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STUDY SUGGESTS PAST COVID INFECTION MAY NOT FEND OFF VARIANT

Omicron muddles New Year travel

Delta measures work against variant

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 4, (Agencies): Following the announcement of the nascent Covid-19 mutant "Omicron" on Nov 28, about 20% of the residents of Kuwait have either been forced to change or cancel altogether their New Year travel plans to all destinations fearing the Kuwaiti authorities may react to fears of the virus spreading and close the airports, reports Al-Rai daily.

As for the new travel reservations for the New Year holidays, the daily quoting sources said the demand for travel to Turkey and Cairo, Egypt is weak while high ticket prices to Dubai fails to lure the travelers.

Meanwhile, the sources said the tourism and travel offices in Kuwait reported a rise in the sales of about 115 percent from January to September 2021, compared to the same period in 2020, which was 101 million dinars.

The sources added, the trend of sales was upward from January to September 2021 due to the easing of travel restrictions and the start of a gradual return to normalcy to the pre-Corona period although the sales are comparatively weak compared to corresponding period in 2019 which was 308 million dinars.

The tourism sources indicated the market began to regain its activity and recover from the effects of "Corona", with travelers adapting to the new requirements imposed by the pandemic expecting sales figures to return to what they were before "Corona" in 2023 but "Omicron" has put a dent in all expectations.

The number of travel offices in Kuwait has reached 430 and the monthly losses during the height of "Corona" from sales were approximately 34 million dinars.

Nonetheless, sources say "Omicron" has not affected the travel sector in Kuwait much, as there are strict procedures in place and majority of the people in Kuwait have been vaccinated, travel almost all over the world has been restricted to those who have taken the jabs and PCR test has been made mandatory.

South African scientists are warning that reinfections among people who've already battled COVID-19 appear to be more likely with the new omicron variant than with earlier coronavirus mutants.

A research group has been tracking reinfections in South Africa and reported a jump with the arrival of omicron that they hadn't seen when two previous variants, including the extra-contagious delta variant, moved through the country.

Undergone

The findings, posted online Thursday, are preliminary and haven't yet undergone scientific review. Nor did the researchers say what portion of the reinfections were confirmed as omicron cases - or whether they caused serious illness.

But the timing of the reinfection spike suggests that omicron "demonstrates substantial population-level evidence for evasion of immunity from prior infection," they wrote.

"Previous infection used to protect against delta and now with omicron it doesn't seem to be the case," one of the researchers, Anne von Gottberg of the University of Witwatersrand, said at a World Health Organization briefing on Thursday.

The Study also did not examine the protection offered by vaccination. The vaccines trigger different layers of immune response, some to fend off infection and others to prevent severe disease if someone does become infected.

"We believe that vaccines will still, however, protect against severe disease," von Gottberg said.

The newest variant was discovered just over a week ago by scientists in South Africa and Botswana, and it's now been found in multiple countries. Much remains unknown about the new variant, including whether it is more contagious, as some health authorities suspect, whether it makes people more seriously ill, and whether it can thwart the vaccine.

Protection

But learning how much protection is provided by prior infection is important, especially in parts of the world where much of the population remains to be vaccinated.

The Study suggests "omicron will be able to overcome natural and probably vaccine-induced immunity to a significant degree," Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia, said in a written response to the findings. Just how much "is still unclear though it is doubtful that this will represent complete escape."

As of Friday, 30 additional Coronavirus variant Omicron cases have been confirmed in the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA), contributing to an overall total of 109 confirmed cases so far, said a medical center.

Cases have been reported by 16 EU countries, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), said in a statement.

World Health Organization officials in the Western Pacific say border closures adopted by some countries may buy time to deal with the omicron coronavirus variant, but measures put in place and experience gained in dealing with the delta variant should remain the foundation for fighting the pandemic.

While a few regional countries are facing surges, COVID-19 cases and deaths in many others have decreased and plateaued, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Dr. Takeshi Kasai told reporters Friday in a virtual news conference broadcast from Manila, Philippines.



KUNA photo
Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi.

WMD talks conclude

The Second Session of the UN Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction concluded by adopting final documents that would help in continuing and framing the work of the conference in the future.

In a statement to KTV and KUNA, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said: "The second session of the conference, headed by Kuwait, wound up after five days of intense and painstaking work, as several formal and informal meetings were held before and during the conference."

The conference aims to establish a Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction to maintain peace and security in the Middle East similar to Latin America, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa and Central Asia, Al-Otaibi said.

He added that the conferees had adopted and completed a working list that defined the procedures of electing a President and the voting process, as well as how to establish subsidiary bodies affiliated with the conference.

