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Two coronavirus cases confirmed in Pakistan

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–PM’s aide says both patients had returned from Iran recently

–Mirza says ‘no need to panic’ as Balochistan govt closes all educational institutes till Mar 15

KARACHI: The first two cases of the novel coronavirus in Pakistan have been confirmed, a top government official said on Wednesday, adding that both patients had travelled to Iran recently.

In a tweet, PM’s Special Assistant on Health Dr Zafar Mirza said, “I can confirm first two cases of coronavirus in Pakistan. Both cases are being taken care of according to clinical standard protocols & both of them are stable.”

He said there’s “no need to panic, things are under control”, adding that one patient was reported from Karachi and the other from Islamabad.

The confirmation came moments after the Sindh Health Department announced that a young man had tested positive for the coronavirus in Karachi.

The 22-year-old male patient travelled to Iran where he acquired COVID-19, Media Coordinator to the Health and Population Welfare Minister Meeran Yousuf said in a statement.

The patient travelled from Iran to Karachi by plane on Feb 20. He and his family have been placed in quarantine at the Aga Khan University Hospital and the health department is in the process of examining all the passengers that he travelled with, the statement added.

Yousuf said the Sindh government has informed the federal government, World Health Organisation and other partners about the confirmation of the virus in the patient. "The passengers who travelled with him were exposed as well; we will track down all the passengers and carry out their tests," the coordinator added.

So far, over 2,700 deaths have been confirmed from coronavirus in the world and over 81,000 others have been infected. Pakistan is facing a huge challenge to avoid the disease as the virus has already made entry to neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran.

The government has deployed 67 doctors at its border crossing with Iran to treat suspected patients of the deadly virus. At the same time, the provincial authorities have declared a "coronavirus emergency" in five districts of Balochistan – Chagai, Washuk, Panjgur, Kech and Gwadar – as a preemptive measure.

The Balochistan government has also closed all educational institutions in the province till March 15 to prevent the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, activities at the Pakistan-Iran border remain suspended as the provincial government has completely sealed the border at five points not allowing anyone to cross into Pakistan

from Iran.

The authorities have also announced it would not allow around 5,000 pilgrims currently in Iran to return following the outbreak of the infestation there.

The virus is believed to have originated late last year in a food market in the Chinese city of Wuhan that was illegally selling wildlife. Health experts think it may have originated in bats and then passed to humans, possibly via another animal species.

On Wednesday, the World Health Organisation said there are now more new cases of the coronavirus reported each day outside China than inside the hardest-hit country.

The UN health agency had put the number of new cases in China at 411 on Tuesday and those registered outside the country stood at 427.