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CANADA INDIA FOUNDATION CELEBRATES PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS (GLOBAL INDIAN DIASPORA DAY), 2022. | DETAILS ON PAGE 3

## ELECTION DATES ANNOUNCED FOR FIVE STATES, INCLUDING PUNJAB, UP FROM FEB 10-MAR 7, RESULT ON MAR 10

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Spanned over seven phases, the elections to five states Assemblies -- Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gao, Punjab and Manipur -- would be held from February 10 to March 7, and the counting of votes will take place on March 10, the Election Commission of India announced on Saturday.

Uttar Pradesh will go to polls on February 10, 14, 20, 23 and March 3 and 7; Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand would vote on February 14; while Manipur will vote in two phases on February 27 and March 3, said Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra .

The elections would be held following full Covid protocols.

Up to January 15, no physical rallies roadshows, padyatras, or vehicle rallies will be allowed keeping in view the pandemic situation. All parties have been advised to conduct campaigns in virtual mode.

Invoking Aarticle 171 (1), Chandra said that the Assembly tenure has to end in five years and, therefore, elections are necessary.

As per the Covid protocols for conducting elections, all elections officials will be double vaccinated, will be given a booster dose and will also be treated as frontline workers. Booths would be fully sanitised and there will be adequate gloves, sanitizers etc for the polling staff. More than 15 crore people in the five poll-bound states have received the first dose of the vaccine, while nine crore people have received both the shots. Polling time has been increased by one hour in all the states.

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## C-VOTER SURVEY- INDIA ELECTIONS, 2022 AAP FALLS SHORT OF MAJORITY IN PUNJAB; BJP LEADING IN UP, GOA; CLOSE COMPETITION IN UTTARAKHAND, MANIPUR

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress are projected to poll 40 per cent and 36 per cent votes in Punjab, respectively, as per the ABP-CVOTER Battle for the States survey. The 117-member Punjab Assembly will go to the polls on February 14, and the counting of votes will be taken up on March 10. The numbers could propel the AAP in pole-position as far as the race for Punjab is concerned, as per the survey.

But despite the lead in vote share, AAP may just fall short of majority due to regional distribution of voter base. Also, Congress is benefiting from its Mayawati moment by installing the first Dalit CM in the state, Charanjit Singh Channi, thus consolidating its hold over Dalit voters.

The sample size for the survey was 14,360 across 117 Assembly seats in Punjab. Regardless of AAP's continued lead, there is a distinct possibility of amplification of the current trend of convergence with Congress' vote share. If the race tightens any further, the eventual outcome will be decided on a seat-by-seat basis. Therefore, candidate selection may become very important. Which brings us to the conclusion that this is a waveless election in Punjab. For all the political and social turmoil witnessed in the state, the electorate is remarkably split in its expression. If this situation continues to hold for another month, we may see a hung Vidhan Sabha in Punjab with AAP emerging as the single largest party, closely followed by the Congress.

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## SHEILA SUGUMAR, WIFE OF GANESAN SUGUMAR (OWNER- SARAVANAA BHAVAN RESTAURANTS, CANADA), PASSES AWAY

Y Media expresses its heartfelt and deepest condolences for the demise of Sheila Sugumar, wife of Ganesan Sugumar (Owner- Saravanaa Bhavan restaurants, Canada). With deepest sympathy, we wish for peace and comfort during this time of great loss. May her soul rest in peace!



## ECONOMY ADDED 55,000 JOBS IN DECEMBER, UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 5.9%

Employment rose by 55,000 (+0.3%) in December, while the unemployment rate was little changed at 5.9%. There were more people working full-time in December, particularly core-aged men aged 25 to 54. Most of the employment growth was in Ontario.

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## AVERAGE SELLING PRICE OF \$1.09 MILLION, HOME SALES UP 28% IN GTA: TRREB

A record 121,712 sales were reported through TRREB's MLS® System in 2021 – up 7.7 per cent from the previous 2016 high of 113,040 and up 28 per cent compared to 2020. Record demand last year was up against a constrained supply of listings, with new listings up by 6.2 per cent – a lesser annual rate than sales.

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## PM IMRAN KHAN REGIME IN MAY UNRAVEL THIS YEAR

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** During 2022, political crises and economic meltdown in Pakistan are likely to intensify thereby resulting in regime change or mass protests which will pose yet another challenge to the country with serious implications for security and foreign policy choices, Friday Times reported. The 'hybrid regime' that has been governing Pakistan since 2018 became hostage to internal contradictions and external pressures throughout 2021.



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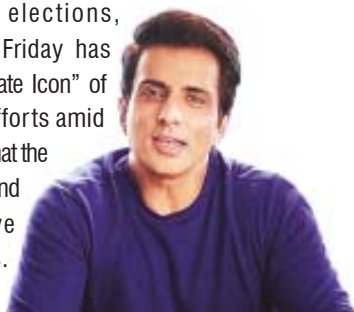
## ONLINE CAMPAIGNING A WATERSHED MOMENT FOR INDIA'S ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

The guidelines set by the Election Commission of India (ECI) for the conduct of the campaign for the upcoming state elections are a huge paradigm shift for political parties. Used to sweat it out on the roads and streets, political parties and their leaders now have the digital/ virtual world to decide their future -- a scenario which no one had thought about but is a reality today, and could as well become an acceptable way to fight elections, which may also help in minimising the huge spending by parties.

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## SONU SOOD STEPS DOWN AS PUNJAB'S 'STATE ICON' AHEAD OF ASSEMBLY POLLS

