

Herd immunity?

'Weaker' Omicron sparks cautious hopes against Covid-19 pandemic

AFP, Paris

With new versions forcing vaccine makers to re-test jabs, the virus that causes Covid-19 has proven highly unpredictable.

But the latest variant to sweep the globe has persuaded some experts that long hoped-for collective immunity is in sight, and that the virus may be evolving into a relatively benign seasonal illness.

Omicron has proven particularly contagious, infecting people thought to have immunity conferred by vaccines or a bout with the disease itself.

But while Omicron is driving a record number of cases in countries around the world, the illness is generally less severe, compared to previous variants.

More people getting Omicron and recovering, combined with more vaccinations, could be the key to boosting collective defences against almost any form of Covid, some experts have said.

Lower rates of hospitalisation due to Omicron also suggests Covid-19 might evolve into a weaker form, similar to coronaviruses long circulating in the general population.

"Perhaps we are witnessing the beginning of an evolution towards a more banal virus like the others we know," said Alain Fischer, who coordinates France's pandemic vaccine response.

The idea has been embraced by public health officials.

Speaking before the legislature this week, French health minister Olivier Veran said "maybe this will be the wave that allows us to acquire a kind of immunity".

Earlier, his Israeli counterpart, Nachman Ash, told an Israeli radio station that herd immunity was "possible".

However, even if Omicron leads to fewer severe cases, a larger proportion of the population infected means that hospitalisations are bound to increase overall.

In the absence of herd immunity worldwide, Omicron is unlikely to be the last Covid variant, experts warn.

"We aren't there yet," said Fontanet.

"We can expect new variants to emerge, but as our immunity strengthens over time - either through natural infection or with booster doses of the vaccine - their ability to lead to serious consequences will diminish."



An armoured personnel carrier is seen near the mayor's office during protests triggered by fuel price increase in Almaty, Kazakhstan January 5, 2022. Kazakhstan declared emergencies in the capital, main city and provinces yesterday after demonstrators stormed and torched public buildings. The Cabinet resigned but that failed to quell the anger of the demonstrators.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Ingredients for civil war' there Says Cambodia on Myanmar as it takes Asean chair

AFP, Singapore

Myanmar has "all the ingredients for civil war", Cambodia, chair of Southeast Asia's regional bloc, has warned ahead of a visit by Prime Minister Hun Sen to the crisis-wracked country.

Myanmar has been in chaos since a coup last year, with more than 1,400 people killed in a crackdown on dissent by security forces, according to a local monitoring group.

Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn warned the outlook was dire.

"The political and security crisis in Myanmar is deepening, and has led to (an) economic, health and humanitarian crisis," he said.

"We feel that all the ingredients for civil war are

now on the table. There are now two governments, there are several armed forces, ... and (there is) guerrilla warfare around the country."

Prak Sokhonn rejected criticism that Hun Sen's 2 day visit, which starts from tomorrow, would legitimise the junta, and said the kingdom's "immediate attention is on improving the situation in Myanmar".

In response to Myanmar's refusal to allow Asean envoy to visit Myanmar opposition, the bloc had excluded Myanmar's junta leader from a high-level October summit, a rare rebuke by a group often criticised for being toothless.

Nevertheless, Prak Sokhonn said Cambodia was making efforts to allow Myanmar's junta chief to resume attending meetings of the bloc again.

North Korea fires 'ballistic missile'

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired a suspected ballistic missile off its east coast yesterday, just hours before South Korean President Moon Jae-in attended a groundbreaking ceremony for a rail line he hopes will eventually connect the divided Korean peninsula. The presumed missile was fired around 8:10 am (2310 GMT) from an inland location, over the east coast and into the sea, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said. Japan's defence minister said the suspected ballistic missile had flown an estimated 500 km. UN Security Council resolutions ban all ballistic missile and nuclear tests by North Korea, and have imposed sanctions over the programmes.

Behead mannequins!

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban have ordered shop owners in western Afghanistan city of Herat to cut off the heads of mannequins. A video clip showing men sawing the plastic heads off women figures went viral on social media. The Taliban have so far issued no national policy on mannequins or statues. Under the former militants' strict interpretation of Islamic law, depictions of the human figure are forbidden.

