

India continues reporting record high daily COVID cases

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Policemen wearing protective face masks ask people to sit while waiting to enter the Lokmanya Tilak Terminus railway station in Mumbai [Niharika Kulkarni/Reuters]

New Delhi, April 18 (RHC)-- India has reported yet another new record of daily coronavirus cases as hospitals in the capital, New Delhi, and other parts of the country overflow with patients and experts warn

the healthcare system is teetering on the brink of collapse.

The health ministry revealed on Sunday that 261,500 cases were registered in the past 24 hours, the fourth consecutive day when the country has reported more than 200,000 daily cases.

The figure pushed the total number of cases past 14.7 million, second only to the United States in terms of the number of coronavirus infections. There were also 1,500 deaths, taking the number of fatalities in the South Asian country to 177,150, fourth on the global list behind the US, Brazil and Mexico.

New Delhi recorded 24,000 coronavirus cases in a day and is facing an acute shortage of hospital beds. It has imposed a weekend curfew and is among the worst-hit cities in India.

In recent weeks, criticism has mounted over how the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi handled the health crisis, as religious festivals and election rallies continue despite reports of shortages of hospital beds, oxygen cylinders and vaccination doses.

Some local governments have raised concerns over shortages and hoarding of anti-viral drug remdesivir. Nawab Malik, a minister in the western state of Maharashtra, accused Modi's federal government of restricting remdesivir supplies to the state. A minister in Modi's cabinet, Mansukh Mandaviya, denied the allegation, saying adequate supplies were being arranged.

After hundreds of thousands of ascetics and devout Hindus gathered for several days along the banks of the Ganges for Kumbh Mela – a religious festival being held in the northern city of Haridwar, Modi on Saturday called for restraint, saying on Twitter the festival should now be kept "symbolic".

Devout Hindus believe bathing in the holy Ganges absolves people of sins, and during the Kumbh Mela, it brings salvation from the cycle of life and death. Experts have warned about the spread of more contagious variants of the disease, especially during large-scale gatherings for religious festivals and political rallies.

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