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India's Omicron count...

Delhi, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health Lav Agarwal said though daily COVID-19 cases are below 10,000 for the past 20 days, there is a need to stay vigilant in view of the new Omicron variant and rising cases in other countries.

According to Central and state officials, Maharashtra has reported 40 cases, Delhi (22), Rajasthan (17), Karnataka (8), Telangana (8), Gujarat (5), Kerala (7), Andhra Pradesh (1), Chandigarh (1), Tamil Nadu (1) and West Bengal (1).

While the country's first two cases of the Omicron variant were detected in Karnataka on December 2, this heavily mutated version of the coronavirus was first reported in South Africa on November 24.

"As Omicron variant is spreading very fast across Europe and most parts of the world so need to avoid nonessential travel, avoid mass gatherings and it is time to observe low intensity festivities and ushering in new year celebrations has to be at low intensity," said ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava.

Those districts which have more than 5 per cent positivity rate need to ensure restrictive measures until the test positivity rate comes below 5 per cent for at least 2 weeks, he stressed.

Citing the World Health Organization (WHO), Agarwal said the Omicron variant is spreading faster than the Delta variant of the coronavirus in South Africa, where Delta circulation was low.

It is likely that Omicron spread will outpace Delta variant where community transmission occurs, he said quoting the WHO.

Quoting the WHO DG, Agarwal said Omicron is spreading at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant. We are concerned that people are dismissing Omicron as mild.

In response to a question on whether we are in community transmission of Omicron, Agarwal said, "We cannot at this point say that Omicron variant is widespread in India."

He said most cases of Omicron have a travel history, or have contacts with travel histories. On a limited basis, there are one or two cases in which we have not been able to establish any such history but the process is still on to identify if there has been any travel or contact histories, he added.

Agarwal said the sheer number of cases could once again overwhelm unprepared health systems.

"Vaccines alone will not get any country out of this crisis. Masks, physical distancing, ventilation and hand hygiene should be followed along with vaccines. In most countries, those being hospitalized and dying are those who have not been vaccinated. So, the priority must be to vaccinate the unvaccinated, even in countries with the most access to vaccines."

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said 10 of the 22 COVID patients infected by the Omicron variant have been discharged.

The minister had on Thursday said many international travellers are turning out COVID positive upon arrival at the Indira Gandhi International Airport.

Health experts and Doctors in the national capital warned that people should avoid all kinds of gatherings as Omicron is a highly transmissible variant, and follow COVID-appropriate behaviour, else the situation may worsen.

They also rued that a "sense of complacency" has again crept in large sections of citizens, despite seeing the "horrors of the second wave" early this year.

"Omicron is highly transmissible. First thing people need to do is avoid all gatherings of any form, and follow all COVID-appropriate behaviour, like wearing masks, following social distancing, use of hand sanitiser, and not become lax at all," said a senior doctor at the Lok Nayak hospital, the nerve-centre of Delhi's fight against the pandemic since 2020.

Doctors at other government and private hospitals, concurred that similar complacency level among a larger section of citizens was seen just before the brutal second wave hit Delhi.

In Tamil Nadu, as many as 28 people who arrived from both 'high-risk' and 'non-risk' countries till date have tested COVID positive along with S-gene drop, raising the suspicion of them being infected with Omicron, a state minister said.

Medical and Family Welfare minister Ma Subramanian told reporters in Chennai that the samples of the 28 passengers have been sent for genomic sequencing analysis.

At the joint press conference in Delhi, NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V K Paul said a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic is being experienced in Europe with a steep rise in cases despite 80 per cent partial vaccination being done and delta wave being experienced.

"Situation overall is stable but in some districts the positivity rate is increasing and if needed restrictive measures should be implemented. There should be proper contact tracing and clusters should be monitored carefully and containment measures should be implemented. Clusters should be investigated to see if the new variant is driving the rise in cases there," he added.

NITI Aayog Member...

he observed, Dr. Saraswat stated that NITI Aayog's developmental policy push is in line with 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas' mantra of the Prime Minister to remove developmental deficits and income inequalities across all the States and UTs in the country.

