

Coronavirus pandemic in new and dangerous phase: WHO

ISLAMABAD: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that the new coronavirus pandemic is now in a "new and dangerous phase", with the disease accelerating at the same time as people tire of lockdowns.

The death toll has crossed 460,500 mark across the world. The United States has the most deaths with 111,191, followed by Brazil with 48,427, Britain with 42,461, Italy with 34,561 and France with 29,617 fatalities. More than 4,000 dies from the virus related complications on Friday.

A lockdown is re-imposed on 15 million people in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu state in southern India, as the number of coronavirus infections in the nation nears 400,000. The new restrictions follow a surge of cases, even as the rest of the country of 1.3 billion people gradually resumes normal life.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged nations and citizens to remain extremely vigilant, as the number of cases reported to the UN health agency hit a new peak. More than 150,000 new cases of COVID-19 were reported to WHO yesterday -- the most in a single day so far," Tedros told a virtual press conference.

He said almost half of those cases were reported from the Americas, with large numbers also being reported from South Asia and the Middle East. "The world is in a new and dangerous phase. Many people are understandably fed up with being at home. Countries are understandably eager to open up their societies and economies," he said.

"But the virus is still spreading fast, it's still deadly and most people are still susceptible." China has released genome data for the coronavirus found in a new outbreak in Beijing, which state experts suggest share similarities to European strains, as the number of cases neared 200 on Friday.

Tens of thousands of people in the Chinese capital are being tested for the contagion while neighbourhoods have been locked down and schools closed as authorities seek to contain a cluster linked to the Xinfadi food market.

Another 25 cases were confirmed in Beijing, taking the total number of infections since last week to 183. Iran said its novel coronavirus caseload passed the 200,000 mark on Friday, as authorities gave provinces the power to reimpose measures aimed at stemming the spread of the virus.

Official figures have shown an upward trajectory in new confirmed COVID-19 cases since early May, when Iran hit a near two-month low in recorded infections. Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on state television that another 2,615 people in Iran had tested positive for the virus in the past 24 hours.