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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Tesla's Elon Musk says he is 'thinking of quitting' his jobs

Dec 10 (Reuters) - Tesla Inc (TSLA.O) Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk is "thinking of" leaving his jobs and becoming an influencer, the world's richest man tweeted on Thursday.

"Thinking of quitting my jobs & becoming an influencer full-time wdyt," Musk said in the tweet, without elaborating.

It was not immediately clear if Musk, a prolific user of the social media platform, was being serious about quitting his roles.

Musk, who is also the founder and CEO of rocket company SpaceX, and leads brain-chip startup Neuralink and infrastructure firm The Boring Company, said during a conference call in January that he expects to be the CEO of Tesla for "several years."

"It would be nice to have a bit more free time on my hands as opposed to just working day and night, from when I wake up to when I go to sleep 7 days a week. Pretty intense."

Tesla CEO Elon Musk gestures as he visits the construction site of Tesla's Gigafactory in Gruenheide near Berlin, Germany, August 13, 2021. Patrick Pleul/Pool via Reuters

Last month, he asked his followers on Twitter whether he should sell 10% of his stake in the electric-car maker, to which the majority agreed. He has sold shares worth nearly \$12 billion since.

The billionaire is known for his Twitter banter and lively interactions with followers which have in the past raised regulatory and corporate governance questions, lawyers have said.

Musk was fined \$20 million by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission for tweets in 2018 and was required to step down as chairman.

Howard Fischer, a partner at law firm Moses & Singer, said he doubted Musk's latest tweets violated any rules because they were too vague.

He added: "I think that Musk's social media comments are subject to a substantial discount, as it were, by the market, as compared to other executives."



Envoy says China will forego many 'developing country' benefits at WTO

GENEVA, Dec 10 (Reuters) - China's ambassador to the World Trade Organization said on Friday that Beijing would remain a "developing" country at the global trade body but would forego many of the benefits, signalling an important shift to trading partners.

China, which has the world's second largest economy, is this week celebrating 20 years since joining the Geneva-based trade watchdog, during which it has seen outstanding economic growth thanks largely to its participation in global trade.

It's easy to say YES to a healthcare plan with affordability, flexible options, the largest hospital network, and free preventive care.

As China has grown richer, trading partners - most notably former U.S. President Donald Trump - have criticised its developing country status, calling it unfair that China gets preferential treatment intended for poorer countries.

Li Chenggang said in an interview

with Reuters that despite strong growth China still considers itself a developing country due to lingering poverty but that it would seek carve-outs "in only a few areas" such as agriculture and financial services. "We will not ask for a blank cheque for SDT (special and differential treatment). We will carefully assess our needs," he said. In major negotiations on cutting fishing subsidies in order to boost global fish stocks, Li said China, which is a major fishing nation, may forego all such exemptions. read more

He declined to say when, or under what conditions, China would cease to consider itself a developing country altogether under WTO rules. WTO members including the United States, Australia and Japan levelled other criticisms at China in an October trade review, pointing to subsidies for state enterprises and saying these violate the conditions for China's WTO membership in 2001. read more

However, Li, who was involved in China's 15-year-long accession negotiations, defended China's record saying that it had surpassed some of

the entry criteria, pointing to reductions in tariff rates and the opening of its services sectors.

"We will keep an open mind to the criticism but it should be reasonable, it should be constructive," he said.

In a sign of the importance of the 20th anniversary to China, its mission distributed lapel pins with "20" on them, with a depiction of the Great Wall of China around the WTO logo forming the "0".

LOST MOMENTUM

The WTO is at a critical juncture, having been weakened by global discord, the COVID-19 pandemic and the indefinite closure of its top appeals chamber two years ago when Washington blocked appointments of new judges.

A key ministerial meeting (MC12) this month -- where it had a chance to prove its relevance -- was postponed due to concerns about the new Omicron coronavirus variant. Li said he thought that delay had cut some of the "positive momentum" in trade talks and called for members to work towards a clear roadmap for restoring the Appellate Body next year.



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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

12/11/2021



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Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas

The Door Is Open Again At The ITC!



It was our great honor and pleasure to greet Ambassador Yansane of the Republic of Guinea and Judge Robert Eckels to the International Trade Center today.

Almost two years ago

because of the coronavirus pandemic we had to close our center. For so long we suspended all the activities at the center.

ITC was founded by a group of community leaders. As a

non-profit organization we have been serving over ten thousand small businesses in the area through seminars, social events and international conferences. We are very proud of our record of promoting

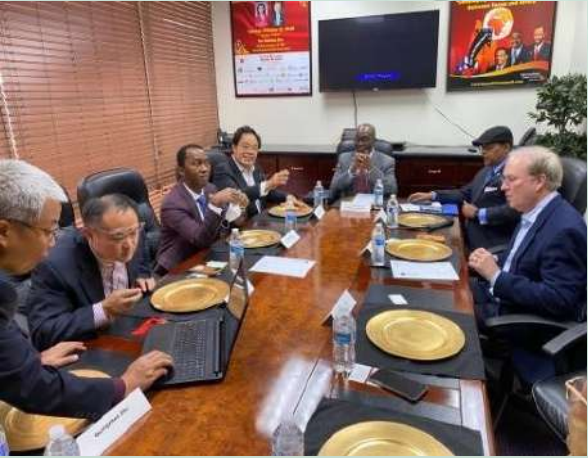
international relations between Texas and the world.

