

### **Corona growth fastest in Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tuesday crossed 110,851 cases becoming the second largest most corona-infected nation in Asia with 2,216 deaths. As many as 45 infected persons died on Tuesday.

Of 110,851 confirmed cases, Sindh reported 41,303 cases, Punjab 40,819, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 14,527, Balochistan 7,031, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) 5,785, Gilgit-Baltistan 974, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) 412.

Of 2,216 deaths, Punjab reported 773 deaths, Sindh 696, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 610, Balochistan 62, Gilgit-Baltistan 14, Islamabad Capital Territory 52, and AJK 9 as of 11:58pm.

The populous Punjab province has seen a sharp rise in the number of corona cases and the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended that a strict two-week lockdown be enforced in the province.

In a letter to the Punjab government, the WHO lauded the provincial government's efforts in response to the pandemic.

"Government intervention on April 12th 2020 detailing social distancing measures including restrictions, closure of schools and businesses, international travel restrictions, and geographical area restrictions were instituted with the aim of limiting the spread of the disease," the letter said.

The organisation said during the lockdown, the country was reporting 1,000 cases per day. However, this number increased after the federal government eased the lockdown in the country.

"SOPs need to be strictly enforced to stem the spread of the virus," the letter said. Cases increasing beyond 100,000 in Pakistan is a cause for concern, the WHO said. The WHO recommends that for any government that wants to start lifting restrictions, six conditions must be met including disease transmission is under control, health system can detect, test, isolate and treat every case and trace every contact, hot spot risks are minimized in vulnerable places, such as nursing homes, schools, workplaces and other essential places have established preventive measures, risk of importing new cases "can be managed", and communities are fully educated, engaged and empowered to live under a new normal

The WHO strongly recommends that the government adopts the two weeks off and two weeks on strategy, as it offers the smallest curve. It also recommends strengthening all public health measures such as quarantine, isolation, physical distancing, and contact tracing.

Given due consideration to the test positivity rate, developing testing capacity beyond 50,000 tests/day is extremely important, it said. Meanwhile, Punjab Health Minister Yasmin Rashid Tuesday said the provincial government would impose a lockdown in areas with higher number of coronavirus cases to stem the spread of the disease.

Speaking to the media in Lahore, she said the government had warned earlier that the number of cases would rise. She said the final decision on the lockdown would be taken by the cabinet committee.

“Lahore has more than 19,000 coronavirus cases,” said the minister, adding that when the lockdown was eased ‘people thought that the coronavirus has left’. Dr Rashid said cases were rising due to the violation of SOPs, even though people were fined for flouting the rules.

Punjab has every kind of data, she said, adding that they were witnessing the benefits of ACTEMRA injection against the virus. “There are reports that ACTEMRA injection is being stocked to be sold in black,” said the minister, adding in the same vein that the medicine was not life-saving.

She said in Punjab, the highest number of tests were done and several doctors, who were not treating the virus patients, got infected. She said the province had a great number of testing kits.

Meanwhile, the NCOC officials told the forum that there were 102 testing labs functional in Pakistan undertaking COVID tests. Four new laboratories would start functioning soon. The forum undertook an in-depth review of the National Anti COVID-19 short-term action plan for June/July to meet additional requirements.

The forum discussed in detail the incentive package for the frontline healthcare workers who are fighting corona as frontline heroes. NCOC prepared recommendations for incentives to doctors and paramedics and will announce after consultation with doctors/ stakeholders.

To ensure compliance to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for containment of COVID, authorities throughout Pakistan have taken widespread action against markets, industries and transport. Dedicated teams of all provinces have ensured that those not adhering to health instructions/ guidelines are sensitized as SOPs compliance.

