

!! Continuations from Page 1 !!

34 States, UTs...

per cent between January 21 and February 3 (from 3,47,254 to 1,72,433), and during the same period, the daily positivity rate reduced from 17.94 per cent to 10.99 per cent, indicating a decreased spread of the infection.

India reported a peak of 3,47,254 cases on January 21, which is less than the previous peak of 4,14,188 on May 7. Also, for the last 14 days, a consistent decline in cases has been reported in India. A substantial decline in active cases -- patients who are either on home isolation or hospitalised -- is being noted in last around 12 days, Agarwal said.

The number of districts with positivity rate more than 10 per cent has reduced from 406 (January 20-26, 2022) to 297 (January 27-February 2), and currently, there are 169 districts with a positivity rate between five and 10 per cent.

Also there are 268 districts with positivity rate less than five per cent.

"The pandemic situation has improved. There are states and districts of concern, but overall there is a contraction in the spread of infection which is heartening. There are 268 districts where the positivity is below five per cent. And clearly, these districts can move in the direction of non COVID care and also in the direction of other economic activities as well as school opening etc," NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V K Paul said.

"This declining trend of pandemic allows us to think about those options in general as well," he said, adding the two states of concern are Kerala and Mizoram in particular with high positivity rate.

He stressed that the virus has not gone away as yet and urged people to be vigilant and careful.

"We have to be following strategies to contain, to address this pandemic. So it's a mixed picture but overall, we do see a decline in the step in the spread of the infection," he said.

Paul further said that there is clear evidence that vaccination has been protecting people. Vaccination has been ensuring low prevalence of severe disease, protection against mortality, he said.

Providing an update on Covid vaccination, Agarwal said 96 per cent of India's adults have been administered the first dose of the vaccine, while 76 per cent are fully vaccinated.

He said 65 per cent of adolescents in the 15-18 age group have received their first dose of Covid vaccine and 21.63 lakh eligible adolescents have been given the second dose.

Also, 1.35 crore precaution doses have been administered to healthcare workers, frontline workers and those aged 60 and above with co-morbidities.

In 16 states and union territories, 100 per cent of the eligible population has been covered with first dose, while in four, 96 to 99 per cent have been administered the first dose.

In six states and UTs, 100 per cent population has been covered with the second dose, Agarwal said.

On more deaths being reported in Kerala, Agarwal said it is a matter of concern and discussions have been held with the state on the matter.

From October last year till February, 24,700 deaths have been shown as backlog deaths by Kerala. If backlog deaths come on a continued basis then it becomes difficult to understand how the ease management was and what more needs to be done, he said.

"Guidance has been given to states. So this may come up as a challenge that if these deaths were reported back then, maybe if we made additional efforts then they could have been managed, and we are in talks with the state on the matter and told them that deaths must be immediately reported," Agarwal said.

On vaccination of those in the 12-15 age group, Paul said, "Clearly as our vaccine strategy with time is evolving, so our agenda has been that children can get vaccinated. Trials are being conducted of vaccines on paediatric population. The vaccination programme is carried out in systematic way. It is constantly being viewed how the vaccination programme can be expanded towards the younger age group but it has to be done at a time when other higher priority objectives have been achieved."

On whether the peak has passed, Agarwal said, "We have shown you that in the past 14 days, we are noting a consistent decline but still there are states and pockets reporting more cases. Hence we must keep our focus on principles of covid management." On Zydus Cadila supplying to India, Agarwal said seven states have been prioritised and it will soon reach in Bihar, and it will be watched, and as delivery is made in market accordingly, its use will start.

On the plan for expansion of the precaution dose, Paul said, "Vaccination implementation is prioritised, and right now, we are trying to accomplish the assigned group."

J&K Govt gives...

oversee the medical treatment of the 24-year old acid attack survivor, an official spokesman said.

The DC and SSP interacted with the parents of the victim and expressed their solidarity with her, he said.

On the occasion, the DC handed over a cheque of Rs 1 lakh out of District Red Cross Fund as an immediate assistance to the victim's family and also assured all possible support from the local authority.

The DC was informed by the doctors that all the best medical facilities are being given to the survivor.

The doctors are monitoring her condition and she is in a stable condition, said the Medical Superintendent of the Hospital.

Since the attack, three persons, including the alleged stalker of the victim, have been arrested by police.

India has policy...

engagement on issues related to Afghanistan, including terrorism and radicalisation, with international stakeholders and regional partners.

"India has a historical and civilizational relationship with Afghanistan. As a contiguous

neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, India is concerned about the recent developments in that country," he said.

"Government of India has a policy of zero tolerance on terrorism and believes in collective efforts of the international community to counter the menace," Muraleedharan added.

