

Iran reports largest spike in coronavirus fatalities as 147 more die

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Wed, 2020-03-18 11:04

TEHRAN: Iran reported its single biggest jump in deaths from the new coronavirus on Wednesday, saying that another 147 had died in a nearly 15 percent spike that raises the death toll to 1,135 people nationwide.

It marks the biggest 24-hour rise in deaths since officials first acknowledged cases of the virus in Iran in mid-February.

The rise in deaths comes as the number of cases continues to grow each day, with some 17,361 people having been infected nationwide, according to a briefing Wednesday by Iran's deputy health minister, Alireza Raisi.

The outbreak has cast a shadow over the Persian New Year, Nowruz, a normally joyous holiday that begins on Friday. Health officials have urged the public to avoid travel and crowded places. But many seem to be ignoring the warnings, raising the risk of further outbreaks.

Some food markets in the capital, Tehran, were still packed on Wednesday, and highways were crowded with traffic as families traveled between cities. Iran also announced it would close mosques for communal Friday prayers for a third consecutive week.

Raisi criticized people for not adhering to the warnings, saying on national television the virus is very serious. "This is not a good situation at all," he said as he implored people to stay home.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday defended his government's response to the coronavirus outbreak in the face of widespread criticism that officials acted too slowly and may have even covered up initial cases before infections rapidly spread across the country.

In a speech to his Cabinet, Rouhani said the government was "straightforward" with the nation, saying it announced the outbreak as soon as it learned about it on Feb. 19.

"We spoke to people in an honest way. We had no delay," he added.

The government has come under heavy criticism for what has been seen as a slow and inadequate response. For weeks, government officials implored clerics to shut down crowded holy shrines to stymie the spread of the virus. The government finally closed the shrines this week.

"It was difficult of course to shut down mosques and holy sites, but we did it. It was a religious duty to do it," Rouhani said.



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Iranian president rejects criticism of coronavirus response
Iran prohibits 'unnecessary' travel as expert warns 'millions' could die

[Oman central bank to offer \\$20bn extra liquidity](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2020-03-18 10:15

DUBAI: Oman's central bank is preparing to provide some 8 billion Omani rial (\$20.8 billion) in extra liquidity to banks as one of several measures aimed at supporting the economy, state TV reported, as coronavirus fears escalate in the Gulf region.

The central bank has asked banks to cut banking fees, adjust their capital and credit ratios, and allow repayment postponements for up to six months, particularly for small and medium enterprises, the state news agency said separately.

It asked to facilitate lending in sectors affected by the coronavirus, including health care, travel and tourism. (\$1 = 0.3849 Omani rials)



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[Greek police use tear gas on migrants at Turkish border](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2020-03-18 09:43

THESSALONIKI, Greece: Clashes broke out overnight on Greece's border with Turkey early Wednesday, after 500 migrants attempted to break down a border fence and enter Greece.

Greek police said they used tear gas to repel the push to break down the fence south of the Kastanies border crossing. They said Turkish authorities

also fired tear gas at the Greek border. The clashes began at 2 a.m. and lasted for roughly two hours.

An estimated 2,000 migrants are still camped out on the Greek-Turkish border, weeks after Turkey declared its borders to Europe open and encouraged migrants and refugees living in the country to try crossing into European Union member Greece.

Tens of thousands of people headed to the border despite Greece's insistence that its eastern border, which is also the EU's external border, was shut. The move came after months of threats by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that he would open his borders and allow millions of refugees into Europe unless the EU provided more support for refugee care in Turkey. The EU says it is adhering to a 2016 deal with Turkey under which it provides billions of euros in funds in return for Turkey caring for more than 3.5 million refugees from neighboring Syria.



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Hospitality gives way to hostility for migrants to GreeceTwo migrants injured in clashes along Turkey-Greece border

Iranian president rejects criticism of coronavirus response

Author:

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1584525115226663300

Wed, 2020-03-18 09:43

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday defended his government's response to the coronavirus outbreak in the face of widespread criticism that officials acted too slowly and may have even covered up initial cases before infections rapidly spread across the country. Iran has been the hardest hit country in the region, with nearly 1,000 dead and roughly 90 percent of the over 18,000 confirmed cases of the virus in the Middle East. Its leadership announced Tuesday that "millions" could die in the Islamic Republic if people keep traveling and ignore health guidance. In a speech to his Cabinet, Rouhani said the government was "straightforward" with the nation, saying it announced the outbreak as soon as it learned about it on Feb. 19.

"We spoke to people in an honest way. We had no delay," he added.

The government has come under heavy criticism for what has been seen as a slow and inadequate response. For weeks, government officials implored clerics to shut down crowded holy shrines to stymie the spread of the virus. The government finally closed the shrines this week.

"It was difficult of course to shut down mosques and holy sites, but we did it. It was a religious duty to do it," Rouhani said.

The outbreak has cast a shadow over the Persian New Year, Nowruz, a normally joyous holiday that begins on Friday. Health officials have urged the public to avoid travel and crowded places. But many seem to be ignoring the warnings, raising the risk of further outbreaks.

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Iran prohibits 'unnecessary' travel as expert warns 'millions' could dieIran temporarily frees 85,000 prisoners amid coronavirus

[Saudi Embassy urges citizens in Cairo to follow measures to fight virus](#)

Tue, 2020-03-17 22:50

CAIRO: The Saudi Embassy in Cairo has urged its citizens to follow all precautionary steps to protect themselves from the spread of coronavirus.

The embassy called on Saudis currently in Egypt to avoid crowded areas and commercial malls, as well as follow instructions from local authorities to confront the virus.

The embassy also said in light of Saudi Arabia's recent decision to halt flights between the Kingdom and different parts of the world, Saudis in Egypt

are urged to stay at their homes until further notice.



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Jordan's monarch approves a state of emergency law to combat coronavirus