

Health experts declare Sri Lanka is being hit by a tsunami of Omicron infections

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On Wednesday, the *Daily Mirror* quoted comments from health experts who warned that Sri Lanka was “in the midst of a massive Omicron wave sweeping through the country.” They added, “We don’t know the actual caseload, but the situation is far from normal. The caseload has risen tremendously due to the Omicron variant.”

Despite a drastic drop in testing in order to hide the full extent of the pandemic, more than 1,000 cases have been officially reported every day since January 31. On Wednesday, Health Ministry Technical Division director Dr. Anwar Hamdani told *Ada Derana* that the number of COVID-19 infected patients had increased by 20 percent, deaths by 17 percent and patients depending on oxygen by 12 percent over the previous week.

The current official daily COVID-19 death toll is around 30. Thirty-six deaths were reported on Wednesday, surpassing the previous day’s figure of 31. According to statistics, the total number of infections since the pandemic hit the island is now over 633,000 with total deaths at 15,899. Rising infections have overwhelmed the limited number of COVID-dedicated hospitals and seen thousands of patients pushed into so-called “home quarantine.”

Over 5,000 health employees have been infected, including more than 1,000 nurses. On Monday, 20 doctors and 60 other frontline workers at Badulla Hospital tested positive.

Last month, a Naththandiya Dhammissara National School student died of the coronavirus, taking the official student death toll to 90 since the pandemic began in 2020. COVID infections among students and teachers have been reported all over the island.

Last month, the government’s murderous policy of “living with the virus” saw 232 virus-infected Grade 5

students forced to sit for scholarship examinations. This month, 29 separate district level centres have been established so that COVID-19 infected candidates can participate in Advanced Level examinations. Education authorities ordered infected students in quarantine “to report to the designated examination centre mentioned in their examination admission form.”

Workplaces are being hit hard. Free Trade Zone Manufacturers Association secretary Dhammika Fernando told the *Sunday Times* that there were “huge absentees of about 15 to 20 percent in each and every factory” because of COVID-19 and lamented that factories were being delayed in fulfilling their orders.

The *Sunday Times* reported that in contrast to previous outbreaks, “today the management is asking employees to continue to work as a result of which the pandemic is widely spreading in the factories.”

Rather than challenging this, the trade unions are fully collaborating with the companies. Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union leader Anton Marcus said that his union was calling for a meeting of the National Labour Advisory Council and the health authorities. Employers must “take the situation seriously as they too have a responsibility to look after the welfare of their workers,” he declared.

Marcus’s union—like all the other unions that fully supported reopening the economy and maintaining production at all cost—has not called for temporary closures of non-essential factories or full pay and proper health facilities and treatment for those infected.

Voicing the Rajapakse regime’s brutal indifference to the tsunami of Omicron, Sri Lankan Army Commander General Shavendra Silva told a press conference last week that despite “the huge spread of the coronavirus, the government has no intention of re-imposing travel restrictions.” Starting in April 2020, Colombo began

systematically removing the limited health restrictions, with current restrictions applying to just some public gatherings.

What is needed to save lives is the closure of schools and non-essential production, the imposition of travel restrictions and the modernisation of the entire health infrastructure.

Against these essential requirements, the army commander cynically appealed to the population to “follow the health security measures.” The current rudimentary health measures will not stop the virus from spreading, as masses of people are forced to travel in congested buses and work in factories where social distancing is impossible.

Neither the government nor its health authorities have any concern for the lives of working people. From the outset, their priority has been to maintain big business profits. This, they declare, is “defending the country’s economy”—i.e., the profit system.

Instead of a virus-elimination policy to defend human lives, rulers all over the world, including the Rajapakse administration, have imposed murderous “living with the virus” policies, resulting in the deaths of millions of people.

The outcome of these criminal measures finds its starker expression in the US, the wealthiest country in the world, where the official COVID death toll recently surpassed 900,000. By contrast, in China, which has the largest population in the world and which follows a zero-COVID policy, less than 5,000 COVID deaths have been reported.

Principled epidemiologists have repeatedly explained that vaccination alone, without a range of public health measures, will not stop or control the pandemic. This scientific truth has been proven in the negative in the US and Europe where higher vaccinations rates have failed to stop a tsunami of the deadly Omicron variant. The World Health Organisation has predicted that half of the entire population in Europe will be infected with the coronavirus in the next few months.

Addressing the Independence Day celebration on February 4, President Rajapakse declared: “We understood very early that the only solution to control the COVID-19 pandemic was vaccination. Accordingly, we have been able to start community life by controlling the disease by administering both doses to more than 85 percent of the population.” In plain

language, Rajapakse is making clear that his regime will do nothing to prevent the spread of Omicron and the ongoing health catastrophe.

Several Sri Lankan health experts have backed Rajapakse’s “living with the virus” death agenda and promoted illusions in the government’s vaccination drive. The newest of these is Dr. Nadeeka Janage, a specialist virologist at the National Medical Research Institute. The *Economy Next* website on February 5 reported that Janage claimed that “by providing more and more vaccination, the pandemic can be brought to endemic level.” These comments are in line with a right-wing international campaign to “endemicise” the pandemic.

The anti-scientific character and the political objectives of these efforts were exposed in a WSWS article published on January 25. The article quoted Dr. Raina MacIntyre, an internationally acclaimed Australian epidemiologist, who stated: “Denial of the science of epidemiology is widespread, even among ‘experts.’ We are told repeatedly that SARS-CoV-2 will become ‘endemic.’ But it will never be endemic because it is an epidemic disease and always will be. The key difference is spread.”

MacIntyre pointed out that respiratory transmission infections, such as influenza, measles and Sars-CoV-2, do not become endemic. She stated: “Public health is the organized response by society to protect and promote health and to prevent illness, injury, and disability. It is a core responsibility of government.”

The “endemicising” theory peddled by Janage and others is an anti-scientific attempt to justify the criminal policies of governments all over the world, which defend the capitalist profit system.



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