He was replying to a question on whether the government is considering forging a cooperative approach for tackling threats such as terrorism and radicalisation in the aftermath of the Taliban's takeover of Kabul.

"India continued its engagement on issues related to Afghanistan, including terrorism and radicalisation, with the international stakeholders and regional partners at various fora," he said.

"In this regard, the Prime Minister participated in the SCO-CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation) Summit and the G-20 Extraordinary Summit on Afghanistan," the minister said.

He also mentioned the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2593 on Afghanistan.

The resolution, adopted on August 30 under India's presidency of the global body, talked about the need for upholding human rights in Afghanistan, demanded that Afghan territory should not be used for terrorism and that a negotiated political settlement should be found to the crisis.

Muraleedharan also referred to the India-hosted regional dialogue on Afghanistan on November 10 that was attended by NSAs of Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

He said an outcome document, Delhi Declaration, was issued. It reflected the "regional consensus" on major issues of regional stability and security.

"On December 10, India hosted a ministerial-level special session on 'Afghanistan' on the sidelines of the third India-Central Asia Dialogue which was chaired by the External Affairs Minister and was attended by the foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries," the minister said.

He also referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosting the first India-Central Asia Summit, attended by the presidents of the Central Asian Republics, on January 27.

"During the meeting, the leaders discussed the evolving situation in Afghanistan including issues related to terrorism and radicalisation," Muraleedharan said.

We are witnessing...

northern borders have adequately underscored the requirement of ready and capable forces with an optimal component of boots on the ground backed by modern technology to preserve the country's sovereignty and integrity.

"Our adversary shall continue with their efforts to achieve their strategic aims...sort of conflict by use of grey zone activities in the political, military and economic domains, and do so in a collusive manner," he said.

"The events of 2020 have been testimony to the diversity of security threats in all domains and this has brought the spotlight towards non-contact and contact zone warfare. We need to augment capabilities in both non-contact and contact modes of warfare," he said referring to the eastern Ladakh face-off. In an oblique reference to China, he also said that some nations are challenging the globally accepted norms and the rules-based order.

This, he said, has manifested in various forms that included aggression and opportunistic actions to change the "status quo" keeping the threshold below all-out war.

Gen Naravane said the developments in Afghanistan have again brought to focus the use of proxies and non-state actors to decisive effect.

"These actors thrive on local conditions, innovatively exploit low-cost options to devastating impact and create conditions that limit the full use of sophisticated capabilities which are available to state," he said.

He also said that the process of integration of three services through theaterisation is already moving ahead under a time-bound plan and the Indian Army is totally committed to this transformation.

Gen Naravane said the Army is focusing on restructuring, rebalancing and reorienting its forces and the process has already been initiated.

"We are further consolidating our operational experiences to these changes and this shall remain a work in progress," he added.

4,984 cases pending...

and constitution of the Monitoring Committee to evaluate the reasons for the delay of investigation.

It is necessary that all the Courts trying cases against MPs/MLAs are equipped with necessary infrastructure for the conduct of court proceedings through internet facility, he said.

Hansaria sought directions from the court that the courts dealing with cases against MPs/MLAs will exclusively try these cases against lawmakers and other cases would be taken up only after trials of such cases are over.

The trial would be conducted on a day to day basis in terms of section 309 Cr.P.C. Necessary allocation of work would be made by the High Court and/or the Principal Sessions Judges of every district within two weeks, he said.

He further sought direction that both the prosecution and defence shall cooperate with the trial of the case and no adjournment shall be granted in the case, the public prosecutor and/or the prosecution fail to co-operate in the expeditious trial, the matter shall be reported to the Chief Secretary of the State who will take necessary remedial measures.

He added that in case, the accused tries to delay the trial, his bail shall be cancelled.

The trial court shall send a report on each of the cases where the trial has been pending for more than five years before the respective High Courts, as to the reasons for the delay and suggest remedial measures. The High Court shall consider these reports on the judicial side in the suo motu writ petitions registered in terms of the order dated September 16, 2020, and pass appropriate orders to remove the stagnation of trial, he said.

Hansaria also sought direction that the Central Government will provide funds for ensuring the smooth functioning of Courts through virtual mode that is by facilitating

the availability of video conference facilities.

The High Courts shall submit a proposal to the law secretary of the Government of India in this regard as to the funds required, which shall be made available by the Central Government within two weeks of the proposal, he said.

He added that a monitoring committee may be constituted, headed by a former Judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice of a High Court to monitor the investigation of cases pending before the Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation, and National Investigation Agency in terms of submission recorded in the order dated August 25, 2021.

