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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Thursday, February 24 2022|

Ukraine declares state of emergency, summons citizens home from Russia

KYIV/DONETSK, Feb 23 (Reuters) - Ukraine declared a state of emergency on Wednesday and told its citizens in Russia to come home, while Moscow began evacuating its Kyiv embassy in the latest ominous signs for Ukrainians who fear an all-out Russian military onslaught.

Shelling intensified at the line of contact in eastern Ukraine, where Russian President Vladimir Putin recognised the independence of two Moscow-backed rebel regions this week and has ordered the deployment of Russian troops as “peace-keepers”.

Convoys of military equipment including nine tanks moved towards eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk from the direction of the Russian border, a Reuters witness reported.

But there was still no clear indication of whether Putin will launch a massed assault on Ukraine with the tens of thousands of troops he has gathered near his neighbour’s borders. A U.S. defence official said the Russian forces were “as ready as they can be” for an attack. [read more](#)

That uncertainty and a mostly incremental first volley of sanctions on Russian interests by Washington and its allies have jolted financial markets, which were mixed on Wednesday.

Oil prices reversed their early losses on the day, while global stocks broke a four-day slide and demand for safe-haven assets waned as Western leaders and Ukraine awaited Putin’s next move. The rouble fell, although not by much. [read more](#)

“Predicting what might be the next step of Russia, the separatists or the personal decisions of the Russian president - I cannot say,” Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

The 30-day state of emergency could restrict the freedom of movement of conscripted reservists, see curbs imposed on the media and lead to personal document checks, according to a draft text that needs to be approved by parliament.

The restrictions would come into force from Thursday.

The Ukrainian government has also announced compulsory military service for all men of fighting age.



A Ukrainian frontier guard checks a man’s documents at the Hoptivka (Goptovka) crossing on the Ukrainian-Russian border in the Kharkiv region, Ukraine February 23, 2022. REUTERS/Antonio Bronic

Britain banned Russia from issuing new bonds in its markets.

FRESH TROOPS DEPLOYED

Ukraine’s military said one soldier had been killed and six wounded in increased shelling by pro-Russian separatists using heavy artillery, mortar bombs and Grad rocket systems in the two breakaway areas in the last 24 hours.

New satellite imagery showed several fresh troop and equipment deployments in western Russia and more than 100 vehicles at a small airfield in southern Belarus, which borders Ukraine, according to U.S. firm Maxar.

For months, Russia has presented the crisis mainly as a dispute with the West, demanding security guarantees, including a promise never to allow Ukraine to join NATO.

Ukrainian government and state websites, which have experienced outages in recent weeks blamed by Kyiv on cyber attacks, were again offline on Wednesday. Ukraine’s parliament, cabinet and foreign ministry websites were affected.

Moscow denies planning an invasion and has described warnings as anti-Russian hysteria. But it has taken no steps to withdraw the troops deployed along Ukraine’s frontiers.

On Wednesday, it took down flags from its embassy in Kyiv, having ordered its diplomats to evacuate for safety reasons.

SANCTIONS

Western countries have been warning for weeks about the possibility of the bloodiest war in Europe for decades. That has not materialised yet but the apparent threat remains, leaving policymakers to struggle with calibrating their response.

Along with allies Washington has unveiled a volley of sanctions this week, including new restrictions on some Russian

banks. None of the measures so far directly targets Putin himself, or are expected to have serious consequences for Moscow, which is sitting on more than \$630 billion in international reserves. [read more](#)

The Biden administration is expected to on Wednesday unveil sanctions against Nord Stream 2 AG, a Swiss firm which built Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany and whose parent is Russian state-owned gas giant Gazprom. [read more](#)

Germany on Tuesday froze approvals for the pipeline.

The European Union will add all members of Russia’s lower house of parliament who voted to recognise the separatist regions in Ukraine to a blacklist, freezing their assets. A second EU sanction package would include export controls. [read more](#)

EU leaders will also hold an emergency summit on Thursday to discuss next steps.



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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

02/23/2022



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Are We Waiting To Die In A Coffin?

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered troops into a separatist-held part of eastern Ukraine. It is unclear if this troop movement marks the beginning of an invasion of the Ukraine that western leaders have warned about in the last few weeks.

U.S. Ambassador Greenfield told an UN security meeting that, "President Putin is attempting to create a pretext for further invasion. So-called peacekeeping is

nonsense."

