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BVI Reports First Coronavirus Death; Extended Curfew Announced

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Tortola, British Virgin Islands – A 52 -year-old Filipino woman who had underlying medical conditions and who came into contact with an overseas source with the coronavirus, has died.

This is according to information compiled from government sources, including the Ministry of Health and the Health Emergency Operations Centre HEOC.

On Thursday, the territory received the sad news of a fourth possible case of the virus. The patient, who was admitted to the isolation ward of the Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital for emergency treatment, succumbed to the symptoms of her illness on Saturday morning.

Premier Andrew Fahie, in extending sympathies to the loved ones of the deceased during a broadcast on Saturday, said despite the sad news, the British Virgin Islands is still in a good place. However, he said in the interest of saving lives, there would have to be additional sacrifices, resulting in a prolonged shutdown of the economy so that in a few more days, the territory will be in a better place.

“Preliminary test results for COVID-19 in this patient returned positive, but this still has to be verified by CARPHA, so officially, this is a suspected case,” Mr. Fahie declared. “Several other persons who had contact with this individual were also tested for the virus; preliminary results for these persons returned as negative for the virus, but this also has to be verified by CARPHA. In these circumstances, even though we have to wait for formal results to come back from CARPHA, we are proceeding on the basis that patient #4 was indeed COVID-19 positive and that her death is suspected to be COVID-19 related, unless it is proven otherwise when the results come back from CARPHA.”

He said the safety and well-being of every person on these islands is the number one priority of his government and other stakeholders united in this effort against this virus.

Residents were largely looking forward to the phased relaxing of the 14-day 24-hour curfew and restrictions next week. In fact, essential businesses were allowed to start preparing from this weekend for a phased reopening on Monday, April 19.

“But you would understand that the present circumstances leave us no choice but to adjust these plans to ensure your safety,” Premier Fahie said. “In this regard, the phased reopening of businesses has to be pushed back and we need to extend the 24-hour curfew for just a few days more from today onwards until we are certain that it is safe.”

According to the BVI leader, the records stand as testimony that countries that have taken the virus seriously and communities that have adhered to the warnings to practice social distancing and self isolation have fared better than those that have not.

“We in the British Virgin Islands took the matter seriously from the very beginning, we secured our borders and we secured our communities,” he pointed out.

Mr. Fahie contended that although the COVID-19 situation is always changing, it was good that the BVI was this proactive. He said the best way to shorten the fallout and lessen the impact on the economy and persons in a difficult position as a result of the situation, is to batten down now for a bit longer.

He promised to divulge further details after a meeting of Cabinet later on Saturday, especially as it relates to persons getting access to food and other essential supplies.

Governor Augustus Jaspert and Health Minister Carvin Malone joined in expressing condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

Governor Jaspert pointed out that the apartment complex where the deceased lived has been quarantined and further contact tracing is underway.

Reacting to the vitriol circulating via social media on the situation with the virus, he said, “this is a moment to stay calm...this is also a moment for showing great community spirit and unity that we have in the British Virgin Islands...no one should have any fear of coming forward to report any health concerns...there should be no stigmatizing of any individuals or communities in this

territory.”

Mr. Malone informed the public during a sitting of the Virgin Islands House of Assembly late on Friday that another BVI resident had tested positive for COVID-19 through local testing and that the sample would be sent to CARPHA for confirmation.

He confirmed on Saturday that the family and persons residing in the apartment compound where the patient and her family lived have been quarantined. He asked persons who left the compound to call the medical hotline so they could be examined or questioned to determine their status.

“Yesterday, 24 samples were transported to CARPHA by the Regional Security System aircraft and results are expected later this afternoon,” the Health Minister said. “These samples were taken from the patient and 22 of her immediate contacts, as well as case #3 who is now ready for retesting to confirm his recovery status.”

The government officials thanked the health professionals and everyone involved in the COVID-19 fight and encouraged residents to continue to adhere to the protocols established to stay safe.

Based on initial test results verified by the Trinidad and Tobago based Caribbean Public Health Agency CARPHA, the BVI recorded three confirmed positive cases, of which there were two recoveries.