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Fast-track NEP...

Lt Governor directed concerned officials for better coordination between the two to find solutions for various societal issues, ensuring the welfare of underprivileged sections of the society through actionable Research & new Technologies.

He urged the universities to put special focus on fighting the Drug menace through 'Nasha Mukt Abhiyaan'. Sustained programmes highlighting the issue of drugs and creating a mass movement against the menace is the need of the hour, he added.

Underlining the crucial role of universities in development of the UT, the Lt Governor issued directions for laying focus on linkage between Industry demands and commensurate up-skilling through updated curricula and capacity building of faculty.

The Lt Governor called for constituting a VC's group for working out modalities and formulating a UT-level action plan for robust implementation of NEP and way forward. He also advised for holding regular follow-up meetings on the issue.

While reviewing the various activities organized by the Universities, the Lt Governor said that fundamental values of harmony and role of Universities in building Aatmanirbhar Bharat must also be the central themes of celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.

Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, Advisor to the Lt Governor; Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta, Chief Secretary; Nitishwar Kumar, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor; Prof. M. K. Dhar, VC Jammu University; Prof. Talat Ahmad, VC Kashmir University; Prof. Shakil Ahmad Romshoo, VC, IUST; Prof. Akbar Masood, VC BGSBU; Prof. Bechali Lal, VC, Cluster University of Jammu; Prof. Qayyum Hussain, VC, Cluster University Srinagar; (Prof.) Dr. Yasmeen Ashai, Director Colleges and representatives of SKUAST Jammu and SKUAST Kashmir were present during the interaction.

Winter Session: Govt...

against the laws. The Congress has demanded a condolence resolution for the farmers who died during the protests.

At the meeting, opposition leaders also demanded discussion on the Pegasus snooping row, fuel prices and unemployment in the session.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not present at the all-party meeting convened by the government, Defence Minister and Deputy Leader of Lok Sabha Rajnath Singh sought cooperation from all parties for productive and smooth functioning of the House.

The government is ready for discussions on all the issues permitted by the Lok Sabha speaker and the Rajya Sabha chairman, he said.

Talking to reporters, Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge said leaders wanted to ask more from the prime minister about the farm laws as there were some apprehensions that these legislations might again come in some other form.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi said there is no tradition of the prime minister attending the all-party meet.

Some opposition leaders raised the issue of extended jurisdiction of the BSF in some states, including West Bengal.

TMC leaders Sudip Bandopadhyay and Derek O'Brien raised the issue of bringing laws on MSP and disinvestment of profitable public sector units.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh, however, walked out of the meet, claiming he was not allowed to speak and raise issues related to farmers, especially on MSP.

Several parties demanded that the women's reservation bill be taken up in the session, sources said.

The ruling BJP and main opposition party Congress have issued whips to their MPs to be present in higher attendance during the session.

The Congress has convened a meeting of various opposition parties on Monday which is likely to be skipped by TMC and NCP leader Sharad Pawar.

According to Kharge, while TMC MPs would be busy at a party event in Kolkata, Pawar has to attend a marriage.

The BJP in its parliamentary party meeting on Sunday stressed on higher attendance of its MPs and asked them come prepared to take on the opposition.

Even in the NDA meeting, also held on Sunday, allies called for better coordination among partners of the ruling alliance, while few allies also thanked the government for its decision to repeal the farm laws.

Prime Minister Modi who usually attends these BJP and NDA meets, was not present in any of them.

In the NDA meet, Apna Dal (S) leader and Union Minister Anupriya Patel raised the issue of 69,000 teacher vacancies in Uttar Pradesh. NPP leader Agatha Sangma urged the government to repeal the Citizenship Amendment Act on lines of the decision to repeal the farm laws, keeping in mind the sentiments of the people from the north-east.

About 40 leaders of various parties also met on Sunday at Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu's residence and discussed issues to be raised in the session.

Some expressed concern over recent comments by the Supreme Court over functioning of Parliament and other legislatures, and the manner of lawmaking by them.

Naidu said, "I can understand your concerns. But such comments should be viewed in the context of the functioning of legislatures marked by persistent disruptions, unruly behaviour and violent actions which have deleterious effects."

"The best way to counter them is to ensure proper functioning of legislatures by ensuring dignity and decorum of the house, since such comments are finding resonance with the public from what they see about the functioning of the legislatures," he said, according to sources.

Besides the repeal bill, the government has listed 25 draft legislations for the session, including one to ban all but a few private cryptocurrencies while allowing an official digital currency by the RBI.

A Joint Committee of Parliament report on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 will also be tabled in the two Houses during the session.

The bill was brought in Parliament in 2019 and was referred to the committee for further scrutiny on demand of opposition members.

The main objection of opposition members was granting "unbridled powers" to the central government to exempt any of its probe agencies, including the ED and the CBI, from the purview of the entire Act.

According to the government's legislative business list, three bills have also been listed to replace as many ordinances.

These are Narcotics Drug and Psychotic Substances Bill to amend an act of the same name, Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill and Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill.

The Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill and the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill propose to extend the tenure of directors of the CVC and the CBI.

