

Nightlife capitals New York and Los Angeles yesterday ordered schools, bars and restaurants to close or go take-out only as the US scrambled to contain the coronavirus pandemic and the Federal Reserve slashed rates to stem the fallout.

The fast-spreading outbreak has claimed almost 70 lives in the United States, disrupting every walk of life as Americans panic-buy essentials and brace for what may come.

Faced with an economic slowdown, the Fed announced emergency measures to shore up confidence and keep the financial sector running, including cutting the key interest rate to 0-0.25 percent.

President Donald Trump, in a now-daily briefing to his virus task force, praised the Fed's "phenomenal" action and sought to strike a reassuring tone even as he pleaded with Americans to stop stripping store shelves bare.

"Relax. We're doing great. It all will pass," he said.

But Anthony Fauci, the country's leading expert on infectious diseases, was blunt in telling Americans to prepare for hard times.

"The worst is ahead for us," he told the briefing. "We have a very, very critical point now."

In drastic measures, New York's Mayor Bill de Blasio said the city's usually buzzing bars and restaurants would

be restricted to take-out or delivery, and that nightclubs, theaters and concert venues must close starting today.

Schools, museums and sports arenas have already been shut in many US states -- but lively St Patrick's Day celebrations were still held despite pleas to limit socializing, prompting calls for more aggressive action.

"Our city is facing an unprecedented threat, and we must respond with a wartime mentality," De Blasio said in a statement.

Reinforcing the message, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that gatherings of 50 people or more be cancelled or postponed, not including day-to-day education or business activities.

In the strongest measure yet on American soil, the US territory of Puerto Rico imposed a 9:00pm to 5:00am curfew -- along with the closure of malls, movie theaters, gyms and bars.

As a number of states imposed shutdowns, the governor of Illinois, which includes the city of Chicago, announced that all bars and restaurants would close until March 30.

Los Angeles also said it would close bars, restaurants and nightclubs for at least two weeks, while California's Governor Gavin Newsom asked people over the age of 65 to self-isolate.

Several major Las Vegas casinos and hotels were shuttered, and party town New Orleans issued guidelines halving the capacity of bars and clubs.

VIRUS INFECTION RATES

Impact of weather not confirmed

Says Chinese medical expert

REUTERS, Beijing

The impact of weather on coronavirus infection rates has not been confirmed, said Cao Wei, Deputy Director and Associate Chief Physician of Department of Infectious Diseases, Peking Union Medical College Hospital at a press conference yesterday.

China tightened quarantine measures for international arrivals as the country worries about a rise in imported cases of the deadly coronavirus and anger rages online at how Europe and the United States are handling the pandemic.

After declaring they had "basically" curbed the spread of the disease within China, where the virus first emerged, authorities have now ordered international arrivals into the nation's capital from yesterday onwards to go into centralised quarantine locations for 14 days.

About 20,000 people, one-tenth of them foreigners, have been entering China by plane each day on average since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11, according to an immigration official.

Airline passengers are now being transferred to an exhibition centre near Beijing's main international airport for medical screening before heading to quarantine facilities, reports AFP.

People in protective suits and police officers guarded the centre yesterday while ambulances waited outside on standby.

Travellers had previously been allowed to undergo the mandatory isolation at home but now only those with "special circumstances" will be allowed to do so.

People sent to the facilities must pay for their stay.

Authorities have given few details but at least three hotels told AFP they were designated to receive quarantined passengers. Staff wearing medical suits stood guard at hotel entrances.

People over 70 years old, minors, pregnant women, those who live alone, and people with underlying medical conditions can quarantine at home, Beijing city officials said.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Bahrain records first death in GCC

A Bahraini woman has died from the novel coronavirus, the health ministry announced yesterday, marking the first death from the disease among Gulf Co-operation Council states. The 65-year-old woman had pre-existing medical conditions, the ministry said on Twitter. Nearly 1,000 cases of the virus have been recorded so far across the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Most of those infected have been people returning from Iran, where more than 700 people had died in the outbreak by Sunday. Facing a mounting public health threat, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman have taken drastic measures to combat the pandemic. The Gulf countries have shut down cinemas and other entertainment centres -- some even closing gyms and spas. Kuwait has taken the strictest measures in the GCC by largely locking down the country over the weekend.