Trump cancels Jan 6 press meet

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump on Tuesday abruptly gave up his plan to steal the limelight on the anniversary of the January 6th assault against Congress, leaving President Joe Biden to address a divided nation. Despite losing by more than seven million votes to Biden, and despite losing multiple court challenges around the country, Trump continues to say he was the real winner in 2020. Polls consistently show that around 70 percent of Republicans think Biden was elected illegitimately. Meanwhile, Congressional investigators probing the riot on Tuesday asked Fox News host Sean Hannity to provide information about his communications with Trump. On January 6, 2021 thousands of Trump supporters stormed the seat of US democracy in a bid to prevent lawmakers from certifying Biden's victory. Five people were killed in the melee.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Office of the Executive Engineer, Barisal PWD Division, Barisal. Memo. ২৩০৬/২. Dated: 03/01/2022. Invitation for e-Tender. e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the Procurement of following works given below. Table with columns: SL No., Tender ID, Invitation Reference No., Name of works, Tender closing date & time. Includes contact info for Gerald Oliver Guda, Executive Engineer PWD Division, Barisal.

The unvaccinated, I really want to piss them off. ... I won't send them to prison, I won't vaccinate by force. So we need to tell them, from Jan. 15, you won't be able to go to the restaurant anymore, ... won't be able to have a coffee, go to the theatre, the cinema... French President Emmanuel Macron

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Local Government Engineering Department, Office of the Executive Engineer, 1012, CDA Avenue, Sholashahar, District: Chattogram. Memo No. 46.02.1500.000.99.010.22.39. Dated: 05/01/2022. e-Tender Notice-37/2021-22. This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. Table with columns: SI No., Package No., Name of works, Tender ID, Procurement method, Last date & time of submission documents. Includes contact info for A.K.M. Amiruzzaman, Executive Engineer, Local Government Engineering Department, District: Chattogram.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার. বিভাগীয় ভূ-সম্পত্তি কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, ঢাকা. দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি. এতদ্বারা সর্বসাধারণের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে ভূ-সম্পত্তি ব্যবস্থাপনা নীতিমালা, ২০০২ অনুযায়ী বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, ঢাকা ভূ-সম্পত্তি বিভাগের আওতাধীন নিম্নবর্ণিত স্টেশন/এলাকায় অনুমোদিত মাটির গ্র্যানুলার তফসিল মোতাবেক প্রটিনসমূহ বাণিজ্যিক কাজে ব্যবহারের নিমিত্ত বাৎসরিক ভিত্তিতে সম্পূর্ণ অস্থায়ীভাবে লাইসেন্স গ্রহণে আগ্রহী ব্যক্তিদের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরযুক্ত দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। প্রকৃতি দরপত্র দলিল 'এ চালা' এর মাধ্যমে ১০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা (অফিসতয়োগ্য) মূল্যে বিভাগীয় ভূ-সম্পত্তি কর্মকর্তা, বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, ঢাকা/চট্টগ্রাম, প্রধান ভূ-সম্পত্তি কর্মকর্তা (পূর্ব), বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, চট্টগ্রাম এবং জেলা প্রশাসক, ব্রাহ্মণবাড়িয়া, ময়মনসিংহ, হবিগঞ্জ, সুনামগঞ্জ (যে দপ্তরের জন্য যেটা প্রযোজ্য) হতে ক্রয়/সিদ্ধ করা যাবে। নির্ধারিত তারিখ ও সময়ে বিভাগীয় ভূ-সম্পত্তি কর্মকর্তা, বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, ঢাকা/চট্টগ্রাম এবং প্রধান ভূ-সম্পত্তি কর্মকর্তা (পূর্ব), বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, চট্টগ্রাম দপ্তরে রক্ষিত বাস্তব দরপত্র দাখিল করা যাবে। দরপত্র দাখিলের দিন কোন দরপত্র দলিল বিক্রয় করা হবে না। নির্ধারিত তারিখ ও সময়ে অনুযায়ী আশ্রয়ী দরপত্রদাতাদের সম্মুখে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) দরপত্র দলিল খোলা হবে। সরকারি দপ্তরে নিচে কোন দর প্রার্থনাসূচী হবে না। রেলওয়ে কর্তৃপক্ষ রেলওয়ের প্রয়োজনে কোন কারণ দর্শালে বাতিলকৃত হোকেন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা সকল দরপত্র বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।