The trial courts may be directed to pass a specific order in all pending cases that the benefit of the Witness Protection Scheme 2018, has been made available to the witness in terms of the order dated November 4, 2020, he said.

On November 24, last year, the top court had asked the Allahabad High Court to issue a fresh notification to set up special magisterial courts to try minor offences involving lawmakers and ensure allocation of cases to sessions or magisterial courts depending upon the gravity of offences, saying the non-setting up of such courts in Uttar Pradesh was based on an evident misconstruction of its orders.

The top court had taken exception to the non-setting up of special magisterial courts in Uttar Pradesh for trying lawmakers in minor offences and said that the notification issued by the high court on August 16, 2019, was based on an evident misconstruction of its directions.

The order had come on a plea raising the legal question of whether minor offences, triable by magisterial courts, against lawmakers can be prosecuted before a special court presided over by a sessions judge who is senior to a judicial magistrate.

Rains in Jammu...

from 1.9 degrees Celsius the previous night, they said.

The famous ski-resort of Gulmarg recorded a low of minus 6.0 degrees Celsius up from minus 8.0 degrees Celsius the previous night.

Palahgam tourist resort in south Kashmir, which also serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra, recorded a low of minus 1.7 degrees Celsius up from minus 6.1 degrees Celsius the previous night, they said.

Officials said Qazigund recorded the minimum of 0.2 degrees Celsius up from the previous night's minus 1.2 degrees Celsius.

The nearby south Kashmir town of Kokernag recorded a low of minus 1.0 degrees Celsius.

The mercury in Kupwara in north Kashmir settled at a low of 1.0 degrees Celsius.

Kashmir is currently under the influence of a 20-day-long 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold) which began on Monday after the Chilla-i-Kalan -- the 40-day harshest winter period -- ended.

Chilla-i-Kalan, which had begun on December 21 last year -- is a period when a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies, including the famous Dal Lake here, as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley.

The chances of snowfall are the most frequent and maximum during this period and most areas, especially in the higher reaches, receive heavy to very heavy snowfall.

However, the 'Chilla-i-Kalan' this year was not harsh like the last year and there was less snowfall during the period.

After the end of 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold), a 10-day-long 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold) follows. However, both these periods are considered less harsh.

E-passports to...

he added. He said in addition to providing protection against fraudulent practices and tampering, the e-passport will help in substantially upgrading existing passports and services to the citizens.

Muraleedharan said that 93 passport seva kendras and 428 post office passport seva kendras are operational in the country at present.

To a separate question, he said longer visa processing time has been reported in countries including UK and Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While the issuance of visa and visa-related process is the sovereign and unilateral decision of the respective countries, the government emphasises the importance of easier, faster and liberalised visa process for Indian nationals at various levels and in bilateral meetings/forums with foreign countries," he said in his reply.

13 terrorists, 7...

terrorists and four soldiers were killed in Noshki.

"The terrorists were repulsed from both places by the Pakistan Army. A few four to five people are surrounded by the army in Panjgur and will be defeated," he said, terming it a "great success" against terrorism.

Prime Minister Imran Khan took to Twitter on Thursday to congratulate the security forces for foiling the terror attacks on their camps in Balochistan.

"We salute our brave security forces who repulsed terrorist attacks against security forces' camps in Panjgur & Naushki, Balochistan. The nation stands united behind our security forces who continue to give great sacrifices to protect us, we wrote.

Earlier in a statement, the military's media wing Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said: "both attacks were successfully repulsed, inflicting heavy casualties on terrorists. A Frontier Corps spokesperson also confirmed that two blasts had taken place near the camps in Panjgur and Noshki which were followed by intense firing.

The BLA claimed responsibility for the attacks in a statement. The separatist outfit has recently stepped up attacks on security forces and installations.

The attacks on Wednesday were the latest in a string of such assaults in Balochistan and come a week after ten soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack on a security forces' checkpoint in the province's Kech district.

Three Levies Force personnel and a Bugti tribal leader were killed and eight others injured on January 28 in bomb blasts in the Sui area of Dera Bugti.

On January 30, at least 17 people, including two policemen, were injured in a grenade attack in Dera Allahyar town of Jaffarabad district.

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of landmass. It is also home to the multi-billion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project.

TR Bhagat appointed Vice President BJP J&K UT SC Morcha

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

KATHUA: In a programme

organized by the BJP office

bearers Kathua unit SC

and senior leader of BJP T R

Bhagat entrusted with new

responsibility as Vice presi

dent of BJP SC Morcha

Jammu and Kashmir Union

Territory by Prof. Gharu

Ram Bhagat, President SC

Morecha BJP J&K UT. T R

Bhagat is a former Chief

Engineer and has worked in

various capacities in UT

administration.

Prominent among those

present in the function was