"Prime Minister has identified agriculture and industry sectors as two important drivers of pushing GDP growth in the country and, therefore, focussed attention has to be trained on these sectors for improving productivity, wages, prospects and

income in these sectors," he pointed out.

Dr. Saraswat announced that it's only when states grow their GSDPs that national GDP will grow, leading to more and more wealth creation, which will then be available for re-distribution amongst all the sections of the society.

In his speech, the Chief Secretary stated that J&K today is not only one of the most transparent, but also one of the best governed UTs amongst all States/UTs in the country.

Hailing the transformation in governance historical, Dr. Mehta said transparency and good governance, which has come about in the last two years, has provided the long deprived people of the UT the right to define their destiny, including efforts to fight corruption.

He said that J&K has followed a whole of government approach in improving transparency, increasing enforcement, institutional deepening and, importantly, in building trust of the people.

Dr. Mehta gave details of the recent reforms like BEAMS, PAYSYS, full verification of works, road connectivity in all villages, availability of 128 public services online, saturation of all individual beneficiary oriented schemes etc. and stated that these landmark steps will both facilitate ease of living and ease of doing business in J&K.

He asked NITI Aayog to share the updated ranking on all developmental/growth indicators, while further observing that the present rankings, which are dated by 2-3 years do not reflect the transformation J&K has undergone in the last two years and rather tend to paint a wrong picture.

While reviewing the issues of various departments of the J&K Government pending with the Central Ministries Dr. Saraswat asked the officials of the UT Government and Education Ministry to hold a meeting to resolve the issues relating to setting up of Kendriya Vidyalayas/Regional Institute of Education.

He advised Education Ministry to devise a framework of measuring learning outcomes in schools in J&K to help the government make the required reforms in the education sector.

Terming Jammu-Poonch National Highway as an important arterial extension, Dr. Saraswat asked the officials of Ministry of Defence and PWD of the UT Government to hold consultations to promptly address all issues, including the issue relating to the transfer of army land located in the alignment of Jammu - Akhnoor section of the highway.

Member, NITI Aayog asked the Tourism Ministry to seriously consider sanction of 4 youth hostels in J&K, besides a winter sports university in the valley, as sports is an important activity in J&K.

Highlighting the financing issues under Swadesh Darshan scheme, Dr Mehta asked the officials of the Tourism Ministry to fund the tourism projects approved under PMPD from other schemes of the ministry.

Dr. Mehta said that J&K government is willing to invest in the construction of an airport in Kishtwar district, if the airlines evince interest in using the airport, thereby, making the investment a viable proposition.

While stating that there is a significant tribal population in J&K, Dr. Saraswat said that NITI Aayog will request the concerned Ministry to find a way to fund the various tribal projects in J&K, as funding under Finance Commissions now not available to UT.

Meets LG; appreciates...

UT Administration where several schemes being run under the aegis of Central Ministries were discussed.

The NITI Aayog member appreciated the efforts of the UT Administration regarding Education Quality Index and improvement of Health Index. He also apprised the Lt Governor that UT of J&K is the best performing in terms of own tax revenue generation under GSDP.

The Lt Governor expressed his gratitude towards NITI Aayog headed by the Honorable Prime Minister, for giving dedicated focus on the holistic development of the UT of J&K. He also assured all possible help from UT administration in implementing the vision of NITI Aayog on the ground.

JKPCL to buy...

Purchase Obligation (RPO) as fixed by the Ministry of Power Government of India, besides ensuring enhanced power reliability due to diversity in the power bucket of Jammu and Kashmir. The decision will also prioritize the generation and usage of renewable solar energy in consonance with the national endeavour of promoting green energy for a reduction in carbon footprints and mitigating global warming. It is expected that with the addition of this power the JKPCL will be better placed to meet the increasing power demand which increased from 18091.386 MU during 2020-21 to 19500-2000 MU in the current financial year.