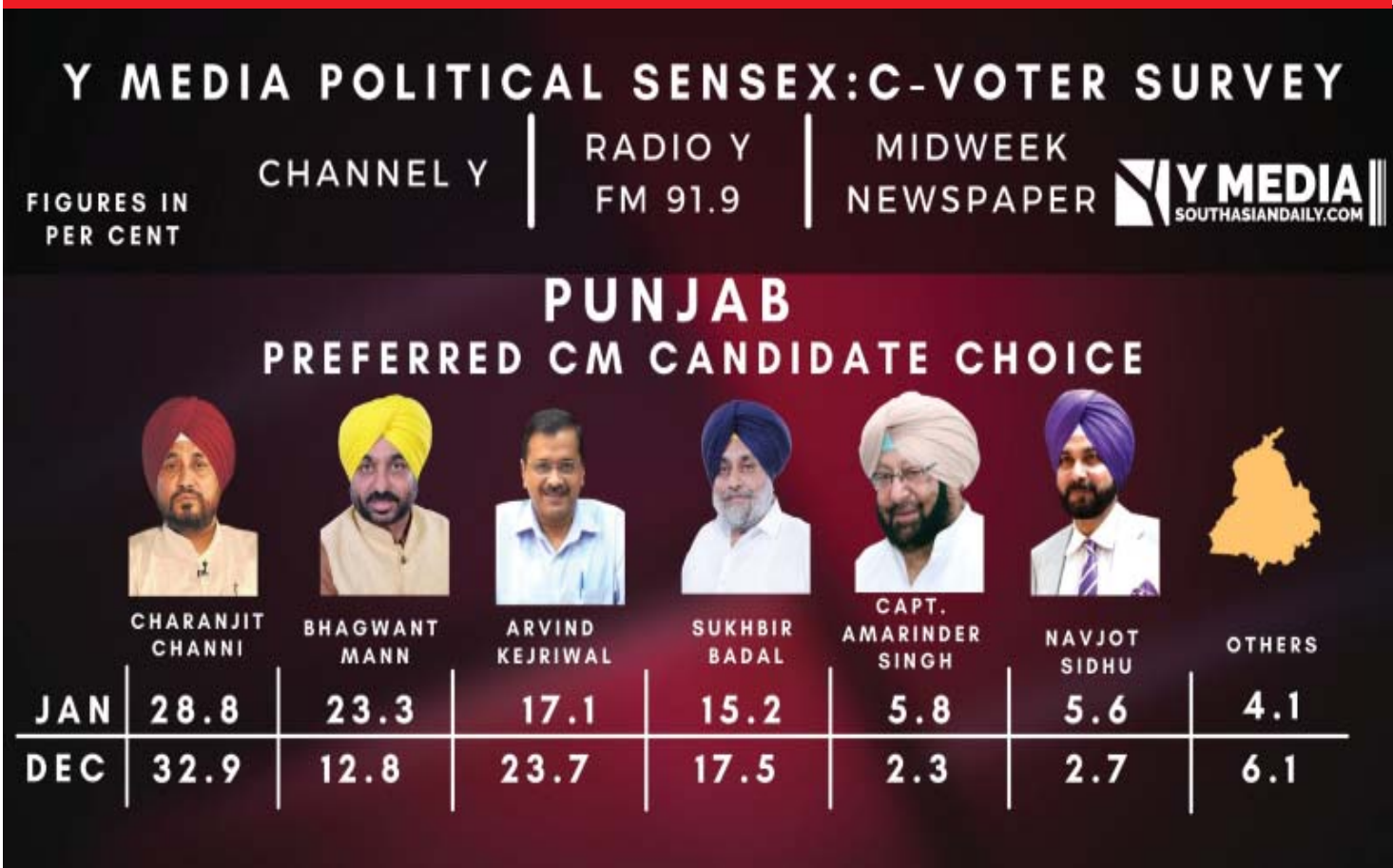
Ahead of the 2022 Assembly elections, Bollywood actor Sonu Sood on Friday has "voluntarily" stepped down as the "State Icon" of Punjab. Known for his philanthropic efforts amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Sood shared that the decision was taken "mutually" by him and the Election Commission. This move comes ahead of the state elections.



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## Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

- *As Of January 15, Unvaccinated Or Partially Vaccinated Foreign National Truck Drivers, Coming To Canada From US By Land, Will Be Directed Back To US.*
- *Unvaccinated Canadian Truckers Will Have To Quarantine Under New Mandate, Feds Say.*
- *Students In Ontario Will Return To In-person Learning Starting Monday, Jan. 17.*
- *91.1% Of Ontarians 12+ Have Received First Dose, 88.5% Fully Vaccinated.*
- *Quebec To Impose 'health Tax' On People Who Are Unvaccinated From Covid-19: Premier.*



| DETAILS ON PAGE 5





HAPPY  
*Lohri*

THE BEST GIFT YOU CAN GIVE  
YOUR FAMILY IS LOOKING  
AFTER EACH OTHER

HAPPY LOHRI!



BREAST CANCER SOCIETY  
*of Canada*<sup>TM</sup>  
LA SOCIÉTÉ DU CANCER DU SEIN  
*du Canada*<sup>MC</sup>



# CANADA INDIA FOUNDATION CELEBRATES PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS (GLOBAL INDIAN DIASPORA DAY), 2022



## STARTING TUESDAY, JAN. 18, ONTARIO TO CHARGE OFF-PEAK RATES FOR ELECTRICITY FOR 21 DAYS

Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, issued the following statement following today's monthly employment release by Statistics Canada:

"Employment in Ontario increased by 46,900 in December, almost all of which are full-time jobs. Although today's numbers are good news, they are tempered by the reality of a new COVID-19 variant. Our priority remains to protect the health of Ontarians and our economy and we are taking action to protect both. Our ambitious rollout of vaccines and booster shots has been working to keep families, communities, and workplaces as safe as possible. As of January 6, more than 4.4 million booster doses have been administered across the province. As we continue to accelerate our provincial vaccine booster efforts, we are taking further action to slow the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant to protect families and businesses and the progress we have made. In response to recent trends that show an alarming increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, has temporarily moved the province into Step Two of its Roadmap to Reopen with modifications that take into account the province's successful vaccination efforts.

Our government continues to take an all-hands-on-deck approach and work directly with the business community to protect against increased spread of the virus. To increase the province's booster vaccination capacity, business groups and large corporations are stepping up, once again, to offer employer-led vaccine clinics. We're calling on Ontario businesses to learn more about the criteria for setting up an employer-led vaccine clinic to help protect our families and communities during this next wave.

For businesses that are most impacted by necessary public health measures or capacity limits due to Omicron, our government has introduced new financial supports to help them weather the storm.

Earlier this morning, as part of a comprehensive plan to support workers and businesses, our government announced an Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant for small businesses that are subject to closure under the modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen. It will provide eligible small



businesses with a grant payment of \$10,000.

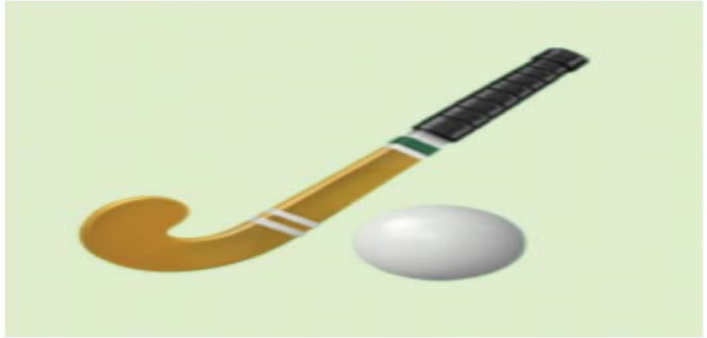
Eligible small businesses include:

- Restaurants and bars;
- Facilities for indoor sports and recreational fitness activities (including fitness centres and gyms);
- Performing arts and cinemas;
- Museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos, science centres, landmarks, historic sites, botanical gardens and similar attractions;
- Meeting or event spaces;
- Tour and guide services;
- Conference centres and convention centres;
- Driving instruction for individuals; and
- Before- and after- school programs.