There is also a politically significant bill specifically for poll-bound Uttar Pradesh, The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, to amend the SC and ST list of the state.

Similarly, there is another bill to amend the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes list of Tripura.

Then, there is the High Court and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2021, to amend the salaries act of judges of the higher judiciary.

The session beginning Monday will conclude on December 23.

WORLD ON ALERT...

sufficient testing, it is extremely difficult to determine the true level of infection spread. States must strengthen the testing infrastructure and strictly implement the testing guidelines," he said.

Blushan also stressed on continued monitoring of hotspots, the areas where recent cluster of positive cases have emerged.

"In all such 'hotspots', saturation testing and sending of positive samples quickly for genome sequencing to designated INSACOG labs must be ensured in collaboration with Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). States should keep a close check on the emerging trend of cases and the positivity in an area and quickly delineate hotspots for effective containment of COVID-19," he said.

The health secretary said states should aim at achieving positivity rate below 5 per cent while focusing on increasing the number of tests and share of RT-PCR tests to aid in early identification.

"Having adequate availability of health facilities across the state is essential to ensure that there are no delays in providing care," he said, adding that trained human resources, infrastructure, logistics and procurement should be planned and strengthened, considering the geographical spread of the pandemic, and there shall be no compromise in providing prompt, quality treatment to patients.

Blushan urged the states to optimally utilise the financial support provided by Government of India under ERCP 1 and 2 diligently.

INSACOG has been established to monitor the circulating variants in the country, he said, underlining it is important that states must significantly increase sampling from the general population for genome sequencing by sending these samples to INSACOG lab network as per the policy.

He also urged states and UTs to hold regular press briefings.

"We have seen in the last surges in the country that discourse on Covid is often

influenced by misinformation leading to anxiety in the masses. To address this, all states should proactively and regularly address the concerns of community through press briefings and state bulletins providing evidence-based information," Blushan said in the letter.

States may also ensure that the community is well-informed regarding the measures undertaken and be advised to follow measures like Covid-appropriate behaviour and getting vaccinated.

He said it is critical for states and UTs to adhere to the overarching 'Test-Track-Treat Vaccinate and Covid-appropriate behaviour' principle to ensure stringent implementation of containment measures as per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) guidelines.

"I'm sure that under your continued leadership we will be able to maintain the momentum and build on the progress made so far to address the latest threat of the pandemic. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare assures of all requisite support to the states and UTs," Blushan said.

The new, potentially more contagious B.1.1.529 variant was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) from South Africa on November 24 and has also been identified in Botswana, Belgium, Hong Kong and Israel.

It was on Friday designated as a "Variant of Concern" by the WHO, which named it Omicron. A variant of concern is the WHO's top category of worrying COVID-19 variants.

The UK on Sunday tightened its rules on mask-wearing and on testing of international arrivals after finding two cases. New cases were confirmed Saturday in Germany and Italy, with Belgium, Israel and Hong Kong also reporting that the variant has been found in travellers.

In the US, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious diseases expert, said he would not be surprised if the omicron variant was already in the United States, too.

We have not detected it yet, but when you have a virus that is showing this degree of transmissibility ... it almost invariably is ultimately going to go essentially all over, Fauci said on NBC television.

Because of fears that the new variant has the potential to be more resistant to the protection offered by vaccines, there are growing concerns around the world that the pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions will persist for far longer than hoped.

Nearly two years since the start of the pandemic that has claimed more than five million lives around the world, countries are on high alert. Many have already imposed travel restrictions on flights from southern Africa as they seek to buy time to assess whether the omicron variant is more transmissible than the current dominant delta variant.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was necessary to take targeted and precautionary measures after two people tested positive for the new variant in England.

Right now this is the responsible course of action to slow down the seeding and the spread of this new variant and to maximise our defences, he told a news conference.

Among the measures announced, Johnson said anyone arriving in England must take a PCR test for COVID-19 on the second day after their arrival and self-isolate until they provide a negative test. And if someone tests positive for the omicron variant, then he said their close contacts will have to self-isolate for 10 days regardless of their vaccination status currently close contacts are exempt from quarantine rules if they are fully vaccinated.

He also said mask-wearing in shops and on public transport will be required and said the independent group of scientists that advises the British government on the rollout of coronavirus vaccines has been asked to accelerate the vaccination program. This could involve widening the booster program to younger age groups, reducing the time period between a second dose and a booster and allowing older children to get a second dose.

From today we're going to boost the booster campaign, he said.

Britain's Department of Health said the two cases found in the UK were linked and involved travel from southern Africa. One of the two new cases was in the southeastern English town of Brentwood, while the other was in the central city of Nottingham. The two confirmed cases are self-isolating with their households while contact tracing and targeted testing takes place.

The British government also added four more countries Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia onto the country's travel red list from Sunday. Six others Botswana, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe were added Friday. That means anyone permitted to arrive from those destinations will have to quarantine.

Many countries have slapped restrictions on various southern African countries over the past couple of days, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Thailand and the United States, in response to warnings over the transmissibility of the new variant. This goes against the advice of the World Health Organization, which has warned against any overreaction before the variant was thoroughly studied.

