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Russia Suspends Constitutional Referendum to Fight Covid-19

By: Telesur  
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Russia's President Vladimir Putin Wednesday postponed the referendum on the amendments to the constitution and called on the people to stay home to quickly curb the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It is now extremely important to abort the threat of a rapid spread of the disease," Putin said in a televised message to the nation.

Although Russia closed its border with China in late January, the coronavirus has managed to sneak into its territory.

"We must understand that Russia, due to its geographical situation, cannot isolate itself from the threat. Alongside our borders, some countries have been seriously affected by the epidemic," Putin explained.

On Tuesday, the high-level force tasked with fighting the pandemic indicated that there were 410 Covid-19 cases in Moscow and warned that the situation was "more serious" than originally anticipated.

Authorities also acknowledged that the 658 confirmed cases to date do not reflect the real situation in many regions of the country, where the scarcity of exams is a pressing problem.

Shortly after Putin's intervention, the first two patients killed by Covid-19, an 88-year-old and 73-year-old man who died in Moscow, were confirmed.

Faced with the possibility of the country entering an "Italian" scenario, Putin postponed the constitutional consultation scheduled for April 22.

"The absolute priority is people's health, life, and safety. Therefore, I consider that the vote should be moved to a

later date," the Russian president said and explained that the new date for the vote will depend on the evolution of the epidemiological situation.

Should the Russians support constitutional reforms, Putin could stand for re-election in 2024. At this time, however, his political career is tied to managing the epidemic.

Putin announced a package of measures to reduce the social impact of Covid-19, among which is the declaration of non-working for the period between March 28 and April 5, a period in which workers will receive their wages.

"Please do not think, as is customary in our country that, 'Ah! This does not affect me.' This can affect anyone," Putin warned and added, "the safest thing is to stay home."

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin threatened severe penalties for governors who do not take strict measures to contain the pandemic in their territories.

Moscow's Mayor Sergey Sobianin suspended all public acts and declared a mandatory quarantine for 2 million elderly and chronically ill.

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