The Ontario government is also providing electricity-rate relief to support small businesses, as well as workers and families spending more time at home while the province is in Modified Step Two. For 21 days starting at 12:01 am on Tuesday, January 18, 2022, electricity prices will be set 24 hours a day at the current off-peak rate of 8.2 cents per kilowatt-hour, which is less than half the cost of the current on-peak rate. The off-peak rate will apply automatically to residential, small businesses and farms who pay regulated rates set by the Ontario Energy Board and get a bill from a utility and will benefit customers on both Time-of-Use and Tiered rate plans.

## Amarinder's Punjab Lok Congress gets 'hockey stick & ball' as party symbol

**NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH, (IANS)** Former Punjab Chief Minister AmarinderSinghs Punjab Lok Congress (PLC) party has been allotted 'hockey stick and ball' as party symbol. In a tweet, PLC said, "Happy to inform that Punjab Lok Congress has received its Party Symbol - Hockey Stick and Ball. #Bas\_Hun\_Goal\_Krنا\_Baki (Now only left to score the goal)." Singh's PLC is jointly contesting next month's Assembly elections in Punjab with the BJP and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt). Quoting the PLC tweet, Union minister and BJP's election in-charge for Punjab, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, tweeted, "Congratulations @capt\_amarinder ji & @plcpunjab. Together let's pave the way for development of #Punjab. Chak de!" Amarinder Singh floated his own party after he was forced to resign from the office of Chief Minister. After resigning from office, he quit the Congress and formed his own party. In the last week of December, three parties officially announced to jointly contest the Punjab Assembly polls and formed a six-member committee, comprising two members from each party, to decide the



seat-sharing formula. The three parties will also issue a common manifesto. Hockey is one of the most popular sports in Punjab and many players from the state have been integral parts of the national team. The 117-member Punjab Assembly will go to the polls on February 14, while the counting of votes will be taken up on March 10.

## GLOBAL FOOD PRICES UP 28.1% IN 2021: FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO)

**GENEVA, (IANS)** Although global food prices decreased slightly in December 2021 month-on-month, they were much higher throughout last year than in 2020, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). AbdolrezaAbbassian, senior economist of the UN agency, told a press briefing here on Friday that in 2021, the FAO Food Price Index was 28.1 per cent higher than in 2020, reports xinhua news agency. Global cereal prices were at their highest level since 2012, on average 27.2 per cent above 2020 prices, he said.

According to Abbassian, in 2021, vegetable oil prices increased by 65.8 per cent over 2020; sugar prices soared to their highest level since 2016; meat prices were 12.7 per cent above 2020 prices; and dairy prices were 16.9 per cent higher than in 2020.

Biggest gainers were maize, up 44.1 per cent, and wheat, gaining 31.3 per cent. One of the world's other key staple foods, rice, lost 4 per cent. The Vegetable Oil Price Index declined 3.3 per cent in December, due to lower global import demand, that may be linked to concerns over the impact of rising Covid-19 cases, which have led to delays in the supply chain. For the year as a whole, the Oil Index reached an all-time high, increasing 65.8 per cent compared with 2020. "The monthly increase in prices since the last quarter of 2020 was a signal for producers to produce more, but whether or not 2022 would see an adjustment depends on several factors, including the repercussions of the pandemic, the cost of fertilizers and climate conditions," he noted.

## PAKISTAN NSA SAYS FOREIGN POLICY INFLUENCED BY US, LACK FINANCIAL FREEDOM: REPORT




Pakistan's foreign policy is still not free from the influence of the US, says National Security Adviser (NSA) Moeed Yusuf.

"It is still not (free from US influence) and I doubt that there is any country which is free from it," the Geo News quoted the NSA as saying in an interview. Yusuf said Pakistan does not have financial and economic independence, as he noted that the country does not have enough capital to meet the requirements of the population – which are increasing. "When we cannot (fulfil) the demands, we seek foreign loans. When you procure loans, your economic sovereignty is compromised."

Yusuf said a country's economic sovereignty is comprised whenever it seeks loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or any other institution, Geo news reported. "Now because of this, it affects a country's foreign policy, and when foreign policy is affected, you cannot run the affairs, as they would be in an ideal situation," he said when asked about Pakistan's plans on Afghanistan.




Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT



**Symptoms of COVID-19** are fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, and decreased sense of smell and taste.

If you have any of the above symptoms, isolate.

The isolation period starts at the first onset of symptoms.



ISOLATE IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OF COVID19, YOU DON'T NEED TO GET A TEST. IF YOU ARE FULLY VACCINATED, ISOLATE FOR 5 DAYS; IF YOU ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED OR NOT FULLY VACCINATED, ISOLATE FOR 10 DAYS (CHRISTINE ELLIOT/ TWITTER).

# COVID-RECOVERED AT 3-5 TIMES MORE OMICRON REINFECTION RISK: WHO



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Individuals who have recovered from Covid-19 are 3 to 5 times more likely to be reinfected with the Omicron variant compared to Delta, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). According to Hans Henri P Kluge, the WHO's Regional Director for Europe, Omicron variant can evade previous immunity in people. "So it can still infect those who have had Covid-19 in the past, those who are unvaccinated, and those who were vaccinated many months ago," Kluge said in a recent note. "There are three things that we need to do urgently: protect ourselves through vaccination, prevent further infections, and prepare health systems for a surge in cases". Kluge said that health authorities must strengthen capacity, increase testing and trace capacities, engage primary health care in case management, prepare hospitals for a surge, and support health and

## Boosters can wane, 4th Covid shot may be necessary: Moderna CEO

**WASHINGTON, (IANS)** The efficacy of boosters against Covid-19 will likely decline over time, and people may need a fourth shot to increase their protection, Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel has said. According to Bancel, people who received their boosters last year will likely have enough protection to get them through the winter, when new infections surge as people gather indoors to escape the cold. However, he said that the efficacy of boosters will probably decline over the course of several months, similar to what happened with the first two doses, CNBC reported on Thursday. "I will be surprised when we get that data in the coming weeks that it's holding nicely over time - I would expect that it's not going to hold great," Bancel was quoted as saying, referring to the strength of the booster shots. However, Oxford vaccine expert Sir Andrew Pollard recently said that regular booster doses every four-six to fight Covid may not be a sustainable way to prevent Covid



frontline workers. "Two years in, our health workers are being severely tested once again. It is deeply worrying that one in 5 is suffering from anxiety and depression from the pandemic. Their concerns must be addressed and their need for manageable working conditions supported," the WHO executive had stressed. Europe witnessed Covid cases cross 1 million for the first time this week. Europe has recorded over 100 million Covid cases, more than a third of all infections worldwide, since the start of the pandemic. Meanwhile, India witnessed a 21 per cent surge in 24 hours, as it recorded more than 1.4 lakh fresh Covid infections on Friday. With the addition of 285 new deaths, the total deaths toll has climbed to 4,83,463. The Omicron infection tally reached 3,071 across the nation, according to the Health Ministry.