In the Kremlin, Putin made it clear that he sees Ukraine as indistinguishable from Russia and not an independent entity. He said that, "Ukraine is an integral part of our own history, culture and spiritual space," and referred to, "comrades, relatives and people connected with us by blood," and that, "modern Ukraine was created by Russia."

Actually, Putin's move on



the two eastern Ukrainian regions which call themselves the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic is part of a steady march to a wider invasion of Ukraine.

In his emergency statement, Ukraine President Zelenski urged the world to come to the rescue of his country. He said, "We don't want to die in our coffin."

From the perspective of the new world situation, Ukraine is by no means a single problem. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia still feels the pain of the past. They just can't let Ukraine join NATO to work against them.

Unfortunately, countries like Ukraine are just playing cards in the world of international politics.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Truckers and their supporters gather before a convoy leaves for the nation's capital to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates, in Adelanto, California, February 23, 2022. REUTERS/David Swanson



Truckers and their supporters start to gather before a convoy leaves the following morning bound for the nation's capital to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates, in Adelanto, California, February 22, 2022. REUTERS/David Swanson



Truckers and their supporters gather before a convoy leaves for the nation's capital to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates, in Adelanto, California, February 23, 2022. REUTERS/David Swanson



Truckers and their supporters gather before a convoy leaves for the nation's capital to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates, in Adelanto, California, February 23, 2022. REUTERS/David Swanson

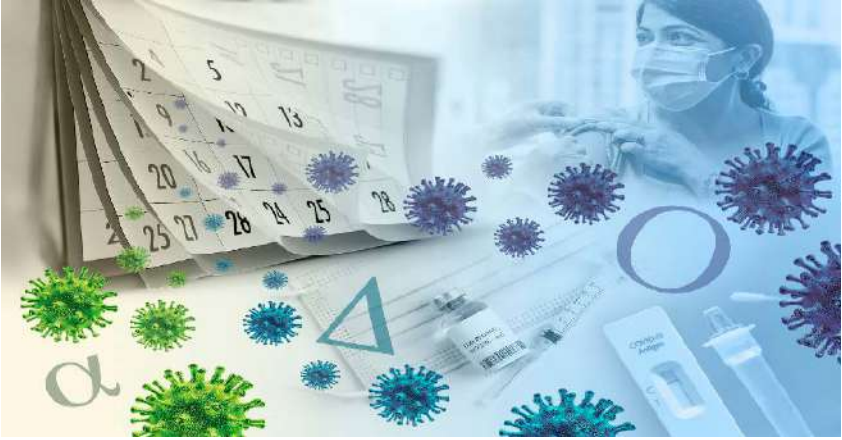


People holding Canadian flags protest at the Ottawa International Airport, as truckers and their supporters continue to protest against coronavirus vaccine mandates, in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. REUTERS/Patrick Doyle



Truckers and their supporters gather before a convoy leaves for the nation's capital to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates, in Adelanto, California, February 23, 2022. REUTERS/David Swanson

Scientists Now On Alert Over Rising Cases Caused By Omicron ‘Cousin’ BA.2



Key Points

A new, highly contagious subvariant of Omicron has emerged, which some have begun calling a “stealth variant,” but public health officials say it’s too soon to tell what kind of real threat, if any, this new strain will present.

In the meantime, it’s worth watching BA.2, the World Health Organization says.

The subvariant has been identified across at least 40 countries, including three cases reported in Houston and several in Washington state. BA.2 accounts for only a small minority of reported cases so far, including 5% in India, 4% of those in the United Kingdom, and 2% each of cases in Sweden and Singapore.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

