

Iran coronavirus death toll jumps to 145, govt lashes out at US

March 7 2020

Iran's official death toll from the new coronavirus rose by 21 Saturday, with a lawmaker among the latest fatalities, while the government accused Washington of hampering Tehran's response to the virus.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said that the 21 deaths took the country's total death toll to 145, while 1,076 additional cases had been confirmed in the past 24 hours, bringing the [total number](#) of confirmed cases to 5,823.

"More than 16,000 people are currently hospitalised as suspect cases," Jahanpour said during a televised news conference.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif later said American sanctions—reimposed from 2018, after Washington pulled out of a multilateral nuclear deal—were undermining Iran's battle against [coronavirus](#).

US President Donald Trump "is maliciously tightening US' illegal sanctions with the aim of draining Iran's resources needed in the fight against #COVID-19—while our citizens are dying from it" Zarif tweeted on Saturday.

"The world can no longer be silent as US #EconomicTerrorism is supplanted by its #MedicalTerrorism," he said.

Jahanpour said Saturday that 1,669 people who were sick with the

COVID-19 illness have recovered.

The Islamic republic is battling one of the world's deadliest outbreaks of the disease outside China.

On Saturday, a newly elected conservative Tehran lawmaker became the second legislator to be killed by the virus, state news agency IRNA reported.

Fatemeh Rahbar, 55, served as a lawmaker from 2004 to 2016 and won a seat in February's legislative election.

Seven other politicians and government officials have died in Iran's outbreak.

The capital Tehran remains the worst-hit province in the country, although all 31 provinces have reported infections.

Iran has closed schools and universities until early April, and suspended major cultural and sporting events.

The number of infections is climbing in northern provinces in particular, Jahanpour said.

More than 300 of the new cases reported on Saturday were in Mazandaran, a popular tourist destination on the Caspian sea.

Jahanpour said that the province had been hit by people travelling there for holidays, which he described as ill-avised.

Several provinces, including in northern and central Iran, have said they will not accomodate tourists in an effort to dissuade people from travelling.

Police in Gilan and Mazandaran from Friday started preventing cars without local license plates from entering the provinces.

But according to an adviser to the health minister Alireza Vahabzadeh, some locals were bypassing the restrictions by giving non-residents lifts across provincial borders.

Like all areas of Iran's economy, the health sector has struggled in the face of renewed US sanctions.

Humanitarian goods, especially medicine and [medical equipment](#), are technically exempt.

But international purchases of such supplies are forestalled by banks wary of conducting any business with Iran for fear of falling foul of the US sanctions.

Representatives of the World Health Organization currently in Iran praised the country's [healthcare system](#).

"Iran has one of the strongest healthcare systems of all the countries in the eastern Mediterranean region," said delegation head Richard Brennan at a press conference in Tehran.

"Elements of the response here (to the outbreak) have progressed further than in a number of other countries," he added.

WHO's representative in Iran, Christoph Hamelmann, said his organisation can help cushion "the impact of unilateral sanctions on the [health sector](#), mainly through assistance with procurement and supply of essential medicines."

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