

South Africa strongly criticizes UK over COVID-19 travel bans

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South Africa's Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor

Pretoria, November 27 (RHC)-- South Africa has blasted the UK government over its hasty placement of several southern African countries under red-list travel restrictions due to concerns over a new COVID-19

variant, which has been detected in small numbers.

The UK swiftly put the six African countries of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa on its "red list" on Thursday evening, restricting travel to essential journeys and requiring all arrivals to quarantine.

South Africa's Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor criticized the travel ban on Friday, arguing that it would cause damage to "both the tourism industries and businesses of both countries."

Pandor said the UK's decision "seems to have been rushed" as even the World Health Organization is yet to advise on the next steps. The foreign ministry said in a statement that it would seek to convince the UK to reconsider the restrictions.

British health officials argue that the "Nu" strain of the coronavirus variant, which has spread in South Africa, has double the number of mutations of the Delta variant and could be more transmissible, while vaccines "may be less effective" against it.

According to the UK Health Security Agency (HSA), the new variant, called B.1.1.529, has a spike protein that is significantly different than the one in the original coronavirus on which COVID-19 vaccines are based.

Speaking at a news conference on Thursday, South African scientists told reporters that the variant had a "very unusual constellation" of mutations, which are worrisome as they could help it evade the human body's immune response.

Meanwhile, the HSA confirmed that no cases of the variant have been detected in the UK so far. The development comes as the number of COVID-19 cases in the UK passed 10 million on Thursday.

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