To ensure distant medical consultation, Telehealth Dashboard in Operation to provide necessary medical assistance on the doorstep. A total of 1374 cases were consulted out of 5,823 requests through the tele health dashboard in which 188 doctors carried out consultation. Latest figures received from the provinces during last 24 hours about the actions taken for SOPs compliance included:

#### Balochistan

In Balochistan, 691 violations have been observed due to which 250 shops and 92 transports/vehicles were temporarily closed/ fined and cautioned.

In Punjab, 769 shops, 8 industries, 776 transports were closed / fined/ cautioned all across province on 2865 SOP violations.

In Sindh, strict actions have been taken against SOP violators including Shops and transports all across Sindh.

In KP, 7,351 SOP violations were observed in which 302 shops, and 221 transports were cautioned and sealed while 1933 individuals were fined.

In GB, 67 shops and 70 transport were fined / sealed on 270 violations of health guidelines/ instructions.

In ICT, 101 SOPs violations were marked in ICT in which 13 Hotel, 24 shops, 2 industries and 36 transports were fined/ sealed.

In AJK, 422 SOPs violations were observed in AJK during which 112 shops / and 85 transports were fined/ sealed.

Meanwhile, in South Asia coronavirus cases have increased at the fastest rate globally in the past week, as the region becomes one of the latest pandemic hot spots.

Infections have risen by 27% in Pakistan, while Bangladesh cases spiked by 19% and 17% in India, according to data of the 20 most affected nations compiled by Bloomberg. Pakistan and Bangladesh also had their single biggest daily spike in fatalities.

As cases dwindle in the US and Europe, they are still increasing in South America and South Asia. More than 136,000 cases were reported worldwide on Sunday, the most in a single day so far, with nearly 75% from 10 countries in the Americas and South Asia, according to WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Countries across South Asia have started to ease their virus lockdowns as they attempt to balance rising cases against economic misery. Pakistan had expected a peak in June but now is expecting late July or August, Prime Minister Imran Khan said in an address to the nation on June 8.

“The world has eased lockdowns since even developed countries have decided they can’t survive with a prolonged lockdown,” said Khan in a televised briefing on the pandemic, noting the restrictions had a “devastating impact on unemployment and poverty in poor countries.”

Meanwhile, scientists have predicted that Pakistan is likely to reach the peak moment of its coronavirus outbreak by the end of June, as the country records its highest one-day deaths so far.

“In the current scenario, the peak is expected from June 20 to end of the month,” Zafar Yasin, a scientist told Geo.

Yasin, who is affiliated with the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), in Switzerland, and his colleagues Sohaib Hassan and Bilal Javed Mughal made the prediction based on a mathematical model called the “Susceptible-Exposed-Infectious-Recovered (SEIR)”.

As per the findings of Yasin’s team, Pakistan is predicted to record 210,000 to 226,000 coronavirus cases in total and 4,500 to 6,000 deaths by the end of August. Furthermore, at its peak, it would be reporting close to 100 deaths per day.

If the government were to introduced a four-month lockdown in June, the paper explains, the number of daily cases could drop to 1,600 and delay the peak to July 20. In case of a “no lockdown” strategy, 4250 – 5450 cases would be recorded every day.

“Lockdowns are being eased in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh without any sign that coronavirus infections are being brought under control,” Mark Williams, chief Asia economist and Shilan Shah, senior economist at Capital Economics wrote in a report Tuesday. “For a start, there is no telling how long containing the virus might take or indeed if it is even possible in South Asia.”

Pakistan has seen its health care system stretched, with patients put on waiting lists as the largest hospitals run out of space.

South Asia’s second largest economy opened its snow-topped peaks in the northern areas for tourism last week after easing restrictions on most retail shops including malls. Some shopping areas were shut down in commercial capital Karachi as social distancing was not being followed.

Gilead Sciences Inc. has licensed its potential Covid-19 treatment, Remdesivir, to five generic drug manufacturers in India and Pakistan to speed supply chain development and help meet anticipated demand while Bangladesh’s Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd. became the world’s first company to start selling the generic version.