They also agreed on forming a working team that would continue holding meetings during the second and third sessions in the next few weeks to prepare for the upcoming events due to be held in coordination with member states, including the Middle East countries, Al-Otaibi noted. (KUNA)

'Convergence' sought

Iran N- talks pause

BERLIN, Dec 4, (AP): Diplomats negotiating in Vienna to revive Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers have paused after five days of talks to consult with their governments and will reconvene next week, officials said Friday.

The European Union official chairing the meeting said there had been some progress, but further "convergence" was necessary.

"We have identified the challenges ahead. Now it is time to consult with capitals," EU diplomat Enrique Mora told reporters. "We will be resuming here in Vienna next week."

"We have substantial challenges ahead, time is not unlimited, there is an obvious sense of urgency," he added. "But above all we need a certain convergence of policy to start negotiations."

The so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, has effectively been on life support since the United States pulled out under then-President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran in 2018.

The remaining signatories to the nuclear deal - Iran, Russia, China, France, Germany and Britain - have been meeting at the Palais Coburg, a luxury hotel where the agreement was signed six years ago. The accord strictly limited Iran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

A U.S. delegation headed by the Biden administration's special envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, was staying at a nearby hotel and being briefed on the talks by diplomats from the other countries.

The Iranian delegation, appointed by new Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, this week called for the U.S. to unfreeze \$10 billion in assets as an initial goodwill gesture.

Mora said reviving the agreement would require Iran to meet its commitments under the accord, and bringing the United States back into "full compliance," meaning Washington would need to drop the crippling economic sanctions it imposed on Tehran.

Asked what had been achieved this week, Mora said there had been progress "in the sense that we have had a new Iranian delegation, they have engaged in negotiations with other delegations."

"We are incorporating also new policy sensitivities for the new Iranian delegations," he said. "But again, the point of departure, the common ground, is where we finished" during the last round of talks in June.

In the United Arab Emirates, French President Emmanuel Macron expressed doubt that the new round of the struggling negotiations with Iran would succeed but added: "That does not mean the negotiations will not restart, and quickly."

NewsWatch

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud and visiting French President Emmanuel Macron held on Saturday a meeting in Jeddah touching on the latest developments in the region and the world.

According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the two top officials also focused on Saudi-French cooperation within the framework of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 as well as means to bolster ties in numerous fields. (KUNA)

DOHA: The Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad met French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday to discuss several issues of common interest at the regional and international levels, especially the latest developments in the region.

The leaders explored ways to enhance cooperation in the economic, investment, defense, security, education and development areas, Qatar News Agency (QNA) reported. (KUNA)

ABU DHABI: The UAE and France have signed a deal worth 16.6 billion euros by which France will supply 80 Rafale fighter jets to the UAE, in addition to 12 Caracal H225 Helicopters including weaponising, training and spare parts.

The deal aims to promote strategic and investment partnership that targets the 2030 UAE-France economic program like renewable energy, innovation and technology, said a joint Emirati-French statement carried by UAE's news agency (WAM) on Friday. (KUNA)

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun accepted the resignation of the Minister of Information George Kordahi on Friday.

While receiving Kordahi's letter of resignation, President Aoun renewed Lebanon's keenness on maintaining the best possible relations with sisterly Arab countries in general and the GCC countries in particular. (KUNA)

IRBIL: An attack by Islamic State militants on a village in northern Iraq killed at least 12 people, including a number of Kurdish forces, Kurdish media reported Friday.

The attack took place late Thursday in a village in the Makhmour region, triggering a confrontation with Kurdish peshmerga forces. (AP)

UMM AL-FAHM: Police on Friday shot and killed a man in an Arab town in northern Israel who had allegedly been involved in a car-ramming attack that wounded two officers, Israeli officials said.

The incident came after a round of violence among residents of Umm al-Fahm, including armed clashes. On Thursday, a man was shot and killed in the town. Israeli police and firefighters raced to the community as gunfire rang out and buildings were set ablaze. (AP)

ANKARA: Europe's democracy and human rights-promoting body said Friday it is initiating a rare disciplinary process against Turkey after it failed to comply with a court's ruling to release jailed businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala.

Last week, a court in Istanbul extended Kavala's imprisonment, defying the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the businessmen was unjustly jailed. (AP)

CAIRO: A Libyan court ruled Thursday that a son of the late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi can compete in upcoming presidential elections, overturning a decision by the country's top electoral body to disqualify him.

A court in the southern province of Sabha ruled in favor of Seif al-Islam Gaddafi, Libyan media outlets reported. (AP)



KUNA photo
Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, the envoy of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, arrived on Saturday in Jeddah to witness the opening ceremony of the Formula 1 Grand Prix scheduled for Dec 5. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, the chief of His Highness the Crown Prince Diwan, was received at the airport by Ambassador of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Consul General of Kuwait in Jeddah Wa'el Al-Enizi.