The Power Development Department has been working towards ensuring 24X7 reliable electricity in major cities and towns in Jammu and Kashmir by augmenting assets both at Transmission and Distribution levels under various Centrally Sponsored Schemes (Flagship Programs). It is anticipated that with the completion of major ongoing flagship programs, the energy requirement will further grow and touch the 22000 MU mark, thus creating a demand for an additional, stable, and reliable supply of 300-500 MW power.

Terror groups targeting...

are believed to remain free in Pakistan, the report said.

In February and again in November, a Lahore antiterrorism court convicted Lashkar-e-Tayyiba founder Hafiz Saeed on multiple counts of terrorism financing and sentenced him to five years and six months in prison, the report noted.

It acknowledged that Pakistan made additional progress in 2020 towards completing its Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Action Plan, but did not complete all Action Plan items, and remained on the FATF gray list".

40 Kg banned polythene seized

STATE TIMES NEWS

UDHAMPUR: On the directions of Deputy Commissioner, Udhampur Indu Kanwal Chib, Pollution Control Committee Udhampur conducted a polythene seizure drive under supervision of District Officer Pollution Control Committee, Bader Hussain here at Garhi, Chopra Shop areas of District Udhampur.

During the drive, about 40 Kg banned polythene and other related materials were seized, while Rs 1,200 was recovered as penalty from the defaulters.

The District Officer Pollution Control Committee stated that the main objective of conducting seizure of polythene was to make Udhampur polythene-free.

Teenager killed, 2 brothers injured as Alto plunges into gorge

STATE TIMES NEWS

BATOTE: A teenager died while 2 brothers got injured when a vehicle they were travelling in, skidded off the road and fell into deep gorge near Batote area of Ramban on Friday morning.

According to police, an Alto car bearing registration number JK06A-8771 was on its way from Bhadarwah to Srinagar, but when it reached Bhagw Nullah near Batote near Gurdwara, the driver lost control over the steering due to which vehicle fell into gorge. Police along with locals rushed to the spot and shifted all injured to Emergency Hospital Batote, where doctors declared one of them as brought dead. The deceased was identified as 19 years old Vikas Kumar, son of Sanjay Kumar, resident of Kharothi, Doloha Bhadarwah while injured were identified Rahul Anand (27 years) and Shiv Prakash (22 years), sons of Dhuni Chand, resident of Kharothi, Doloha Bhadarwah. Police has registered a case in this regard.

Two women among three arrested for illicit distillation, approx 25 ltrs Desi liquor seized

STATE TIMES NEWS

KATHUA: Acting tough against the production of illegal liquor menace in the District, Kathua Police under the overall supervision of SSP R C Kotwal on Friday recovered approximately 25 lts illicit liquor and arrested two women who were indulged in illicit distillation.

As per details, a police team led by Insp. O P Chib SHO Kathua under the supervision of DySP Headquarters Kathua Shammi Kumar during patrolling duty in its jurisdictional area at Manke Talab near Canal noticed a suspicious woman who was selling illicit liquor to people. She was apprehended and identified as Rajni Devi, wife of Parvesh Kumar, resident of Chak Drab Khan Tehsil & District Kathua. On checking, approximately 15 lts of illicit liquor was recovered from her possession.

While in another instance, a team of Police Station Kathua during patrolling duty

Not necessary for...

justices A S Bopanna and B V Nagarathna said.

The top court said the court while considering an application for bail has to exercise discretion in a judicious manner and in accordance with the settled principles of law having regard to the crime alleged to be committed by the accused on the one hand and ensuring the purity of the trial of the case on the other.

"Thus, while elaborating reasons may not be assigned for the grant of bail, at the same time an order dehors reasoning or bereft of the relevant reasons cannot result in the grant of bail. It would be only a non-speaking order which is an instance of violation of principles of natural justice. In such a case the prosecution or the informant has a right to assail the order before a higher forum," the bench said.

The top court's observations came on appeals against an order of Patna High Court which granted bail to an accused in a murder case.

The apex court said while it was conscious of the fact that the liberty of an individual is an invaluable right, at the same time while considering an application for bail courts cannot lose sight of the serious nature of the accusations against an accused.

