

# BVI Seeking Help From Cuba to Battle Coronavirus

Coronavirus / **Published On March 30, 2020 08:14 AM /**

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Tortola, British Virgin Islands — BVI Premier Andrew Fahie announced on Saturday that he was awaiting word from the United Kingdom government in support of two major initiatives — medical resources from Cuba and UK financial assistance for the unemployed — as the British Virgin Islands government continues efforts to stem the spread of COVID-19 in the territory.

To date, two persons have tested positive for COVID-19 in the BVI, both men having returned from traveling from the United States and Europe, respectively. However, results of 9 more cases are expected and other persons are being tested daily.

The BVI is on the third day of a mandatory 24-hour curfew, following a phased lockdown Wednesday and Thursday 8pm-6am and prior to that limited numbers of gatherings and reduced business hours. The 24-hr curfew runs until 2 April at 6am in the first instance.

Premier Fahie emphasized that these measures are aimed at keeping everyone, especially the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions, safe.

“Our shared mission is to stop this pandemic in its tracks to ensure that we do not get any community spreading and to ensure that we send our count back down to zero cases,” he declared. “The best way to do this is by staying in our homes and obeying the precautions as we are doing, and for that, I thank everyone in the Virgin Islands.”

To demonstrate how serious government is for persons to adhere to the curfew, one man was arrested by the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force after 11pm on Thursday.

The BVI leader announced that the Ministry of Health and Social Development and the Premier’s Office have engaged with the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Cuban Government to secure Medical resources.

He said BVI has requested 30 medical personnel from Cuba and the team is now ready to come to the BVI. Cuba has already dispatched medical teams to other Caribbean countries, including Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Antigua/Barbuda, Grenada and Barbados.

“We are now awaiting word from the United Kingdom through the Governor’s Office to support our request for this invaluable assistance from the Cuban Government,” Mr. Fahie said.

Meanwhile, as part of his government’s economic strategy and in an effort to create revenue streams for workers displaced as a result of COVID-19, Mr. Fahie said he has asked Governor Augustus Jaspert to ask the UK government for special assistance for this Overseas Territory.

He wants those unemployed for a certain time as a result of COVID-19, to be paid at least minimum wage from a grant from the United Kingdom.

“As a government, we trust that the governor is able to assist BVI with accessing these funds to match what the BVI is making available to its unemployed population as a result of COVID-19,” the BVI leader said.

In addition, the local government will convene a Regional Trade and Commerce Symposium on Monday, 30 March.

The online symposium will bring together leaders of business organizations in the Caribbean Community CARICOM and OECS, to explore ways to maintain access to quality goods and supplies and ensure competitive prices.

“This will not only ensure our safety in terms of food and supplies, but it will also help to restore our economic activity and create the conditions for keeping our businesses going and for getting our people back into their jobs,” said Mr. Fahie, who is also the Minister of Finance.

Sunday was declared a National Day of Repentance, where people were invited to participate via local radio.