

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

[PM of India Declares a Nationwide Lockdown for 21 Days](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered a 21-day lockdown as India begins to feel the impact of COVID-19. India currently has 519 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, and 10 people have died. So far, the world's second-most populous country has avoided the full ramifications of the virus, and Prime Minister Modi is preemptively shutting the country down to stop any spread of the disease. India has also closed most of its international borders to people arriving from Europe. During the lockdown, only essential services will remain operational. Grocery stores, hospitals, water, electricity, and municipal services are considered to be essential. Places of worship are among the places closed for the duration of the lockdown, which is notable due to India's recent civil unrest over religious freedom. There have been protests throughout India in recent months over contentious new legislation that discriminates against Muslims. Prime Minister Modi implored Indians to follow the government's guidelines, and warned that without strict measures many Indian families would "be destroyed forever."

Despite India having been spared the full brunt of the coronavirus, cases have spiked in recent days, prompting Prime Minister Modi to order the country into lockdown. Modi ordered the national lockdown after some provincial governors had taken measures to limit social interaction such as restricting travel and closing non-essential services. Additionally, India had already issued a ban on international arrivals and grounded their domestic flights. Most passenger train service has also been temporarily discontinued. The Indian government has already started to increase funding for its health care system, with \$2 billion in public funds due to be transferred to hospitals and other healthcare organizations. Health experts in India have warned that over a million Indians are at-risk and could be infected with the coronavirus by the end of May.

Cases of COVID-19 were first discovered in some of India's largest cities; Delhi and Mumbai. However, cases have started to be diagnosed in some of India's rural areas, which poses a problem for health authorities due to the limited healthcare resources in India's rural communities. The northern state of Punjab also faces a unique risk, as many Indians who had left the country returned to their homeland as countries began to enter lockdown. Punjab's top health official Balbir Singh Sidhu estimated that up to 90,000 Indians living abroad were returning, many from countries dealing with significant outbreaks of the coronavirus.

India's lockdown is complicated by months of civil unrest that has threatened to destabilize the country. Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist, right-wing, Bharatiya Janata Party recently passed a piece of legislation called the Citizenship Amendment Act that discriminates against Muslims in India. As a result, many Indians joined protests in major cities that condemned the new law and criticized Modi's legislative agenda. The protests devolved into violence when a BJP official threatened a group of Muslim protesters in Delhi and incited a Hindu mob against them. What followed was the worst sectarian violence in India in decades, which left 12 civilians dead, and 150 injured. Hindu mobs torched Muslim homes and businesses, and defaced a major mosque in India's capital. The Indian government did little to quell the violence, and footage circulated on social media of police officers aiding the Hindu mobs. Protests are ongoing, but have been temporarily halted to prevent the coronavirus spreading further.