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- ❖ **India-Nepal Border Tussle**
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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Alarming Signals!

Warning signals have been sounded by the latest report of the SBI that points out that India is under the grip of the second wave of COVID-19 infections in the wake of rising cases being reported since February this year. According to this report, taking into account the number of days from the current level of daily new cases of victims falling prey to the pandemic to the peak level during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, India may peak in the second half of April this year, with the possibility of total cases reaching around 2.5 million by that period. It is further reported that the entire duration of the second wave could last up to 100 days beginning February 15.

Noting that as the entire nation went into lockdown at the outset of the last week of March 2020, when the total number of pandemic cases was not even 500, the SBI report informs that the number of infections started recording spike along with the extensions of the lockdown. Lamenting that lockdowns were ineffective in many states in 2020 in curbing the spread of the pandemic, the report cites the example based on multiple studies on the Great Spanish Flu of 1918-1919 to show that speedy implementation of numerous non-pharmaceutical interventions, including closure of schools, churches and theatres, could substantially reduce influenza transmissions; nevertheless, that viral spread is prone to be renewed on relaxation of such restrictions. During the first phase of the pandemic in 2020, in none of the most affected districts across the major states, the lockdown failed to contain either infections or the death rates, while fresh caseloads have started increasing in top 15 districts, mostly urban in the second wave and the spread in rural areas is mostly stable and the cases are vastly localized and concentrated. This is also evidenced from Google Mobility data that demonstrate that mobility has declined in many states like Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh in the aftermath of imposition of localized lockdowns; nonetheless, the infection level has only spiked in these states.

As per media reports, on March 24 close to 53, 500 new infection cases were reported across the nation and just in couple of days the count topped one lakh, taking the total caseload to 1.18 crore since January 2020 when the first case was reported in Kerala. This burgeoning upsurge in COVID-19 cases, though limited to some states, is really a matter of grave concern. While attributing casual behaviour of the public in response to the pandemic as the basic reason behind the spike in pandemic cases, experts have called for reverting to masks, social distancing, hand-washing protocol, increase in testing along with decentralizing the vaccination programme as appropriate measures to protect against a second wave of the pandemic. Taking into account the fact that new mutant of COVID-19 is more lethal and spreading at a faster pace, experts have emphasized on redefining the priority parameters for administering vaccination by including all segments of the society, irrespective of age and comorbidities in order to minimize the wastage of vaccine and maximize the safety net to wider sections of the population.

Noting the fact that Rajasthan, Gujarat, Kerala, Uttarakhand and Haryana have vaccinated over 20 Per cent of their elderly population, the SBI report laments that several states with higher elderly population such as Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal have vaccinated much less. Assuming that an increased number of people is vaccinated with the daily inoculation jumping to 4/5 million from the current level of 3.4 million, the report is hopeful that with this capacity the population above 45 years can be vaccinated in coming four months from now. The presence of vaccines has enabled many experts to discount the second wave of COVID-19 that thus far has been more intense and fatal in many countries as these are triggered by many mutant strains of the pandemic. Admitting that the second wave is much higher in intensity than the first wave, experts are sanguine about the presence of the vaccines as making difference currently, thereby, enabling them to tide over the emerging crisis in a better way. Faster pace of vaccination is a more effective way to defeat the pandemic.

— BK