"While considering an application for grant of bail a prima facie conclusion must be supported by reasons and must be arrived at after having regard to the vital facts of the case brought on record.

"Due consideration must be given to facts suggestive of the nature of the crime, the criminal antecedents of the accused if any, and the nature of punishment that would follow a conviction vis-a-vis the offence/s alleged against an accused," the bench said.

Ladakh gets first...

specimens had to be sent outside the union territory which affected investigations especially when the specimens were perishables like human viscera, the officials said.

The FSL Ladakh will be a multidisciplinary forensic laboratory capable of examination and analysis of biological, chemical, print, and documentary evidence, they said.

The establishment of the forensic science laboratory unit in Ladakh will go a long way in giving better, strong, and reliable evidence in the court of law and will also act as a deterrent to possible crimes in the future.

Mehbooba, Omar slam...

also criticised the changes made to the land use laws.

"It will adversely impact our food security and be insidious for our economy," Tarigami said.

J&K records 136...

total recorded recoveries to 20,503, they said.

The Union Territory has recorded 216 COVID-related deaths -- 158 in Leh and 58 in Kargil -- since the outbreak of the pandemic last year, they said.

According to the officials, 665 sample reports in Ladakh were found negative.

Be focused to...

He advised them to learn to respect each other's belief.

The DGP paid rich tributes to the Zewan and other martyrs of J&K Police who sacrificed their lives for safeguarding the interests of the country and the people. He said that as a family J&K police would provide all possible support and assistance to the martyrs' families.

Kashmir to experience...

as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra, recorded a low of minus 5.6 degrees Celsius. The south Kashmir resort had recorded minus 6.9 degrees Celsius the previous night.

The mercury in Kupwara in north Kashmir settled at a low of minus 4.4 degrees Celsius.

Qazigund, the gateway town to the valley, recorded minus 3.2 degrees Celsius, while Kokernag also recorded a low of minus 3.5 degrees Celsius.

Parliament passes Surrogacy Bill; seeks to constitute NSB

STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Parliament passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 on Friday, with Lok Sabha passing it with voice vote amid a protest by opposition members demanding the removal of Ajay Mishra as Union minister in connection with the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Last week, Rajya Sabha passed the bill after amendments, and returned it to Lok Sabha on December 14.

The bill aims to constitute a National Surrogacy Board (NSB) and state surrogacy boards, and appoint appropriate authorities for regulation of the practice and process of surrogacy.

It was earlier passed by Lok Sabha

on August 5, 2019, and transmitted to Rajya Sabha for its concurrence. The Rajya Sabha sent the bill to the select committee for further deliberation.

Lok Sabha passed the amended bill amid uproar by opposition members demanding the removal of the minister whose son Ashish Mishra is among the accused in the October 3 Lakhimpur Kheri violence in Uttar Pradesh.

Eight people, including four farmers, were killed in the violence. The 228th report of the Law Commission had recommended that the government should enact a legislation to ensure that there is only restrictive surrogacy in the country and commercial surrogacy is banned.

at Chak Drab Khan noticed another suspect namely Anju Bala, wife of Lt. Ashok Kumar, resident of Chak Drab Khan Tehsil and District Kathua who was found indulged in illegal trade of preparing illicit liquor (Desi) by establishing a Bhatti in her house. The location was raided and all recovered consignment of illicit liquor was seized. On this, two different cases vide FIR No. 523 & 524/2021 under section 48 (A) of Excise Act was registered against arrested woman at Kathua Police Station.

Meanwhile, a team of Police Station Bishnah led by SHO Bishnah Insp. Joginder Singh while on Naka duty in Bishnah area rounded up a suspect who acted suspicious on seeing police Naka. During search, 6 lts illicit liquor was recovered from him. The accused was arrested and FIR No. 180/2020 under section 48 (a) of Excise Act was registered against him at Police Station Bishnah. The accused was identified as Raj Kumar, son of Girdhari Lal, resident of Kathar, Tehsil Arnia.

The overall arrest and recoveries were made under the supervision of SDPO R S Pura Shabir Khan.