

Tokyo closes cherry blossom parks to slow spread of coronavirus

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's cherry blossoms are in full bloom, but flower viewing came to an abrupt halt in Tokyo because of the coronavirus.

Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike repeatedly asked the city's 13 million residents to stay home in late March, saying the capital is on the brink of an explosion in virus infections. She warned of a possible hard shutdown of the city if the spread of the virus doesn't slow.

On the evening of March 27, access was blocked to Ueno Park, a favorite spot for *hanami*, or cherry blossom viewing. Signs said "No parties" and "Danger. No entry."

The empty park was a sharp change from the previous weekend, when people came in droves after the central government announced an end to national school closures, leading many to think the outbreak was under control, when it was actually worsening in the capital.

Koike repeated her stay-at-home request, asking Tokyoites to postpone their flower viewing until next year. "The cherry blossoms will surely bloom next year. Our priority right now is to overcome this difficult time," she said.



BLOSSOMS BLOCKED. An official walks on an empty street of cherry blossoms after it was closed as a safety precaution against the new coronavirus, at Ueno Park in Tokyo on March 27, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. Ueno Park is a favorite spot for *hanami*, or cherry blossom viewing. New signs say "No parties" and "Danger. No entry." (AP Photos/Eugene Hoshiko)

Amusement parks, zoos, and aquariums, as well as some coffee shops and department stores closed. Officials are particularly concerned about asymptomatic young people spreading the virus.

Daichi Harada was with his dog getting some fresh air in the park after being at home for an extended period. "Tokyo ordered us to stop cherry blossom viewing," he said as left. "It's our duty to stay home."



CORONA VICTIM. Japanese comedian Ken Shimura gestures with a funny face to a photographer in Tokyo, in this May 2012 file photo. The nationally popular Japanese comedian, who drew inspiration from Jerry Lewis, has died of COVID-19 pneumonia, the first known celebrity victim of the virus in Japan. He was 70 years old. Shimura, who had fans of all generations with his slapstick jokes and funny faces, died of the virus on March 29, 2020, his agency, Izawa Office, said. (Kyodo News via AP, File)

Popular Japanese comedian dies from the coronavirus

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Popular Japanese comedian Ken Shimura, who drew inspiration from the American comedic icon Jerry Lewis, has died from the coronavirus, becoming Japan's first known celebrity victim of the disease. He was 70 years old.

Shimura, who attracted fans of all generations with his slapstick comedy and funny faces, had been treated at a Tokyo hospital and died March 29, according to his agency, Izawa Office.

He was diagnosed with pneumonia after contracting the coronavirus. He was hospitalized on March 20 after developing a fever and breathing troubles, and was put on a ventilator.

The news of his death came as new cases spiked in Tokyo, with the city's governor warning of an explosive spread of the virus in the region. The news topped Japanese television news and talk shows, and some fans and media gathered outside the hospital where he had been treated.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Shimura's death sent shock waves throughout Japan, where many people, especially the younger population, are seen as lacking a sense of urgency about the virus.

"I'm shocked to hear that he died so soon after his infection was reported," a 21-year-old college student told NHK television. "Until now, the risk of getting infected seemed someone else's problem, but I'm scared of it now."

Shimura was a former member of the comedy rock band the Drifters, a household name in the 1970s and 1980s, and gained fame while starring in the group's primetime comedy show "It's 8 o'clock, Gather Everyone!"

Born Yasunori Shimura, he recently was known for his popular character Baka Tonosama (Stupid Warlord) on TV comedy shows. He also led his comedy theater, Shimurakon (Shimura Spirit), since 2006.

Shimura was known as a fan of the late American comedian Jerry Lewis and had drawn inspiration from him.

The comedian's death came as he was preparing for a new film. He was also to run in the Olympic torch relay in July to represent Higashimurayama, a town in Tokyo's suburbs, his agency said. Japan and Olympic officials have agreed to postpone the games until next year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I don't think Shimura himself expected to have to go this way," an Izawa Office staff member told reporters, adding that his comedy shows were still upcoming on TV.

"I hope you will remember him and laugh," he said. "Until the end, he was committed to present laughter to the people."

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Difficulty level: Medium #14234

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue's puzzle
Puzzle #92656 (Easy)
All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

4	5	9	2	3	7	8	6	1
1	8	7	9	5	6	3	4	2
2	6	3	4	1	8	9	7	5
6	2	5	3	4	9	7	1	8
9	7	8	1	6	5	2	3	4
3	1	4	8	7	2	5	9	6
8	4	2	6	9	3	1	5	7
5	3	1	7	2	4	6	8	9
7	9	6	5	8	1	4	2	3

+ HELP US, HELP YOU +

WE ARE FIGHTING FOR EVERYONE

DO YOUR PART STAY HOME

PHYSICAL DISTANCE + WASH YOUR HANDS