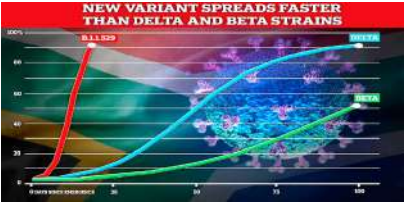
(Reuters) - The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries. Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant: The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries. Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant: “STEALTH” SUBVARIANT Globally, BA.1 accounted for 98.8% of

sequenced cases submitted to the public virus tracking database GISAID as of Jan. 25. But several countries are reporting recent increases in the subvariant known as BA.2, according to the World Health Organization. In addition to BA.1 and BA.2, the WHO lists two other subvariants under the Omicron umbrella: BA.1.1.529 and BA.3. All are closely related genetically, but each features mutations that could alter how they behave. The variant, B.1.1.529, is believed to have emerged in Botswana - from where there are no direct flights to the U.S. - and is also being found in neighboring South Africa. Hong Kong reported a case after a passenger who had recently traveled from South Africa was found to be infected with the variant, and then infected another person while in the same hotel, quarantining. Israel has also identified a case ‘in a person who returned from Malawi,’ with ‘two more cases of people returning from abroad’ placed in quarantine, the country’s health ministry said Friday.

The variant – now named Omicron -- by the World Health Organization has caused an ‘exponential’ rise in infections in South Africa. Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, said initial data from the variant was worrying and border restrictions should be imposed. ‘Looks like vaccine evasion could be real with this variant,’ he tweeted, pointing out that the two patients in Hong Kong who had the variant were both double-jabbed with the Pfizer vaccine.

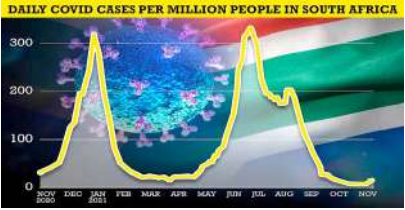


One of the two had recently been in Southern Africa. That person then passed it on to a second person, quarantining in the same hotel. ‘It’s very airborne,’ Feigl-Ding said. ‘The hotel guests were in different room across the hallway from each other. Environmental samples found the virus in 25 of 87 swabs across both rooms.’ He added: ‘I think border and travel restrictions make sense. Especially since Hong Kong only caught the case because of a mandatory hotel quarantine. Which countries in the west still have that??? Almost none.’ Botswana has four confirmed cases, South Africa 77 - with the real figure likely in the hundreds - and Hong Kong has two, meaning 83 cases of the variant are confirmed so far. But South African scientists tried to backpedal today saying it was ‘likely’ that vaccines still offered ‘high levels of protection’ against hospitalisations and deaths from the variant. Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands joined Britain, Israel and Singapore in suspending travel from South Africa today and, in a sign of growing alarm, the European Union is also proposing prohibiting travel from the country and its neighbors. As of 5:00 a.m. EST, the CDC website’s travel advice page for South Africa had the country listed as ‘Level 1: Low Level of COVID-19’, with flights to the US permitted from the African country since November 8. The levels range from Level unknown, Level 1: Low, Level 2: Moderate, Level 3: High and Level 4: Very High.



The CDC page asks anyone travelling to and from South Africa to be fully vaccinated, or for those who are not to be tested for Covid. It also recommends travellers follow measures in-place in South Africa, including wearing a mask and social distancing. South Africa’s infection rate spiked 93 per cent in a day yesterday amid fears the strain is driving the surge. Local scientists say it has likely spread to all the country’s nine provinces, but there is yet to be a surge in hospitalisations in epicentre Johannesburg. Travellers from South Africa have been allowed entry into the US since November 8, when restrictions barring entry to people from more than 30 countries - implemented at the start of the pandemic - were partially lifted. The new rules, which came 19 months after the travel ban was implemented, require international visitors to show both proof of vaccination and a negative Covid test. ‘There’s a lot we don’t understand about this variant,’ said Richard Lessells, an infectious disease physician at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, at a press briefing organized by South Africa’s health department on Thursday. ‘The mutation profile gives us concern, but now we need to do the work to understand the significance of this variant and what it means for the response to the pandemic.’ U.S. stock futures dropped in overnight trading on Thursday as concerns about the variant spread. Futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 400 points, while those for the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq 100 were both in negative territory.

On Thursday Britain’s health secretary, Sajid Javid sounded the alarm over what one senior scientific advisor in the UK termed the ‘worst-ever’ super-mutant COVID variant.