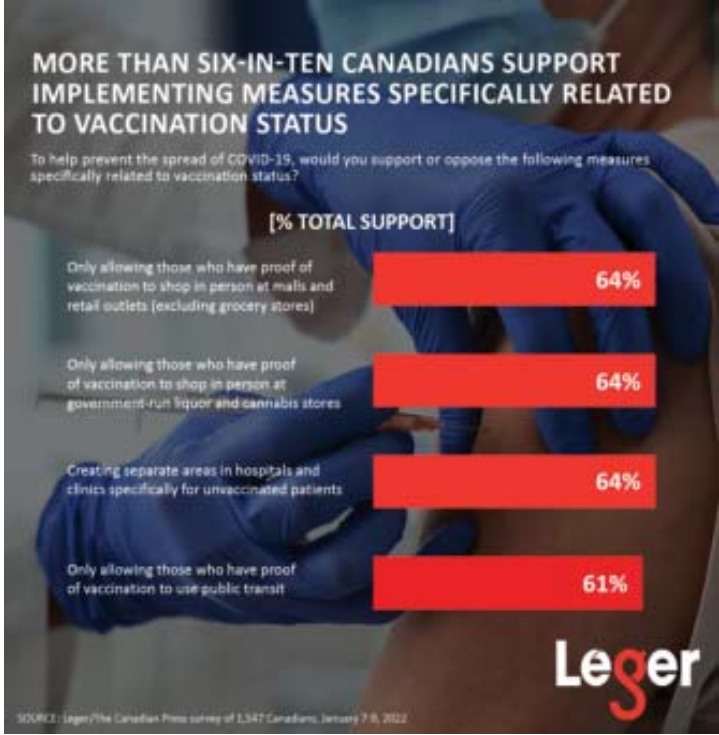
infections. "Administering booster vaccines to everyone every six months was 'not sustainable'," Pollard was quoted as saying to the Daily Mail. "We can't vaccinate the planet every four-six months. It's not sustainable or affordable. In the future, we need to target the vulnerable," said Pollard, who was chief investigator of the Oxford Covid vaccine trials and director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, which developed AstraZeneca's jab. "Today, less than 10 per cent of people in low income families have even had their first dose, so the whole idea of fourth doses globally is just not sensible," Pollard was quoted as saying to Sky News. According to Pollard, future immunisation drives should target the most vulnerable, rather than all adults. In the wake of Omicron spreading rapidly around the globe, Israel has rolled out a fourth dose for over-60s, while health authorities in Germany, UK and France are planning a second booster.

## OMICRON MAYBE '1ST RAY OF LIGHT' AGAINST COVID: UK SCIENTIST

**LONDON, (IANS)** The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant could be "first ray of light" that in the future there may be a less severe coronavirus variant that is similar to the common cold, according to a UK scientist. According to Dr Mike Tildesley, a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (Spi-M) and a University of Warwick professor, Omicron could be an indicator that people can live with Covid as an endemic disease, the Guardian reported. But as Covid cases continued to rise in the UK and hospitalisations at their highest in almost a year, he said "we're not quite there yet". "The thing that might happen in the future is you may see the emergence of a new variant that is less severe, and ultimately, in the long term, what happens is Covid becomes endemic and you have a less severe version. It's very similar to the common cold that we've lived with for many years," he was quoted as saying to Times Radio on Saturday. "We're not quite there yet, but possibly Omicron is the first ray of light there that suggests that may happen in the longer term. It is, of course, much more transmissible than Delta was, which is concerning, but much less severe." A total of 18,454 people were in UK hospitals with Covid on January 6, according to government figures. This marks a 40 per cent week-on-week rise and the highest number since February 18. "On the slightly more positive side, so it doesn't sound all doom and gloom, what we are seeing from hospital admissions is that stays in hospital do appear to be on average shorter, which is good news, symptoms appear to be a little bit milder, so this is what we are seeing consistently with the Omicron variant," Tildesley said. Meanwhile, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has advised against giving a second booster, or a fourth dose, of the vaccine to care home residents and people aged 80-plus even after figures showed it was 90 per cent effective at preventing hospital admission. Instead, experts want to prioritise the rollout of the first booster dose and encourage those who are still unvaccinated to have first and second doses.



## MORE THAN SIX-IN-TEN CANADIANS SUPPORT IMPLEMENTING MEASURES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO VACCINATION STATUS: LEGER



### THE SPREAD OF THE OMICRON VARIANT

- \* Canadians (83%) are more likely than Americans (67%) to believe that COVID-19 vaccines are effective at ensuring that if a person gets COVID-19, they will not get sick enough to require hospitalization or suffer major complications.
- \* More than six-in-ten Canadians support implementing measures specifically related to vaccination status, including:
  - \* Only allowing those who have proof of vaccination to shop in person at malls and retail outlets (excluding grocery stores), government-run liquor and cannabis stores and use public transit
  - \* Creating separate areas in hospitals and clinics specifically for unvaccinated patients
- \* When asked to choose which option is closest to their opinion:
  - \* 56% of Canadians and 39% of Americans feel that governments are making the right decision by returning to lockdowns and restrictions
  - \* 31% of Canadians and 40% of Americans feel that governments need to leave things open and Canadians/Americans need to live with the risk posed by the virus

### COVID-19 TRENDS OVER TIME

- \* The proportion of Canadians and Americans who think the worst of the COVID-19 crisis is behind us is trending downward.
- \* Canadians' satisfaction with the measures put in place by all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) to fight the COVID-19 pandemic is trending downward.

