

International travel 'completely depends' on spread of Omicron, says Civil Aviation Minister Scindia

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International travel is completely dependent on the spread of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Tuesday.

While speaking at an event, the minister said, as quoted by news agency PTI, "Keeping in mind the health, we cannot dissociate ourselves from COVID. We are working closely with the health ministry. When we tide over Omicron, we can look at going back to normalcy even vis-a-vis international travel but I cannot give you the date today."

"It is not incumbent on me, there are host of other factors, other ministries that I have to coordinate with and watch the situation as it unfolds over the next couple of weeks," he said.

On November 26, DGCA decided to restart scheduled commercial international flights to and from India from December 15. However, the decision was put on hold in less than a week in the wake of the emergence of Omicron, the new COVID variant. Last week, DGCA said the flights will remain suspended till January 31.

Talking about the domestic air traffic, the minister informed, prior to Covid-19, our highest capacity was close to 4.2 lakh passengers daily, now we are ranging between 3.7 lakh to 3.95 lakh.

The domestic capacity was increased in a "very gradual and monitored process" and on October 18, the government allowed 100 per cent capacity for domestic airlines.

"Today, we are running 3.7 to 3.9 lakh passengers per day and on a seat load factor basis of 75-81 per cent, which is a very healthy seat load factor. Keeping that in mind, I was looking at opening up international travel but as you all are aware, just on the anvil of that the world got hit by Omicron," Scindia said.

(With inputs from agencies)