He said it could make vaccines at least 40 per cent less effective, and as a result he said they had banned flights from South Africa and five other regional countries. Experts explained earlier how the B.1.1.529 variant has more than 30 muta-

tions – the most ever recorded in a variant and twice as many as Delta – that suggest it could be more jab-resistant and transmissible than any version before it. In response, Javid announced that flights from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe will be suspended from midday Friday and all six countries will be added to the red list. South Africa blasted Britain’s travel ban as rushed. Foreign minister Naledi Pandor said: ‘Our immediate concern is the damage that this decision will cause to both the tourism industries and businesses of both countries.’ A spokesman for the Government said: ‘Imposing bans on travellers from countries where a new variant is reported has not yielded a meaningful outcome.’ Israel was the first country to follow suit, also red-listing the six nations, with Singapore, Germany, Italy the Czech Republic and the Netherlands also banning flights from South Africa. A statement from European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU aims to halt air travel from the region due to concerns over the possible dangers posed by the variant. Germany’s new travel restrictions, starting Friday night, will affect South Africa and ‘probably neighbouring nations’, Spahn said, with only German nationals allowed entry. They must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival even if vaccinated. In Britain they must quarantine for 11 days in Government hotels for about £2,800.



‘The last thing we need now is an introduced new variant that causes even more problems,’ Spahn said, with Germany in the grip of a ferocious fourth wave of the pandemic. In Rome, the government on Friday announced it was banning entry to those who have been in South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia or Eswatini in the past fortnight. Health Minister Roberto Speranza said scientists were studying the new B.1.1.529 variant, ‘and in the meantime, we will follow the path of maximum caution’. Asian countries are also preparing to tighten curbs.

(Article continues below)

(Article continues from above)

Scientists Now On Alert Over Rising Cases Caused By Omicron ‘Cousin’ BA.2

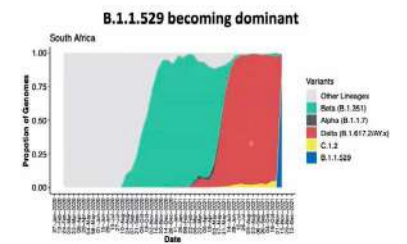
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

No cases have been detected in the UK so far but everyone who has returned from South Africa in the past 10 days will be contacted and asked to take a test. There are currently 13 direct flights a week from South Africa to the United States - Johannesburg and Cape Town are the only cities in the region from where it is possible to fly direct to the U.S. The 13 flights could hold around 3,900 people, if full. United Airlines currently fly direct from Johannesburg to New York City seven days a week, with the 16-hour flight leaving at 10pm and arriving at 7am in Newark. United also fly direct to New York City from Cape Town three times a week, on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. United flies Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners, which can hold 290 people. Delta fly direct from Johannesburg to Atlanta on Saturday, Monday, and Thursday. They use Airbus A350-900, which can seat between 300 and 350 people.



The UK and Israel on Thursday effectively stopped travel from Southern Africa, and some believe the US may follow suit. Flight ‘bans’ have been implemented before - although they are rarely an outright ban on a commercial flight from a country. Instead, they are stringent restrictions on who can fly, meaning that the airlines themselves cancel the routes because there are so few people who meet the requirements. Donald Trump placed restrictions on travel from China to the U.S. in February 2020, and then the border between the U.S. and Canada was closed, and the U.S. and Mexico. This month Joe Biden ended 18 months of

restrictions placed on arrivals from the European Union, China, Iran, South Africa, Brazil and India, which had largely stopped travel between the countries. Some epidemiologists have argued that putting a travel ban in place for South Africa is counterproductive, because it punishes a country that has been transparent with its data. ‘Given how transmissible that the nu variant apparently is, I do not think that halting travel will ultimately be effective in preventing the variant from arriving,’ said Jay Bhattacharya, a professor of health policy at Stanford, whose recent research focuses on the epidemiology of COVID-19 as well as an evaluation of policy responses to the epidemic. He told DailyMail.com: ‘COVID is a global pandemic. No country can isolate itself forever, and halting travel imposes harm on the kind of international cooperation we will need to end the pandemic. ‘A better idea would be for the international community to provide sufficient vaccine supplies to the affected places.’ Others, such as Feigl-Ding, insist travel restrictions are necessary.



South African scientists, meanwhile, add that they are ‘concerned by the jump in evolution in this variant’. The variant has over 30 mutations - around twice as many as the Delta variant - which could potentially make it more transmissible and evade the protection given by prior infection or vaccination. ‘I’ve said before - I’m not always as concerned about these variants of concern, but this one, B.1.1.529, does concern me,’ said Marc Siegel, professor of medicine at the NYU Langone Medical Center, in an interview with Fox News.