The times are changing and because the pandemic is being defeated, ITC will be reopened and we look forward to teaming up with our partners again to sponsor many new programs in the future.

Currently, the ITC tenants include five chambers of

commerce, the Houston office of the United Nations Association and many other companies.

We are looking forward to more people joining us to work together. Our goal is to promote a better life in our community and the world.



Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Members react during Starbucks union vote in Buffalo, New York. REUTERS/Lindsay DeDario



Outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel holds flowers as she hands over the chancellery to her successor, newly appointed German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Chancellery in Berlin, December 8. REUTERS/Fabrizio Bensch



A couple reacts with their daughter outside the Congress as the Senate votes to approve a same-sex marriage bill in Valparaiso, Chile, December 7. REUTERS/Rodrigo Garrido



A car is submerged in rapids near the edge of American Falls in Niagara Falls, New York, December 8. REUTERS/Lindsay DeDario



U.S. President Joe Biden reacts to the sight of snow falling, while walking to Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, December 8. REUTERS/Tom Brenner



Skiers dressed as Santa Claus participate in the charity Santa Sunday at Sunday River ski resort in Bethel, Maine, December 5. REUTERS/Brian Snyder

Could Make Vaccines 40% Less Effective

Scientists Worldwide Sound The Alarm Over New ‘Worst-Ever’ Super-Mutant COVID Variant



Flag BOTSWANA

Name: B.1.1.529

Cases? Around 100 detected

Key mutations:

- K417N** can escape antibodies
- E484A** can escape antibodies
- N440K** can escape antibodies
- N501Y** speeds up spread
- More spike mutations than any other strain

Key Points

- *The B.1.1.529 variant has a ‘very unusual constellation’ of mutations and may be more resistant to the vaccine*
- *There are currently 77 confirmed cases in South Africa, four in Botswana, one in Hong Kong and one in Israel*
- *However, the real numbers are likely much higher as health authorities establish the full scale of the spread*
- *Britain, Israel, Singapore, Germany and Ital are among increasing countries to block flights from South Africa*
- *There are no direct flights to US from any of the countries except South Africa. Early Friday morning, the CDC still listed South Africa as ‘Level 1: Low Level of COVID-19’ on the country’s travel advice page*

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

Scientists are increasingly alarmed over a new COVID-19 variant originating in Southern Africa, which on Thursday and Friday forced countries including the U.K., Israel, Italy and Germany to effectively stop travel from the region, but passengers are continuing to arrive in the U.S. Flight restrictions from South Africa to the US were lifted two weeks ago, along with restrictions on around 30 other countries. As of 5:00 a.m. on Friday, the CDC listed South Africa as ‘Level 1: Low Level of COVID-19’.

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 an-

other 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 doubled-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.’

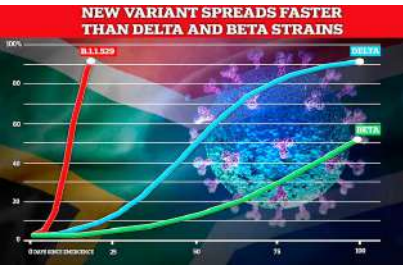
He added: ‘I think border and travel restrictions make sense. Especially since Hong Kong only caught the case because of a mandatory hotel quarantine. Which countries in the west still have that??? Almost none.’

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.

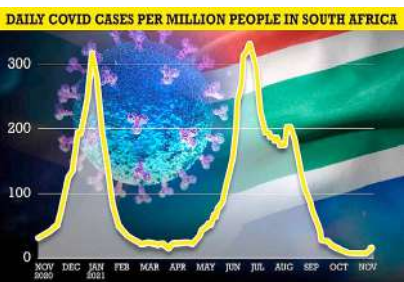
‘There’s a lot we don’t understand about this variant,’ said Richard Lessells, an infectious disease physician at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, at a press briefing organized by South Africa’s health department on Thursday.

‘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 mutations – 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 Worldwide Sound The Alarm Over New ‘Worst-Ever’ Super-Mutant COVID Variant

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.

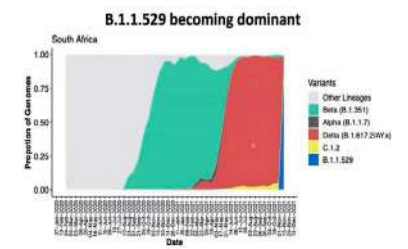
Some epidemiologists have argued that putting a travel ban in place for South Africa is counterproductive, because it punishes a country that has been transparent with its data.

‘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.

COMMUNITY

‘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/>)