Thirty cases of missing persons from 'Gulf War' formally closed

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 4: At the 52nd meeting of the Tripartite Commission for the search of missing persons from the 1990-1991 Gulf War, which was held Thursday under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), it was announced that the cases of thirty missing persons and Prisoners of War from the 1990-1991 Gulf War were formally closed.

The thirty cases (29 cases opened by the State of Kuwait and 1 case opened by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) were closed, based on DNA analyses conducted at the Kuwaiti Department of Forensic Evidence. The results of the identification of such cases were announced in July 2021 (10 cases), September 2021 (1 case) and November 2021 (19 cases).

The remains of the 30 persons in question were found at a burial site in the Desert of Muthana Governorate (Samawa) in March 2019 and January 2020, due to the joint efforts of the Iraqi (Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Health) and Kuwaiti authorities, assisted by ICRC experts within the framework of the Technical Sub-Committee.

"The pain and the impact of a missing relative or loved one is less visible than physical injury, but no less devastating for families. The unanswered absence of a relative or loved one deeply affects entire families and even a whole community and society," stated Adib Nahas, ICRC's Deputy Regional Director for North Africa and the Middle East.

"Solving these cases takes time, patience, and cooperation between governments, humanitarian organizations, and the missing families. It can take years of work to uncover answers. As chair of the Tripartite Commission, the ICRC is very pleased about the continued positive outcomes, driven by the cooperation between Kuwait and Iraq authorities in the framework of the Tripartite Commission," he explained.

Since its establishment in 1991 and 1994, the Tripartite Commission and its Technical SubCommittee, respectively, managed to bring answers to hundreds of missing persons families from the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The Commission's work requires patience and persistence. The long-term commitment will allow relief for at least some families. The burial of a loved one is essential in bringing closure and a sense of resolution.

The Tripartite Commission and its Technical Sub-Committee is chaired by the ICRC, and composed of representatives of the Republic of Iraq, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the Republic of France. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) joined in 2014, as an Observer.

'Coordination key'

Central Bank weighs in on distribution of profits

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 4: According to informed sources, the Central Bank of Kuwait has refused to grant each bank individual permission to amend its statute in a manner that allows it to distribute quarterly profits at quarterly or half-yearly terms, reports Al-Rai daily.

They explained that the position of the supervisory regulator in this regard does not mean its rejection of the idea, but rather it is an attempt to regulate it for all banks simultaneously and comprehensively, not separately.

The Central Bank recently noticed the movement of banking officials towards the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Capital Markets Authority to obtain approval, which guarantees their bank in distributing profits on various terms.

The point of view of the Central Bank's officials is that this procedure should not be allowed in a separate banking manner. It should come within an organized supervisory decision for all banks that wish to distribute quarterly profits. This requires firstly to prepare a supervisory study that guarantees the provision of controls.

The sources suggested that the Central Bank or the Capital Markets Authority, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry would not object to the banks distributing quarterly profits, especially since this practice is already applied. One of the examples of this locally is the Zain Company.

Regarding the objectives of these standards, the sources explained that the Central Bank seeks to provide guarantees that the bank's recorded profits are accurate and in accordance with the generally accepted accounting principles. The interim distribution should not affect the paid capital, and the bank's strength and plans, and the ways to make optimal use of them. The distribution should not exceed a certain percentage agreed upon from the total capital.

The Kuwaiti banks' efforts to implement this amendment reflects their strong financial man-

tle and their ability to approve quarterly distributions without any negative impact on their other expansion plans, either credit or investment.

However, this step must be framed by supervisory procedures for all banks, so that those on whom these controls apply may distribute quarterly profits in the future if he decides to do so. The controls for the banks' distribution of quarterly profits are currently being prepared with the same efficiency that makes it approve the annual distribution.

In the event of obtaining the supervisory approval to amend the banking model used for distributing profits, and replacing it with one that approves the adoption of quarterly distributions instead of annual, it will require the banks to separately hold a general assembly to discuss the proposal of the board of directors and obtain the approval of the extraordinary general assembly to amend the articles of association to the bank.

It is noteworthy that one of the most prominent advantages of the quarterly distribution of banks is that it gives confidence to the investor of the fact that the bank that adopts this behavior has quarterly revenues and cash flows and no unrealized revenues (book profits).

It also enhances the bank's strength by achieving the expected results, which reflect the financial strength of the distributor, and its positive view of the development of its financial operations, as it relies on its expectations on the continuous healthy growth of its operations, and the prospective investment opportunities.

Moreover, this procedure enhances what is known in the market as repurchase, that is, it gives a greater opportunity for shareholders to reinject their dues from the cash dividend in expanding their holdings of the shares of the bank in which they contribute. It is also considered one of the contributing factors to the increase in the share price.

NBK Run Kicks off with blast :

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