

Pakistan 13th among most corona infections

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has become the 13th country with most coronavirus cases in the world by reporting over 163,189 infections and 3,165 deaths from the pandemic, according to latest reports.

Pakistan has so far reported 163,189 coronavirus cases, including 62,269 in Sindh, 60,138 in Punjab, 8,998 in Balochistan, 20,182 in KP, 9,637 in Islamabad, 1,225 in Gilgit Baltistan and 740 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The coronavirus pandemic has killed 453,586 people worldwide since it surfaced in China late last year, according to international media reports.

The United States has the most deaths with 120,290 followed by Brazil with 46,842, Britain with 42,288, Italy with 34,514 and France with 29,603 fatalities. China imposed travel restrictions on nearly half a million people near its capital on Thursday to contain a fresh coronavirus outbreak as deaths surged in other parts of the world.

The threat of a second wave hitting China, which had largely brought the virus under control, and rising tolls in Latin America and South Asia underscore the global challenge in slowing down the pandemic.

Europe, meanwhile, saw further restrictions lifted after months of confinement, with the English Premier League resuming games in empty stadiums on Wednesday. But China is back in containment mode after previously lifting huge lockdowns that had confined tens of millions to their homes.

Another 21 cases of the virus were reported in the past 24 hours in Beijing, taking the total to 158 since a fresh cluster was detected last week after months of no confirmed local transmissions.

India reported 12,881 new cases Thursday, with the country's death toll now over 12,000. Iran planned to reimpose restrictive measures in East Azerbaijan province due to a rising number of infections and deaths in the region. Other parts of the country have already reinstated restrictions.

World leaders have not been immune from the disease. Kazakhstan's 79-year-old former president and official "Leader of the Nation" Nursultan Nazarbayev has tested positive for the coronavirus, his website said Thursday.

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, 51, was admitted to hospital with pneumonia after announcing he had contracted the coronavirus. Nearly 500 Russian medics who tested positive for the coronavirus have died, the head of the state health watchdog said Thursday, a far higher figure than given before.

"489 -- that is medics, unfortunately we have lost almost 500 of our colleagues," Roszdravnadzor watchdog chief Alla Samoilova said at an online conference on safety for medics organised by her agency.

Previously a health ministry official on May 26 gave a death toll of 101. Iran on Thursday announced 87 new deaths from the novel coronavirus as authorities moved to tighten measures to stop its spread in some of the country's worst-hit provinces.

Bangladesh reported 3,803 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, taking the total to exceed 100,000, with 1,343 deaths. Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned that a second wave of coronavirus could hit this autumn, with nations urged to develop a successful test, track and isolate programme.

Dr Hans Kluge, WHO's European regional director, stressed that contact tracing and quarantining people potentially infected with COVID-19 was 'an essential element' of the strategy.

His comments came a day after UK MPs were told the government's contact tracing smartphone app - previously heralded as a fundamental pillar of the country's response to the pandemic - could be scrapped.

Hydroxychloroquine can be ruled out as a treatment for hospitalised COVID-19 patients -- but the WHO said Thursday it was aware of ongoing trials into its value as a preventative measure.

A decades-old malaria and rheumatoid arthritis drug, hydroxychloroquine has been at the centre of political and scientific controversy. On Wednesday, the WHO decided to halt its trials of the drug for novel coronavirus patients in hospital, after evidence from its own work and others that it had no effect on reducing the mortality rate.

But the UN health agency said Thursday that evidence from non-WHO trials into whether it might or might not be useful in preventing against the virus had not yet concluded.

"As far as the use of hydroxychloroquine for prophylaxis or prevention of COVID-19 -- either before or after exposure -- the last word is not yet out," WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan told a virtual press conference.

"There are some good and big trials going on, and we hope those will be completed so that we have the kind of evidence that we need to make sure that patients receive the drugs which help -- and do not receive drugs which do not help."