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Coronavirus Said to be Under Control in the British Virgin Islands, Phased Internal Reopening Begins

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Tortola, British Virgin Islands – Thanks to proactive measures put in place by the government and the cooperation of residents, Premier Andrew A. Fahie of the British Virgin Islands on Wednesday reported that the current 24-hour curfew scheduled to end on Sunday April 19 will be lifted, but in a phased manner; COVID-19 cases are down from 3 to 1 and mandatory quarantined cases are down from 143 to 5.

“As you are aware, we had 3 confirmed cases; they have been recovering remarkably; in fact, two of them have now tested negative for COVID-19,” he announced during a live Facebook stream.

He added that since the institution of the 24-hour 14-day curfew and with ongoing testing, there have been no new cases of COVID-19 in the BVI.

The BVI has been under a phased lockdown since March 22, going into a full shutdown on April 2 where air and sea ports, government offices, businesses and schools were closed and residents, except for essential service workers, ordered to stay at home.

To address the needs of residents during the curfew, government provided days for shopping for essential supplies and then home delivery of food and cooking gas.

In his latest update, Premier Fahie outlined a number of decisions taken by the Cabinet of the Virgin Islands, which includes UK Governor Augustus Jaspert and all of the ministers of government.

He affirmed that BVI has in place aggressive contact tracing and containment measures, along with proactive social distancing. There are no new cases of spikes in transmission and no evidence of community spread, and public health officials have balanced the surveillance system and scaled up the health care system.

“With these factors in mind, Cabinet...agreed that there will be no need for any further extension of the current 14-day 24-hour imposition of a curfew order,” the BVI leader declared.

Phase 1 of a COVID-19 internal and restricted borders reopening plan will run until June 1, 2020.

During this 6-week gradual reopening, a new curfew order will be put in place from 6:01am on Thursday April 16 to 6am on Thursday April 30 for 14 days.

Under the new order:

April 16-17 - the existing 24-hour curfew will remain in effect

April 18 - approved businesses will be allowed to clear supplies at Port Purcell, Tortola and St. Thomas Bay, Virgin Gorda

Critical key private sector businesses will be allowed to carry out necessary in store sanitization, physical distancing markers, security, environmental health assessment and associated measures prior to reopening

A limited list of key private sector businesses and organizations will be permitted to operate during the first few days of the first phase of the internal reopening plan – supermarkets, minimarts, bakeries, pharmacies and drugs stores, restaurants but only for delivery and takeout, banks, remittance services, farming and fisheries, fuel and LPG stations, hardware stores, ferries but only for inter-BVI travel, buses or taxis but with limited passengers adhering to the social distancing measures, laundromats, healthcare providers, insurance companies, small construction teams with a limit of 20 people per project, manufacturers and suppliers of Personal Protective Equipment PPE and hand sanitization products, office supplies stores, telecommunication retail stores, garages and automotive supply stores, home delivery services and gatherings at faith based organizations limited to 20 people.

Cabinet also agreed that a new nighttime curfew will be imposed from 7pm until 6am daily starting from April 19-June 1, 2020. Approved businesses will be allowed to operate daily within this time from 6am to 7pm.

On Sunday April 19, seniors 70 years and above, along with essential services workers will be allowed to access key critical businesses for essential supplies and services. Everyone else is

expected to remain at home.

From Monday, April 20 at 6am, residents will be able to leave their homes to access critical key services and for limited exercise except on the beaches, which will remain closed.

Access to businesses in the capital Road Town from Monday April 20 to Thursday April 23 will be as follows:

- Districts 4, 5, 6 - Monday April 20
- Districts 1, 2, 3 - Tuesday April 21
- Districts 7, 8 - Wednesday April 22
- District 9 - Thursday April 23
- Anegada – April 20-23

“Please understand that the territory will no longer be on a full lockdown, we are internally reopening, but with caution so that we do not retard the progress we have made thus far in containing COVID-19 in the British Virgin Islands,” said Premier Fahie.

He said after the 4th day of the internal reopening, all residents will be allowed into Road Town or anywhere in the territory, so there is no need to panic and rush. He said businesses have given assurances that they are stocked and shipments are being cleared.

There is a 90-day phased public service operations plan, where officers are being retooled and retrained. There will be a temporary redeployment of immigration officers to join the joint task force with Her Majesty’s Customs and the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force, to provide extra manpower on the roads, at the borders and patrolling the seas.

“There will be zero tolerance of human trafficking and to crime,” the BVI leader declared.

He said when the borders reopen in phase 2, only persons deemed to belong to the British Virgin Islands and persons with residency status will be allowed entry over the next three months, but with strict conditions. The only port of entry will be the Terrence B. Lettsome International Airport and passengers must be pre-approved, among other measures, 7 days in advance of travel.

In a further announcement, the Finance Minister said government will continue to meet with businesses to discuss innovative ways of doing business post COVID-19.

In terms of government’s economic response, Cabinet has approved the BVI Government’s Policy Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and this will be discussed with the public shortly. In the meantime, a relief package will be immediately implemented.

Discussions will be held with the United Kingdom government toward relieving the BVI government of its obligations under section 20 of the Protocols for Effective Financial Management and to amend sections 25, 27 & 28 to enable the BVI to secure funding to respond to catastrophic events caused by COVID-19.

Premier Fahie pointed out that any COVID-19 monetary or non-monetary donation coming into the territory must be delivered to the government, to ensure accountability, fiscal responsibility, transparency and good governance.

The BVI government used \$12 million of its own resources in the initial stages to spearhead the health emergency response. An area was constructed at the Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital to

quarantine persons and COVID-19 test kits were acquired. Thirty medical personnel from Cuba are also to arrive here shortly.

In addition, valuable assistance is being received from the private sector, including the BVI Red Cross, Family Support Network and the Rotary and Lions Clubs.

Mr. Fahie went on to announce that schools will remain closed to students, but teachers, in a limited capacity, can access schools and engage in online instructions.

“We cannot become complacent, hence the reason for these actions,” he defended. “If at any time we as a government believe you are not putting safety first and practicing social distancing and personal hygiene, a 24-hour curfew will be reinstated and you can hold me to that.”

Governor Jaspert and Health Minister Carvin Malone also appeared and reiterated the measures in place and to be taken in the next few days.