

Iran announces 43 new coronavirus deaths, raising toll to 237

March 9 2020

Iran on Monday announced 43 new deaths from the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours, bringing the overall toll to 237 dead, one of the world's highest.

"Our colleagues have confirmed 595 new cases across the country," health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a news conference.

"This brings the overall number of confirmed cases to 7,161 as of today noon," he said.

Jahanpour said the rate of new infections was slowing but it was "still too early to judge" when the outbreak could be brought under control.

"Forty-three people have unfortunately been added to the number of those who have died of the disease, so to date we have 237 dead," he said.

Iranian media said a politician and a high-ranking cleric were among the latest fatalities.

Mohammadreza Rahchamani, a reformist politician and sitting MP from 1984 to 2000, died on Monday, state news agency IRNA said.

Another prominent victim was Ayatollah Reza Mohammadi Langeroudi, 91, a student of the Islamic republic's late founder Ayatollah Khomeini, Entekhab website reported.

The outbreak of the virus in Iran is one of the deadliest outside of China, where the disease originated.

With 1,945 cases, the capital Tehran remains the province with the most cases.

The second worst-hit province with 712 confirmed cases is Qom, the Shiite pilgrimage city south of Tehran where the Islamic republic's first cases were reported, followed by Mazandaran in the north with 633.

The latter is a popular tourist spot bordering the Caspian Sea, especially during holidays for the Iranian New Year on March 20.

Iran is yet to officially impose quarantines but authorities have repeatedly advised against travelling.

In certain provinces including Mazandaran, the police have announced that non-residents will be denied entry.

According to Iranian media, authorities in several provinces have ordered the closure of hotels and other tourist accommodations in a bid to discourage travel.

State television has also started airing educational programmes for elementary school students, after schools were closed until the end of the Iranian year.

Some radical Iranian officials have speculated the [coronavirus](#) may have been developed as a weapon by the Islamic republic's arch-enemy, the United States.

The virus may have been "a product of America's biological aggression that has first infected China and then spread to Iran and the rest of the

world," said Hossein Salami, commander of the elite Revolutionary Guards, quoted in Etemad newspaper.

But Alaeddin Boroudjerdi, a senior MP, noted that the "United States, the Zionist regime (Israel) and other countries are all affected" by the virus.

Apart from the direct fatalities, 27 people have died from methanol poisoning in Iran after rumours that drinking alcohol can help cure the disease.

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