

Jain alleges Delhi govt officers 'pressurised' to not increase COVID testing; MHA terms it baseless

New Delhi, Aug 27 (PTI) Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Thursday wrote to Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, alleging that the Delhi government officers are being 'pressurised' by the Home Ministry to not increase COVID-19 testing in the national capital, an allegation that was termed 'baseless' by the latter.

A Home Ministry spokesperson said the marked improvement in the COVID-19 situation in Delhi has been possible due to enhanced testing and other containment measures.

'The allegation raised in the letter of the Health Minister of Delhi Govt dated August 27, 2020, which is addressed to Union Home Secretary, to the effect that MHA is putting pressure on Delhi Govt officers not to increase testing in Delhi is false and baseless,' the spokesperson tweeted.

Responding to the ministry spokesperson's tweet, Jain said, 'I hope that the officers will comply with this msg from MHA. I am sure that the officers, who were reluctant to increase testing today citing pressure from MHA, will immediately increase testing in Delhi.' In the letter earlier in the day, the Delhi health minister said that the AAP government has been able to control coronavirus by working on the policy of more and more testing to identify and isolate COVID-19 patients.

Jain requested the Union home secretary that 'pressure' should not be applied and the central government should not 'interfere' in increasing coronavirus tests in Delhi by the city government.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that COVID-19 test will be doubled to 40,000 per day within a week as the national capital has witnessed a marginal rise in the number of coronavirus cases.

On an average, 20,000 daily tests are being conducted by the Delhi government in the city.

'But when some officers told pressure is being created by the Union Home ministry on Delhi officers that testing is not to be increased further in Delhi, I was shocked,' Jain said in the letter.

There is an elected government in Delhi and as an elected government it's capable of taking decisions, he said.

'I am stupefied as to why the Home Ministry is interfering in Delhi government's work? Secondly, why Delhi government is being stopped from more testing in Delhi,' Jain asked.

More and more testing is being considered the right policy all over the world. Under this policy, the Delhi government has so far succeeded in controlling coronavirus, he said.

'If Delhi government wants to raise testing from 20,000 to 40,000 per day then why it is being stopped. Why Delhi government officers are being pressurised illegally and unconstitutionally,' he alleged.

Jain also alleged that a note prepared by principal secretary (health) was 'secretively' not shown to him and the chief minister.

'We were told that the note was prepared by Delhi government officers under pressure from the Home Ministry,' he claimed, adding that the said note was attached with his letter.

The Union Home Ministry said the letter of Jain annexed a note of the officers of the Delhi government and this note made no mention whatsoever of any instruction of the MHA on the matter of increase in testing in Delhi.

The note has only proposed that the views of an expert committee headed by V K Paul may be taken on the proposed enhancement in testing in Delhi, for technical guidance on various issues such as mix of RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen, categories of geographical areas and demographics etc, the ministry spokesperson said.

The Home Ministry said it was after the intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah that the daily tests in Delhi, which were averaging around 4,000 per day till mid June, 2020, went up to around 18-20,000 per day in a calibrated manner.

'As such, any allegation that MHA is putting pressure on Delhi Govt not to increase testing in Delhi is absolutely without any basis,' the spokesperson said.

On Thursday, Delhi recorded 1,840 fresh COVID-19 cases on Thursday, the highest single-day spike in August in the city, taking the tally to over 1.67 lakh, while the death toll mounted to 4,369, authorities said. This is the third successive single-day spike this month. PTI VIT ACB BUN AAR AAR