### METHODOLOGY

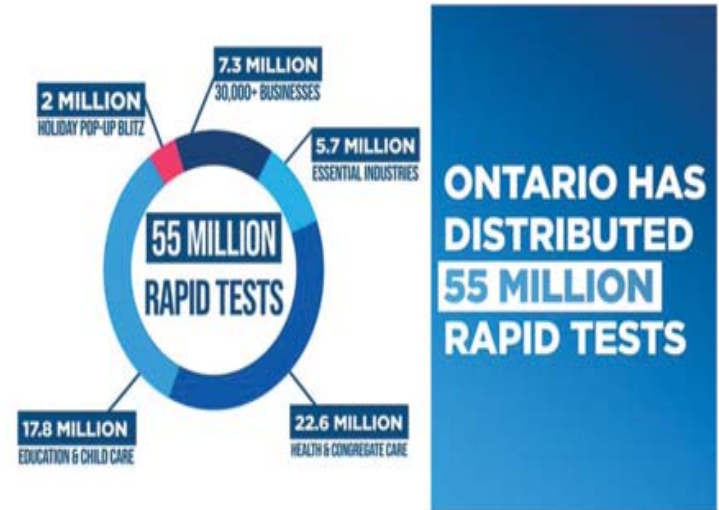
This web survey was conducted from January 7 to January 9, 2022, with 1,547 Canadians and 1,014 Americans, 18 years of age or older, randomly recruited from LEO's online panel. For comparison, a probability sample of 1,547 respondents would have a margin of error of  $\pm 2.49\%$ , 19 times out of 20, while a probability sample of 1,014 would have a margin of error of  $\pm 3.078\%$ , 19 times out of 20.

## 'DELTACRON' IS NOT REAL, LIKELY A LAB CONTAMINATION: WHO EXPERT

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** After a scientist in Cyprus claimed that his team has identified a new Covid-19 variant being dubbed as 'Deltacron', Indian-origin Covid expert at World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Krutika Kuppalli, has said that Deltacron is not real.



Taking to Twitter, Kuppalli, who is part of the Covid Technical Team, said: "#Deltacron is not real and is likely due to sequencing artifact (lab contamination of #Omicron sequence fragments in a #Delta specimen). "Let's not merge names of infectious diseases and leave it to celebrity couples." Earlier, Tom Peacock, a virologist at the Imperial College London, had said that the Cypriot 'Deltacron' sequences reported by several large media outlets look to be quite clearly "contaminated". "When new variants come through sequencing lab contamination isn't that uncommon (very very tiny volumes of liquid can cause this) - just usually these fairly clearly contaminated sequences are not reported by major media outlets," Peacock said in a Twitter thread on Sunday. According to him, Omicron has likely not circulated for long enough, in a large enough population, to produce a true recombinant. True recombinants don't tend to appear until a few weeks/months after there's been substantial co-circulation. "We're only a couple of weeks into Omicron - I really doubt there are any prevalent recombinants yet," he said. Martin Michaelis, Professor of Molecular Medicine at the University of Kent, told The Mirror that it is not yet clear whether the samples are real, or the rest of a sequencing error or contamination. He said: "As far as I can tell, researchers from Cyprus have sequenced samples of SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes Covid, and received genomic sequences that combine features of the Omicron and Delta variants. It is not yet clear whether this is real or a sequencing error or the consequence of contamination." Earlier, Leondios Kostrikis, the head of the laboratory of biotechnology and molecular virology at the University of Cyprus, had claimed that his team had detected a new variant "Deltacron" in 25 people.



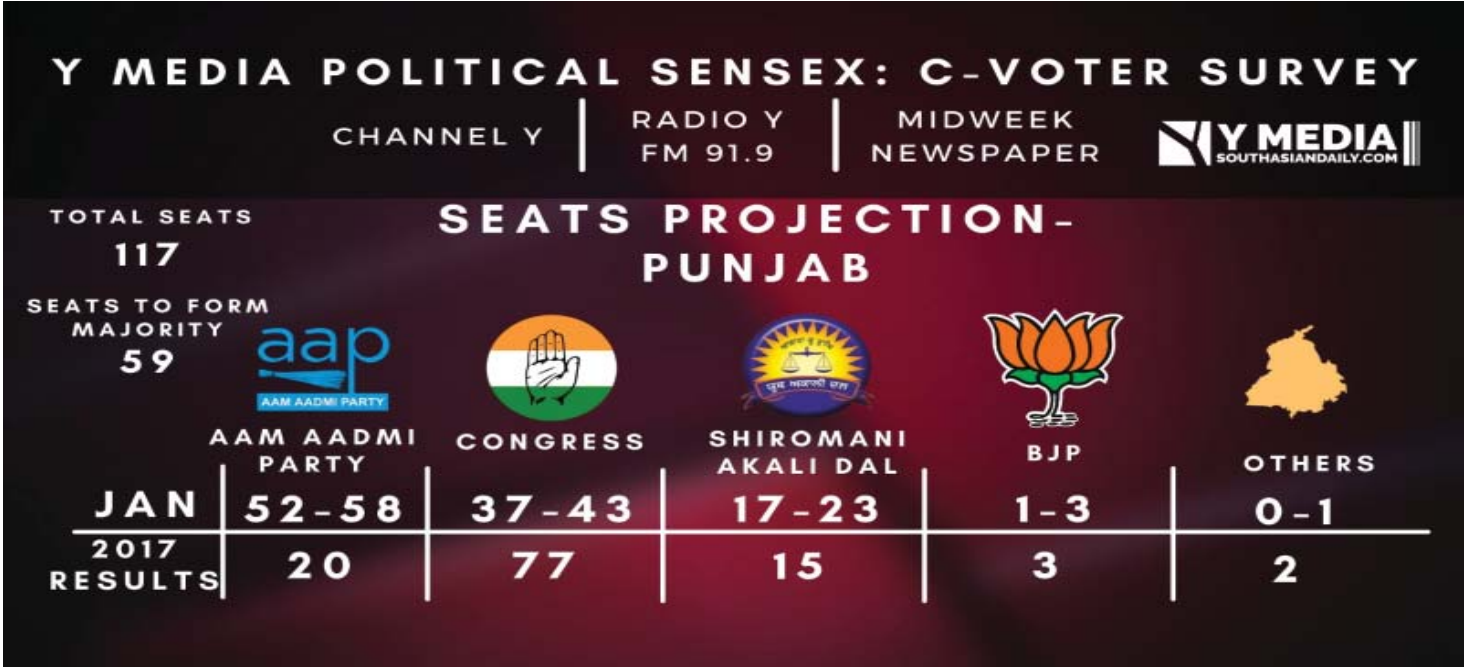
ONTARIO HAS DISTRIBUTED MORE THAN 55 MILLION RAPID TESTS (DOUG FORD/ TWITTER)



Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5-STATES ELECTION, 2022

C-VOTER SURVEY- INDIA ELECTIONS, 2022

AAP FALLS SHORT OF MAJORITY IN PUNJAB; BJP LEADING IN UP, GOA; CLOSE COMPETITION IN UTTARAKHAND, MANIPUR



**CONTD. FROM PAGE 1**

Shiromani Akali Dal's (Badal) projected vote share has declined by 2 per cent from the last round, and it is expected to poll 18 per cent votes and may win around 20 seats in the Badal family strongholds. Currently it seems to be out of reckoning, but the party's performance will most certainly act as the tie-breaker between AAP and Congress.

