

India's Covid tally tops 3cr, last 1cr in record 50 days



NEW DELHI With a steady decline in new Covid cases over the last few weeks, around 153 districts recorded less than 1% positivity rate between June 15-21, indicating that the epidemic is now limited to a few districts that continue to report a high number of cases. Average daily new cases were 1,000.

In just over three and a half months, the second wave accounts for over 65% of all Covid cases recorded in India (taking March 1 as the start of the wave), with close to 1.9 crore cases so far. With 23,042 deaths of a total of 39,600, 66% of all of health workers Covid fatalities in the country have taken place during the second wave.

Madhya Pradesh, which administered a new high of 6.9 lakh vaccine doses on Monday, managed to even 1,000 daily 0.3% of the peak on Tuesday, an indicator perhaps of having got up almost all its stocks on the big day.

Covid-19: Madhya Pradesh goes from 1 lakh jobs a day to less than 5,000. India's total confirmed cases at 30,07,364, as per WHO Covid database. The US has so far recorded 3.44 crore cases, the highest in the world. Brazil is the only other country where cases have exceeded 3 crore.

On Tuesday, India reported 50,497 fresh cases and 1,047 deaths (not counting 294 "backlog" deaths reported by Maharashtra). On Monday, the case count had dropped below 50,000 (42,667) and the toll had dipped under 1,000 (800).

Another 39 people lose their lives to coronavirus in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD Another 39 deaths were reported from coronavirus in Pakistan and a positive response of 1,045 was recorded over the last 24 hours, according to the National Command and Operation Center's daily data.

The NCOC wrote in an update on Twitter that 45,510 COVID-19 cases were confirmed across the country in the last 24 hours, out of which 95% came back positive.

According to the official press release, the rate of positive cases of

COVID-19 currently stands at 2.6%.

The total number of deaths from coronavirus in the country so far has reached 22,073 and the total number of cases has reached 950,768, while 885,600 people have recovered from the virus so far.

The active number of cases stands at 13,045. During the last 24 hours, the recorded deaths occurred in Sindh followed by Punjab. Out of the 39 deaths in the last 24 hours, 19 reported on ventilators.

According to a province-wise breakdown, the total active COVID-19 cases stand at 11,243 in Sindh, 17,799 in Punjab, 1,482 in

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 4,378 in Islamabad Capital Territory, 820 in Balochistan, 301 in Gilgit-Baltistan and 461 in آزاد کشمیر and

Kashmir. A day earlier, the death of coronavirus cases in Pakistan dropped dramatically, with the country reporting a positivity rate of 1.69%, which was the lowest rate in eight months.



Turkmenistan's capital tops list of most expensive cities for expats

The capital of Turkmenistan in Central Asia has been named as the world's most expensive city for foreign workers.

Ashgabat, a city of about one million people, topped a 2021 cost-of-living survey by costanalyst firm Mercer.

The ranking puts Ashgabat above last year's priciest city, Hong Kong, which was placed second, followed by Beirut in Lebanon and Tokyo in Japan.

The annual report ranks 209 cities based on the cost of expenses such as housing, transport and food.

Mercer said it evaluated more than 200 goods and services for the report, which is designed to

help companies and governments around the world estimate how much they should pay expatriate employees.

Expatriates, or expats, are people who live or work outside their native countries.

Most of the cities in Mercer's top 10 are business hubs where economic growth has led to a hike in the price of housing and other living costs.

But Ashgabat owes its high ranking to economic woes rather than prosperity, making it a outlier.

Juan-Phillipe Sarras of Mercer told AFP news agency that "high local inflation" explained Ashgabat's rise to first from second in

last year's survey. Inflation is the rate of increase in prices for goods and services over time.

Known for its autocratic government and large gas reserves, with long-running economic crisis that has plagued many citizens into poverty.

Formerly part of the Soviet Union, the country is highly dependent on natural gas exports to Russia, China and Turkmenistan's economy.

A global jump in energy prices in 2011 pushed up inflation and food prices.

A country profile of Turkmenistan

In September last year, a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the Covid-19 pandemic in Ashgabat "has exacerbated Turkmenistan's pre-existing food crisis".

"Shortages of subsidised food, according since 2010, have worsened, with people waiting hours in line to try to buy more affordable food products, often being turned away empty-handed," the report said.

Despite this, Turkmenistan's government started a major expansion of Ashgabat in May. Longtime President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov pledged to turn the capital into "one of the most prosperous cities in the world".

More than 100 activists urge China to halt Bangladesh coal power project

More than 100 activists from 21 countries sent a letter to China's government on Tuesday calling for a halt to financing of a coal-fired power plant in Bangladesh, saying Beijing had misled Dhaka in February that it would no longer support highly polluting projects.

In 2016, Bangladesh approved the megaproject. Chinese funded Bangladesh's coal project, which has been controversial from the start, with allegations of land grab by police against protesters, and wage and labor issues.

In February 2021, the Economic and Commercial Consulate of China in Bangladesh sent a letter to the Bangladesh Ministry of Finance stating that "the Chinese side shall no longer consider projects with high pollution and high energy consumption, such as coal mining and coal-fired power stations," the activists wrote in the letter signed by Hasan Mahmud, member secretary of the Bangladesh Working Group on Environmental Issues (BWGCI).

The activists' letter noted that China's President Xi Jinping had called in "purple zones, green and clean cooperation" in a speech at the second Belt and Road Forum in 2019.

It also noted the project's controversial history.

Since the beginning of the project in 2016, 12 people have lost their lives, more than 100 got injured and harassment cases have been filed against over 6,000 workers and villagers in three different incidents around this power plant, the letter said.

Local people consider the project a curse. For themselves as recently lives were looted at least 10,000 people have been affected by the losses of homesteads and landless because of the project.

Mahmud confirmed that the letter signed by 129 activists from 21 countries had been emailed to Waseem Wajid, a Chinese embassy in Dhaka.

"We will file a copy of the letter on Wednesday," he told Reuters.

Mahmud said he had the withdrawal of all Chinese investment and involvement in the Bangladesh 11 plant. It also demanded an investigation into alleged human rights violations there and requested the Chinese government to

an Environmental Impact Assessment of the project. "Without exceptions, cancel all existing and future investments in food fuel including coal, oil and gas," it said.

The Bangladesh S. Alam group is scheduled to begin producing 1,320 MW of power in 2023. China financed 10 percent of the U.S. \$2.49 billion cost of the project, according to information on S. Alam Group's website.

The plant, also called SS Power, is a being built by Shandong Electric Power Construction Corp (SEPCO), a subsidiary of Power of China, a Chinese central government enterprise, according to three environmental groups.

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The letter about the Bangladesh project and the coal plant would be "extremely harmful" to the health of people living in the area, said he was not aware of the letter.

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