Jharkhand may extend lockdown till April 30, cabinet to decide today

The Jharkhand government may resolve to extend the lockdown in the state during Monday’s cabinet meeting as the number of positive Covid-19 cases have begun to rise. Since March 31, a total of 17 confirmed cases have surfaced from Ranchi, Bokaro, Hazaribag and Koderma. The state has also recorded two deaths due to the virus, the latest being on Sunday from Ranchi’s Hindpiri area.

Congress, a key alliance partner in the Hemant Soren-led alliance government, on Sunday said that they are in favour of an extension of the lockdown, but with certain relaxations in rural areas. In Monday’s cabinet meeting, ministers from Congress is expected to support the extension proposal, said party office bearers.
Talking to TOI, Congress's senior leader and spokesperson Alok Dubey said, “The party is in favour of an extension with certain relaxations in rural areas and for farmers. We shall submit a proposal to the government in this regard tomorrow (Monday) so that cabinet can take it up. We shall also demand a parole for former Bihar CM Lalu Prasad.” Congress has four ministers in the 11-member cabinet.

State Congress president Rameshwar Oraon, who is also the state finance and food and public distribution minister, had earlier aired his support for the extension of the lockdown. He had said, “It must be increased in places, mostly in the urban pockets, to contain the spread of the disease. In rural areas, the lockdown needs to be relaxed so that farmers can begin harvesting rabi crops, sell foodgrains and other produces to initiate economic activities.”

Senior JMM leader and state transport minister Champai Soren also spoke in favour of an extension. “The cabinet will finally take a call on Monday, but I think that we should continue with it for at least two more weeks to be able to stabilise the situation. Also, at the same time, the government is concerned about lakhs of people who are stranded outside the state on how to smoothly facilitate their return after being effectively screened. A slight negligence to allow reverse exodus may put us in an uncontrollable situation.”

Bleeding severe losses amid the uncertainty, Jharkhand Small Industries Association (JSIA), an umbrella outfit for medium, small and micro enterprises on Sunday appealed the Union and state governments for a lighter lockdown to enable industries to resume work in the interest of economic activities. JSIA secretary Anjay Pancheriwala said, “We have appealed for industries to be allowed to function in the non-hotspot regions with a host of regulations in place. We are ready to follow all safeguards. The entire MSE sector here is virtually bleeding for life vis-à-vis high recurring expenses and zero income. While the governments have appealed not to slash wages of employees, but where will industries bring the money from when there is no business activity?”

However, opposition BJP has appealed the government to extend the lockdown till April 30 with extra caution. BJP’s leader of legislative party and Dhanwar MLA Babulal Marandi said, “Lockdown extension has become imperative for Jharkhand’s in light of the increasing number of cases. Giving any kind of relaxation would mean compromising with safety precautions.”
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View of a deserted road in Ranchi

RANCHI: A Covid-19 positive patient died at Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Jharkhand (https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/jharkhand)’s Ranchi, said an official on Sunday.

He was among the eight persons who were brought to the isolation ward from the Hindpiri area. With this, the death toll in the state rises to two.

“An apparently healthy 33-year-old woman suffering from Covid-19 died of multiple organ failure at 12.30 am at RIMS on Sunday,” said Dr Vijay Bihari, civil surgeon, Ranchi.

Till now there are 17 positive cases of Covid-19 in Jharkhand.
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Sindri: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Saturday approved Patliputra Medical College and Hospital (PMCH) in Dhanbad as a testing centre for Covid-19. Jharkhand will now have three testing centres.
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Dhanbad deputy commissioner Amit Kumar said PMCH will begin testing samples from Saturday night.

So far, samples collected were either sent to Rims in Ranchi or MGM in Jamshedpur.

Kumar said, “Covid-19 test at PMCH will not only ease out the pressure on the two centres of the state, but it would also enable the state government to increase its daily testing capacity. The district administration has also decided to start a dialysis centre at the sadar hospital here to provide relief to kidney patients. The new dialysis centre has been set up as the BCCL central hospital has been turned into a Covid-19 hospital and its kidney patients are finding it difficult to get the dialysis done during the lockdown.”
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Ranchi: State finance minister Rameshwar Oraon on Saturday asked the Centre to grant a special financial package for Jharkhand to help the state overcome the economic and monetary crisis arising out of the poor health of the state treasury and the slowdown triggered by the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.

Talking to TOI, Oraon said, “Economic activities have come to a standstill. Our revenues have fallen by more than 60%-70% while expenditure has increased exponentially. The reasons for revenue shortage are a drastic fall in collections of VAT from excise and sale of petrol and diesel. In addition, the state is still waiting for its share of Goods and Services Tax (GST) and other assistance from the Centre.”

Oraon added, “We are incurring high expenses, mainly for health and food, both of which are crucial during the lockdown and can’t be ignored. With limited resources, we will soon face problems to meet these expenses if we do not get help from the Centre. Jharkhand requires immediate special financial package.”

While he did not quote the amount of central assistance required, Oraon said a formal proposal will be placed before chief minister Hemant Soren to take up the matter with the Centre. He said, “I will place the demand before the CM and our council of ministers in the upcoming cabinet meeting. Once decided, it will then be formally sent to the Government of India.”
Oraon, who is also the state president of the Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee (JPCC), said the party is in favor of a restricted extension of lockdown. He said, “The lockdown must continue in urban areas and places that are heavily polluted or congested as the trend suggests that more coronavirus cases are being reported at such places. It should be relaxed in rural pockets to enable farmers to get back to work. In a nutshell, Congress believes that basic economic activities should resume to prevent the economy from crashing. How long can the government continue to feed everyone, especially in a poor state like Jharkhand where there is virtually no money in the hands of the government?”
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