Amarinder Singh's alliance with the BJP does not seem to be adding up to anything significant. Currently the vote share (2.5 BJP) and seat share (2 seats) of the grouping is projected to remain in lower single digits. However, the alliance's performance may influence the fate of around 30 seats. Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi is preferred by 29 per cent Punjabis as the CM candidate in 2022 polls, and interestingly this number corresponds to the rough headcount of Dalit population in Punjab. Congress President Navjot Singh Sidhu is preferred by only 6 per cent of the voters. AAP's Arvind Kejriwal is preferred by 17 per cent voters while Sukhbir Singh Badal of the SAD is the choice of 15 per cent Punjabis.

The surprise of the pack is AAP's Bhagwant Mann, who has shot to 23 per cent approval rating in the latest round of the survey, up from 13 per cent last time. If AAP declares him as the CM face, it could consolidate his numbers further as the total support for Kejriwal and Mann is almost 10 per cent more than Channi and 5 per cent more than Channi and Sidhu put together. Regionally, the Dalit population is more concentrated in Doaba and Majha regions that account for a total of 48 seats. The Congress is projected to win 25 out of its 40 seats from these two regions. AAP is doing significantly better in Malwa region that accounts for the remaining 69 seats. It is expected to win 41 of its 55 seats from Malwa alone.

Therefore, the three X factors that will ultimately decide the Punjab verdict are as follows :

- \* The relative sweep of AAP and Congress in their respective strongholds
- \* The performance of Akali Dal and its potential impact on AAP and Congress
- \* Ability of Amarinder Singh to dent the prospects of Congress

For now, despite a reenergised and repositioned political stance, Congress is facing more headwinds than AAP. Also, the rural peasantry, fresh from the protests at Singhu border, is unlikely to fully trust the Akali Dal or Congress. Both these parties have baggage with Jatt farmers that dominate the rural polity. In terms of Jatt Sikh politics, the survey projections are indicative of an emerging vacuum. From 1997-2021, Punjab saw a duopoly of Badal-Amarinder, and currently no leader is polling enough support to inherit the mantle of Jatt leadership. Sukhbir Badal is liked by some sections while others prefer Bhagwant Mann. Navjot Sidhu's theatrics have not helped him gain traction in state politics, despite the outsized media imagery projected.

The BJP-led alliance in Uttar Pradesh is projected to win 229 seats in the Assembly elections scheduled to be held in seven phases from February 10 to March 7, as per the ABP-CVOTER Battle for the States survey. The counting of votes will take place on March 10.

The numbers are as many as 96 less than the 2017 figures, but will still give the BJP a comfortable simple majority in the 403-seat Uttar Pradesh Assembly, as per the survey.

The Samajwadi Party-led alliance is projected to win 151 seats, a big jump of 103 seats compared to the 2017 results. But it is still far away from the majority.

The sample size for the survey was 61,802 across 403 Assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh.

The Samajwadi Party alliance led by Akhilesh Yadav has made a remarkable recovery, from an actual of 23.6 per cent vote share in the 2017 elections to a projected 33.5 per cent vote share, as per the latest opinion poll numbers made available on January 6.

The tracker also exposes the upper circuit that the SP alliance has been unable to breach. In their best possible upswing, they could not breach the 35 per cent mark, which is critical to bring the BJP down.

It seems the swing from BSP to SP+ has saturated and now Akhilesh Yadav will have to work on the 7 per cent odd votes that are parked with Congress to swing towards SP+ if he wishes to breach the 35 per cent-mark.

The BJP, at projected vote share of 41.5 per cent, seems to have maintained its vote share of 41 per cent secured in the 2017 Assembly elections even in the latest projections.

The worst seems to be over for the BJP as it trimmed and capped its decline at 40 per cent vote share.

It is to be seen how many non-performing MLAs are denied tickets because maximum anti-incumbency is working against the sitting MLAs in Uttar Pradesh. Add to this the campaign of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the BJP seems to be on the path of recovery at the moment.

Incumbent Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath leads the pack with 43 per cent of voters preferring him as the CM, while Akhilesh Yadav gets the support of 34 per cent of the voters. Former Chief Minister Mayawati trails way behind with 14 per cent, while Priyanka Gandhi manages a little more than 3 per cent.

The virtual absence of Mayawati and the BSP from being a serious contender in the race is startling for her supporters. The BSP vote share is projected to fall from 22.2 per cent in 2017 to a projected 12.9 per cent in the 2022 elections. If these projections hold, the BSP seems headed for a terminal decline in Uttar Pradesh. This has made the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections a two-horse race between Yogi Adityanath and Akhilesh Yadav. When the latter started gathering momentum in late 2021 and went on to stitch alliances with smaller parties, it looked like Uttar Pradesh could be headed for a close contest. There was a time when the vote share difference between the two fell to just about 6 per cent, but the Akhilesh juggernaut seems to have failed to gain more pace.

One reason for this could be what analysts and pundits were saying about the impact of the farmers' agitation on BJP's fortunes, particularly in western UP. There were reports from the ground that the Jats and the Muslims could bury the memories of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots and vote for the SP-RLD combine. The poll tracker shows that the projected vote share of BJP in the region is 41.2 per cent, far ahead of the projected 33 per cent for the SP-RLD combine.

Even in Purvanchal, considered to be a region where the BJP seemed vulnerable, the SP alliance has made considerable inroads; but not enough perhaps to dislodge the BJP. As per the latest projections, the BJP gets a vote share of 40 per cent while the SP alliance gets a little more than 35 per cent. In the Awadh region of course, the BJP is more than 10 per cent ahead of the SP alliance. Despite her brave efforts and imaginative slogans like 'LadkiHoon, Lad Sakti Hoon', along with myriad promises of welfare schemes, Priyanka Gandhi doesn't seem to be able to stop the terminal decline of the Congress in the state. The Congress vote share is projected to increase marginally, while the number of seats could decline from 7 in 2017 to 5 this time.