‘It’s got 32 mutations in the spike protein, which is how the virus spreads. ‘And in the province around Johannesburg, there’s about 2,500 new cases over the past day, and they think — not proven yet — that this is the predominant variant.’ Siegel said that there were numerous reasons for concern. ‘It looks like it’s highly contagious,’ he said. ‘And that is what concerns me, because the other variants that have emerged haven’t had a chance against Delta because Delta is so contagious. ‘The other issue is, will the vaccine protect against this variant? Will the treatments protect against this variant? We’re keeping a really close eye on this one.’ The British expert whose modeling helped instigate the first coronavirus lockdown said that the decision to impose travel restrictions was ‘prudent’. Professor Neil Ferguson, a member of the British government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said: ‘The B.1.1.529 variant has an unprecedented number of mutations in the spike protein gene, the protein which is the target of most vaccines. ‘There is therefore a concern that this variant may have a greater potential to escape prior immunity than previous variants.



A healthcare worker collects a swab from Bronwen Cook for a PCR test against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) before traveling to London, at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa, November 26, 2021.

‘It is also concerning that this variant appears to be driving a rapid increase in case numbers in South Africa. The Government’s move to restrict travel with South Africa is therefore prudent. ‘However, we do not yet have reliable estimates of the extent to which B.1.1.529 might be either more transmissible or more resistant to vaccines, so it is too early to be able to provide an evidence-based assessment of the risk it

poses.’ Experts from the UKHSA have been advising ministers on the issue, with a number of scientists expressing serious concern over the variant due to the significant number of mutations in the spike protein. One senior scientist said: ‘One of our major worries is this virus spike protein is so dramatically different to the virus spike that was in the original Wuhan strain, and therefore in our vaccines, that it has a great cause of concern.’ Experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) are meeting with South African officials on Friday at 11:00 GMT to assess the evolving situation in the country. The variant could eventually be given the moniker ‘Nu’ - with the most concerning variants given named after the Greek alphabet. The variant is already in three countries, suggesting it is more widespread than the official tally. Two cases have been detected in Hong Kong – both of whom had links to South Africa – three have been picked up in Botswana and the remainder are in South Africa. But a lack of surveillance on continental Africa may be underestimating the true numbers there, scientists warned. Professor Tulio de Oliveira, a director of COVID surveillance in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, told a press conference on Thursday that it has been spotted in nearly every corner of South Africa.



A baby cries as her mother receives her Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19, in Diepsloot Township near Johannesburg, South Africa on October 21. He admitted he was still ‘uncertain’ about the impact of the variant on the country’s epidemic, with other scientists saying that it might be so evolved that it becomes unstable. But Professor Oliveria explained the new variant is ‘clearly very different’ from previous strains, including the fact that it has five times more mutations on

a specific part of the spike protein than Delta — meaning it might be better at infecting vaccinated people than the world-dominant strain. He said that officials ‘do expect, unfortunately, to start seeing pressure in the healthcare system in the next few days and weeks.’ Joe Phaahlam, South Africa’s Health Minister, warned at the same press conference: ‘Here is a mutation variant of serious concern.’ He added: ‘We were hopeful that we might have a longer break in between waves - possibly that it would hold off to late December or even next year January.’ Current jabs train the immune system to recognize an older version of the spike, and lots of changes to this protein make it harder for the vaccinated people to fight it off.

What Impact Might B.1.1.529 Have On Vaccines?

Scientists have raised concern that the super Botswana Covid variant may be better able to dodge vaccine-induced immunity than all previous strains — including Delta. UK Health Security Agency scientists say it is the ‘worst ever’. It combines mutations previously seen on the Beta variant, which sparked concern last year as it was thought to be more vaccine resistant, and those on the more transmissible Alpha strain that was behind the second wave. Scientists warn it is ‘plausible’ that the mutant variant is spreading quickly because it is better able to infect people who have immunity either from vaccines or previous infection.



In South Africa where it is spreading most people already have immunity from previous infection. Some 40 per cent have also received two doses of the Covid jab. But despite the concern lab tests are yet to confirm that the variant is better able to dodge vaccine-triggered immunity than other mutant strains. Very little is known about its virulence and whether someone who catches the mutant strain is more likely to end up in hospital or dying from the disease. (Courtesy <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/>)