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First Case of Coronavirus Confirmed in Armenia

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Coronavirus

The first case of coronavirus infection was reported in Armenia when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Sunday confirmed reports on his Facebook page. The patient is a 29-year-old male who arrived from Iran on February 28.

The infected man was traveling with his wife on board a flight from

Tehran, which was transporting mostly Armenian citizens back to Armenia. According to Pashinyan's Facebook post, the wife was tested negative for the virus.

Armenia closed its border to Iran when reports suggested a rise in outbreaks in Iran. Yerevan also announced that it would extend its border closure with Iran until March 22.

"Now the government will take the necessary measures defined by the World Health Organization," said Pashinyan in his Facebook post. "The people who had contacts of risk with the patient will be isolated."

Pashinyan announced that all passengers were wearing masks in Tehran and on board the plane. The border control officers, he explained, had taken precautions and escorted the passengers through a special protocol that prevented contacts with other passengers.

The prime minister urged all citizens to remain calm and only rely on information from government agencies and follow instructions laid out by the health ministry to prevent the spread of the virus.

Later on Sunday, Pashinyan announced that as a precautionary measure all classes at Armenia's schools will be suspended.

At press briefing on Sunday, Armenia's health minister Arsen Torosyan reported that 32 citizens who are suspected to be carrying the virus will be quarantined at the now empty Golden Palace hotel in Tsaghkadzor

The Golden Palace hotel was owned by Armen Avetisyan, a former chief of the Armenian customs service. He offered to donate it to the government in 2019 after the National Security

Service (NSS) moved to prosecute him for money laundering. The government said it would auction the hotel.

Earlier, the State Property Management Committee said the hotel was estimated at \$16.5 million, but the auction, which was supposed to be held in December last year, did not take place, due to the lack of interest.

To allay fears among the population, Pashinyan and his family traveled to Tsaghkadzor, dined at a local restaurant and met with residents of the city.

Torosyan added that the border with Georgia will not close and said flights to Italy, which has seen the highest cases of the Coronavirus in Europe, would not be suspended.

The health minister did say that decisions were being made as the situation developed, stressing that those decisions might change based on consultations with Armenia's international partners.

Torosyan reported that 117 tests had been conducted in Armenia to determine the new cases. He emphasized that these are not quick screening tests, and it is impossible to check them all.

"Moreover, the test may show a negative result at the initial stage of the disease," he added.

The top health officials also said that the likelihood of the border closure with Iran to last through the Nowruz holiday was high, adding that the decision to temporarily suspend visa-free travel from China and Iran was an effort to curb the possible migration of the virus to Armenia.