Actor Sonu Sood's sister joins Congress, to contest polls from Moga

**CHANDIGARH, (IANS)** Actor SonuSood's youngest sister Malvika Sachar on Monday joined the Congress and would be the party's candidate from her hometown Moga in the February Punjab Assembly polls. State Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu and Chief Minister CharanjitChanni reached Sood's residence and met the brother-sister duo. "The aim of politics is to serve the people and I am sure that Malvika would serve the people with full honesty and integrity," Channi said, adding "Now there should be no doubt about who will be the Congress candidate from Moga." Describing her induction into the party a game-changer, Sidhu told the media that her presence would leave a positive on other seats too. "It is very rare that a party chief and the Chief Minister both have gone to someone's home to grant the honour, and she deserves it," he added. Sachar, 38, who is married and running her parental family business in Moga, said she has taken the political plunge to dedicate herself to serve the people. Sood's old-time friends and well-wishers in his hometown,



some 175 km from the state capital Chandigarh, described him as the messiah of tens of thousands of desperate migrants in Maharashtra amidst pandemic, while his family believes his philanthropy spirit comes from his ancestry. "I am proud that my brother is giving succour and strength to those who have been ruined by the pandemic," Sachar had told IANS. Born to a business family, the siblings' father was in the cloth business and mother was an English lecturer in Moga's oldest D.M. College of Education. Their eldest sister is settled in the US.

MAYAWATI MISSING IN ACTION, FOCUS ON DALIT VOTES IN UP

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Ahead of the Uttar Pradesh polls the political parties have now shifted to the virtual mode but missing in action is Mayawati. The BSP supremo has not started her campaign but all the other political parties are active including the BJP with Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing several rallies.

Mayawati's inaction has led to some serious contenders throwing their hat into the ring for the Dalit votes, especially the Jatavs who have been with the Bahujan Samaj Party and did not desert during the bad times. But the silence of the BSP on core issues has led to suspicions in the minds of its leaders and almost all the big leaders including the legislative party leader have left the party and joined the Samajwadi Party. But the BSP seems unfazed with the exit of its leaders and except for Satish Chandra Mishra no other leader is seen at its forefront. The Congress has termed it as the "B team" of the Bharatiya Janata Party while SP leader Akhilesh Yadav has refrained from attacking the BSP leader but has inducted all the BSP turncoats into his party. The four time Chief Minister of UP has been active only on Twitter. She sometimes issues a press note. A day before she tweeted about the PM's security breach and criticized the Punjab government where her party is contesting elections in alliance with the Akali Dal. In her absence most of the BSP leaders are joining the SP and mostly Brahmins are choosing it over the BJP. Former Bahujan Samaj Party MP Rakesh Pandey -- father of BSP leader in the Lok Sabha, Ritesh Pandey -- joined the Samajwadi Party on Monday along with his supporters. Earlier, Kushal Tiwari, a former BSP MP and son of Harishankar Tiwari, joined the SP with his whole clan. Bahujan Samaj Party leaders say that the party has finalized candidates for a majority of the seats and the names of the selected candidates are being announced in meetings organised by the party leaders in various districts.

CONGRESS TO GO WITHOUT CM FACE IN STATE POLLS



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** In the upcoming five state elections, the Congress has decided to go without declaring the chief ministerial face despite having incumbent face in Punjab as a chief minister. Sources in the Congress say that it will only be decided after the results and Congress legislative party will decide the new leader with the consent of the high command, except at few occasions the party does not project a chief minister's face. The Congress leaders in Punjab and Uttarakhand want that Chief Ministers should be projected. Supporters of Harish Rawat, former CM and Navjot Singh Sidhu, Punjab Congress chief want to be projected as Chief Minister's face. But party says it will not take risk to alienate other factions ahead of polls. The Congress faces major challenge of retaining power in Punjab, and to come up with a credible show against the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. Except in Uttar Pradesh, the party is in direct contest with the BJP in three states, while in Punjab, it faces the Akali Dal-BSP and Aam Aadmi Party. Though it is not the main challenger in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress wants to be ahead of the BSP in the contest. The Congress is faced with a crisis in Goa, where almost all the MLAs have deserted the party, the party has three former Chief Ministers -- Digambar Kamat, Pratap Singh Rane but has not decided to project anybody as the face though former Chief Minister Francisco Sardinha is one of the contender for the top post. In Manipur too, the Congress has faced an exodus ahead of the polls. But there OkramIbobi Singh, the former Chief Minister could be given one more chance if the party comes to power but won't project anybody. The party is paying special attention to the northeastern state and has appointed Jairam Ramesh as the senior observer. In the last elections in Manipur, the Congress could not form the government despite emerging as the single largest party. Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is top choice of the party in UP, but it's unlikely that anyone could be projected as CM though party has very less chance in the state compared to other election going states.

STAKES ARE HIGH FOR BJP IN 5 STATE ASSEMBLY POLLS



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The BJP's stakes are high in the assembly polls announced on Saturday as the saffron party is in power in four states - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipura, while the Congress is ruling the state of Punjab. The biggest challenge of the BJP is not only to retain these four states but also make its political presence felt in Punjab which the saffron party is jointly contesting with Amarinder Singh's Punjab Lok Congress and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt). The ruling BJP is leaving no stone unturned to retain four states and win Punjab as this election will set the political narrative in the country for the next general elections. BJP's loss in Uttar Pradesh and other states will strengthen opposition and will also give a shot in the arm to much talked about opposition unity. Similarly, retaining Uttar Pradesh will boost BJP's chances for the next general elections. Uttar Pradesh will vote in seven phases - on February 10, 14, 20, 23, 27, March 3 and March 7. "It is always believed that the Uttar Pradesh assembly poll results will set the tone for the Lok Sabha polls. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh assembly polls this time will also set the agenda either in favour of BJP or against it in the run up for 2024 general elections. Uttar Pradesh, the biggest state with 403 assembly and 80 Lok Sabha seats, is politically very important," a BJP leader said.

BJP CAMPAIGN FOR UTTARAKHAND WILL FOCUS ON IMPORTANCE OF 'DOUBLE ENGINE' GOVT

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The BJP campaign for Uttarakhand will focus on the importance of having a 'double engine' government for the development of the state. The campaign will also mention how absence of a double engine government in Punjab has deprived people of development projects worth over Rs 42,000 crore after security of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was breached in the state on January 5.

The saffron party is also making a community specific outreach programme to achieve its target of winning over 60 seats in 70-member Uttarakhand Assembly polls along with the youth and the first time voters. Uttarakhand is going to polls on February 14 and counting of votes will take place on March 10. Talking about the importance of 'double engine' government, a senior party leader from the state pointed out that in his last three visits to the state Prime Minister Modi had inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of several infrastructure development projects worth around Rs 36,000 crore. "Prime Minister never discriminates among states and believes in 'Team India'. He also went to Punjab to inaugurate projects worth Rs worth more than Rs 42,750 crore but the people were deprived of infrastructure development projects due to politics of the Congress ruled state government. To accelerate the pace of development it is necessary to have a double engine government," Sardar R.P. Singh, the BJP election co-incharge for Uttarakhand told IANS.

