

Lockdown in West Bengal extended till April 30 as corona virus cases surge

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Lockdown in West Bengal has been extended till April 30 as cases of the deadly coronavirus continue to surge, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said post a meeting of all the CMs with Prime Minister Narendra Modi today. Earlier today, West Bengal chief secretary Rajiv Sinha had said that the state government will impose a 14-day 'total lockdown' in 10 hotspots from where several COVID-19 cases have been reported.

With six more cases of the coronavirus in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee said this takes the total number of active patients in the state to 95. "We are thinking of allowing bakeries to function but proper protocol should be followed so that no violation takes place," she said today.

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Meanwhile, the Union Home Ministry today objected to "gradual dilution" of lockdown in West Bengal. The ministry said shops of non-essential goods were allowed to open in the state and the police also gave permission to religious gatherings. In a communication to the Chief Secretary and the DGP of West Bengal, the Home Ministry said there is no regulation in vegetable, fish and mutton markets and social-distancing norms are being violated at these places in the state.

"As per further reports received from security agencies, gradual dilution of lockdown has been reported from West Bengal, with an increase in the number of exceptions being provided by the state government," the home ministry letter said. For instance, shops relating to non-essential items have been allowed to function, it said. The ministry said there is no regulation in vegetable, fish and mutton markets where people have been thronging in complete violation of social-distancing norms in Rajabazaar, Narkel Danga, Topsia, Metiaburz, Gardenreach, Ikbapur and Maniktala in Kolkata. Significantly, areas such as Narkel Danga are reportedly witnessing more COVID-19-like cases.

"It has been reported that police have been allowing religious congregations. Free ration has been distributed not through the institutional delivery system but by political leaders. This may have resulted in spread of COVID-19 infection," the letter said. The ministry said such

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activities are in violation of the central government's orders issued from time to time under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and are liable for penal action under the Act.

"It is requested that strict action be taken in the matter and a report in this regard may be furnished to this Ministry urgently. "It is further requested to take measures to prevent recurrence of such violations in future," it said..

(With PTI inputs)