US Navy reports first suspected case on ship

The US Navy reported its first suspected case of the new coronavirus aboard a ship, saying a sailor had tested positive for the disease but the result needed to be confirmed by health authorities. It came a week after another US Navy sailor stationed in southern Italy contracted COVID-19, which has killed more than 3,700 people worldwide including nearly 70 in the United States. "A Sailor assigned to the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4) tested 'presumptive positive' for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), marking the first case for a sailor aboard a Navy ship," the Navy said in a statement on Sunday evening. The sailor was in quarantine at home, it said, adding that "personnel that the individual immediately identified having close contact with have been notified and are in self-isolation at their residences." The Navy said that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would need to confirm the positive result.



Wuhan doctors celebrate closure of last hospital

Hospital staff in the Chinese city where the coronavirus originated removed their masks ceremoniously as the country's last emergency hospital, built to handle the crisis, was closed. In a video that has been viewed millions of times online, workers remove their masks one by one as the camera passes them, to mark the moment. China built 14 new hospitals, including two in Wuhan, early last month in just weeks to provide thousands of beds for the sick as the virus spread rapidly. The country has recorded 80,824 cases of coronavirus and 3,189 deaths since the start of the outbreak at the end of last year. But strict quarantine measures appear to have drastically reduced the number of new cases, and the country has eased up on the measures in its hardest hit region. On Saturday health chiefs said there had been 13 new deaths and just 11 new cases, including people who recently arrived from other affected countries. More than 65,000 people have recovered from the disease in China.

SOURCE: AFP, INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Iran reports 129 new virus deaths, taking total to 853

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday that the novel coronavirus had killed 129 more people, a new record high for a single day in one of the world's worst-hit countries.

"Our plea is that everyone take this virus seriously and in no way attempt to travel to any province," health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said in a televised news conference.

The latest deaths bring the overall toll to 853 fatalities since February 19, when the government announced Iran's first two deaths from the COVID-19 disease.

Jahanpour also reported 1,053 confirmed new cases of infection in the past 24 hours, raising the total to 14,991.

Tehran province had the highest number of new infections with 200 cases, about 50 fewer than the day before.

The central province of Isfahan followed with 118 cases, with Mazandaran in the north of Iran coming next with 96. Khorasan Razavi province, home to the holy Shia city of Mashhad, was not among the reported provinces with fresh cases. It had recorded 143 the day before.



"If we judge cautiously, it seems that the overall efforts by the people and interventions by the health system... are slowly showing their effects in Qom and Gilan," Jahanpour said.

The holy city of Qom in central Iran, where the virus was first reported, had 19 new cases that took the total to 1,023.

And confirmed infections in Gilan reached 858, with 18 new ones. The northern region is a popular tourist spot and among the worst-hit of Iran's 31 provinces.

The outbreak killed a member of the clerical body that appoints the supreme leader, state media said, taking the death toll among serving and ex-officials to at least 12.

Ayatollah Hashem Bathayi Golpayegani, who was 78, died two days after testing positive for the COVID-19 disease and being hospitalised, state news agency IRNA reported.

Virus spreads to all Canadian provinces

A total of 313 cases confirmed

AFP, Ottawa

The new coronavirus has spread across Canada with a total of 313 cases confirmed Sunday in its 10 provinces, the chief public health officer told a news conference.

Atlantic coast provinces were the last to be hit. Major metropolitan centres -- Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver -- remain the most affected.

"I'm asking everyone to take strong action to prevent the spread of the virus," chief public health officer Theresa Tam said, warning that a window of opportunity to mitigate its spread was "quickly narrowing."

Measures must include, she said, limiting travel and self-isolating for 14 days upon returning from a trip abroad, as well as avoiding large crowds, practicing "social distancing" and working from home, if possible, over the coming weeks.

After a meeting of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's cabinet, ministers said to expect more actions to be announced yesterday.

Canada has tested nearly 25,000 people -- among the highest per capita rates in the world. The number of positive test results jumped from a few dozen just last week, including one death.

"Most of the cases (in Canada) have been linked to travel," Tam said, "but that could change very quickly."



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