Despite the banning of flights, there are mounting concerns that the variant has already been widely seeded around the world.

Italy and Germany were the latest to report confirmed cases of the omicron variant.

An Italian who had travelled to Mozambique on business landed in Rome on November 11 and returned to his home near Naples. He and five family members, including two school-age children, have since tested positive, the Italian news agency LaPresse said. All are isolating in the Naples suburb of Caserta in good condition with light symptoms.

The variant was confirmed by Sacco hospital in Milan, and Italy's National Health Institute said the man had received two doses of the vaccine. Italy's health ministry is urging all regions to increase its tracing of the virus and sequencing to detect cases of the new variant first identified in South Africa.

In Germany, the Max von Pettenkofer Institute, a Munich-based microbiology centre, said the omicron variant was confirmed in two travellers who arrived on a flight from South Africa on November 24. The head of the institute, Oliver Keppler, said that genome sequencing has yet to be completed, but it is proven without doubt that it is this variant, German news agency dpa reported.

The Dutch public health institute said the omicron variant was probably found in a number of the tested persons who were isolated after arriving Friday in Amsterdam on two flights from South Africa.

Gambhir gets another...

in Rajinder Nagar area. The police are currently inquiring into the source of the complaint," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Shweta Chauhan had said.

Soon, the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations unit of the Special Cell wrote to Google seeking information on the account handlers and the registered e-mail ID through which the alleged mails were sent.

Police said the DCP was informed over a phone call about the second death threat from the same e-mail ID at 2.32 pm on Wednesday.

According to the complainant, the second e-mail was attached with a video of Gambhir's residence.

"We intended to kill you, but you survived yesterday. If you love the life of your family, stay away from politics and Kashmir issue," the second e-mail read.

COVID containment: Night...

the number of recoveries in Ladakh to 21,032, which is 97.85 per cent of the caseload, the statement said.

There are at present 229 active cases in Leh and 20 in Kargil.

There has been a spike in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of this month in Leh district, prompting the authorities to impose certain restrictions including night curfew and closure of all schools and residential hostels besides intensifying testing and imposing of fine on COVID norm violators.

NC ready for...

party is ready for the polls and would announce its candidates with the sounding of the poll bugle. "After that it is up to the people how long they are willing to accompany us. We have to convince them of that."

Asked about the ongoing delimitation process and the central government's promise of holding the assembly polls after the completion of the exercise, Abdullah said "It (delimitation) should not be conducted on the basis of politics."

"It should be carried out on the basis of the Census. We have the census of 2011 and no census data after that so there will be no objection from anybody if the delimitation is done in accordance with the 2011 census data," he said.

Responding to a question about the reported remarks of the J&K Director General of Police that some Kashmir-based mainstream parties are provoking the public, the NC leader said, "It is better to ask him (police chief) about it."

"However, we (the NC) have neither provoked people in the past, nor have any programme to provoke them in the future. We are saying that the government should do its work in a rightful manner and the people will stay calm and maintain peace," he said.

Referring to the November 15 encounter in Hyderpora of Srinagar, which left four persons dead, the former chief minister said, "When there is a mistake from the government, people get annoyed we did not do the Hyderpora encounter, the people were not involved in the encounter as well."

"Innocent people were not killed by us. If people got agitated, why blame us? We are not responsible for that, he said, adding "those guilty should be identified and

brought to book."

In response to a question about hoisting of the national flag in the valley, he said, "We had two flags (prior to August 5, 2019) but never preferred one flag to another and kept both the flags high."

He further shot back by saying he hoisted the national flag on August 15 and January 26 when he was the chief minister, but added it was also "our right to unfurl the state flag as well" which was given to the people of J&K by the Constitution.

Finish terrorism but...

appealed to the politicians to visit the terrorism-infested areas of the Valley to encourage the people to support the armed forces in eliminating terrorism.

Azad said that there is a need to create an atmosphere in the terrorism-infested areas as people in such areas are worried about their safety.

Azad also criticised the revocation of Article 370 by the BJP government in 2019 and said that the struggle for statehood will continue, adding that nobody could have imagined that J&K will be divided into two parts.

'Nearly all terrorists...

Over the past three years, the security forces undertook a series of measures to ensure minimum collateral damage and as a result of such efforts, only two civilians were killed and two received minor injuries in 2021, the sources said.

Asked about the encounter in Srinagar's Hyderpora, they said a certain section is focussing on it to occupy "lost space".

Jammu and Kashmir police chief Dilbag Singh on Thursday said the ongoing investigation into the Hyderpora encounter suggests that the terrorists were supported by a network in carrying out terror activities.

The sources said the security forces have been getting support, including actionable intelligence, from the locals in several parts of Jammu and Kashmir as they have rejected the "false propaganda" unleashed by Pakistan.

"There were instances of terrorists even being allowed to escape when there was a threat of collateral damage or when the lives of innocents were assessed to be at risk," said a source on condition of anonymity.

The sources claimed that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir has been under control and pointed out that compared to the 318 terror-related incidents in 2018, only 121 incidents were reported in 2021.