ELECTION DATES ANNOUNCED FOR FIVE STATES, INCLUDING PUNJAB, UP FROM FEB 10-MAR 7, RESULT ON MAR 10

**CONTD. FROM PAGE 1**

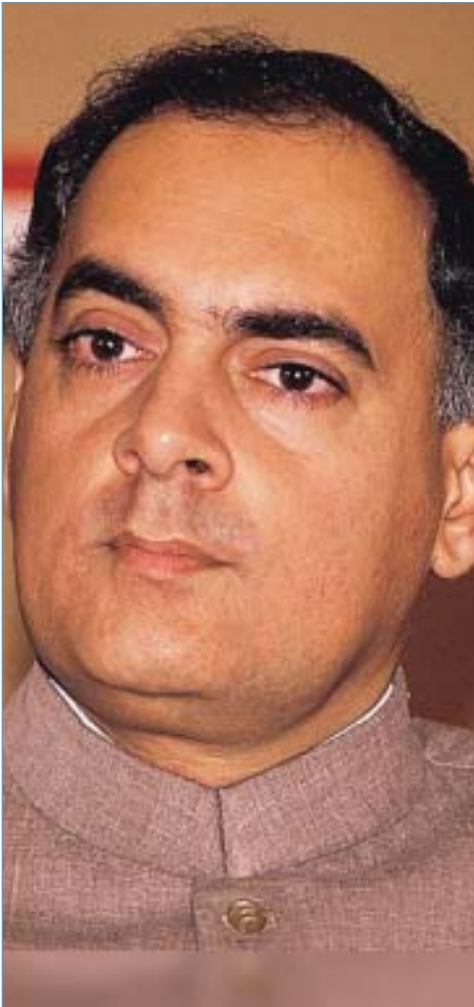
The final electoral rolls were published on January 5. There are a total of 18.34 crore voters, including service voters. Of these, 8.55 crore are women. The EC has made an effort to increase the number of voters and as a result, all states have seen an increase, with the maximum voter increase in Uttar Pradesh. There are a total of 24.5 lakh first time electors and 30.47 lakh senior citizens. The EC has capped the number of voters per booth to 1,250, resulting in an increase in the number of polling stations to 30,334 as the average number of voters per polling booth has decreased. At least one booth in each Assembly constituency will be managed exclusively by women, Chandra said. "It will now be mandatory to publish criminal records of candidates minimum three times in local newspapers and television channels. Even the parties are expected to do so with their candidates," he said. Earlier, Chandra said that the Commission has set out three goals for these elections: Covid-free elections, hassle-free voting experience and maximum participation by voters. The preparations have been going on for at least six months with EC teams visiting poll-bound states.



# Past and no prejudices: Security breaches of PMs

BY NIRENDRA DEV

The fall of the I.K. Gujral government was perhaps the most impactful result of Rajiv Gandhis assassination. Gujral, a suave politician who survived and went on to become Prime Minister because of his non-confrontation style, finally had to put in his papers on Nov 28, 1997. Rajiv Gandhi was killed on May 21, 1991. Security analysts would always say the intelligence inputs, however mild or seemingly 'unconfirmed or weak', about VIPs should never be ignored. Even till day, people debate why Indira Gandhi continued with her Sikh bodyguards despite warnings after Operation Blue Star. Security breaches vis-a-vis Prime Ministers, both categories - incumbent Narendra Modi and his predecessors including the likes of Manmohan Singh and Indira Gandhi - do keep happening. In the case of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination too, there were alerts and warnings of some attempts being made by the LTTE. But before anything concrete could be done, the damage was done. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi reportedly asked the SPG personnel to allow his assassin Dhanu to come near him on the fateful evening. When Rajiv Gandhi reached the campaign rally site in Sriperumbudur on the fateful evening of May 21, 1991, along the way to the stage, he was garlanded by many well-wishers and Congress party workers. The assassin Dhanu (Thenmozhi Rajaratnam) approached and greeted him. She bent down pretending to touch his feet and then detonated the RDX. First major assassination by a suicide bomber in India. Subsequently, accusations of conspiracy have been addressed by two commissions of inquiry. In November 1997, the I.K. Gujral government had to step down. On 28 August 1997, the Jain Commission report was submitted to the government and was leaked on November 16. The commission had inquired into the conspiracy aspects of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination and criticised the DMK. The Congress withdrew support from the Gujral government on November 28 after Gujral sent a letter to the then Congress President Sitaram Kesri, saying he will not dismiss any DMK ministers. Gujral resigned following the withdrawal, and sent a letter to then President K.R. Narayanan that read: "My government has lost its majority and does not want to continue in office on moral grounds." Some breaches of PMs had also resulted in overhauling of Prime Ministers' security apparatus, especially during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure in 1988. On June 2, 1988, the Parliament passed the Special Protection Group Act to protect the Prime Ministers. The move came as four years earlier on Oct 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own bodyguards. With Narendra Modi, there have been four such security breaches beginning December 2014, but security experts point out only the January 5 (2022) episode in Punjab as 'major lapse'. In December 2014, three policemen, including a police inspector and two constables, were found guilty on allegations of negligence that led to breach of security cover for Modi at the swearing-in ceremony of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on October 31.



A former BJP activist, Anil Mishra, was 'able' to reach the podium, almost a few metres from Modi. Mishra was arrested by Marine Drive police of Mumbai. In December 2017, two policemen 'made a mistake' and came in front of PM's convoy and the Prime Minister was caught in 'traffic' for two-three minutes near the Mahamaya Flyover, Noida. Two cops were suspended. In February 2019, an apparent security breach was reported at Prime Minister Modi's rally in Ashoknagar in North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. The breach led to a stampede-like situation and Modi had to cut short his speech and was quickly whisked away by the SPG. In May 2018, a man claiming to be a 'fan' of the Prime Minister reportedly infiltrated the security cover of SPG at the Vishwa Bharati's convocation ceremony, also in West Bengal. Among the past such breaches which made headlines were one each with Indira Gandhi (in 1967) and the other with her son Rajiv Gandhi on Oct 2, 1986. On February 8, 1967, Indira Gandhi was attacked with a brick during an election rally in Bhubaneswar, but she continued her speech. Of course, this was prior to the days of militancy that hit Punjab and other states. On October 2, 1986, Rajiv Gandhi continued his Rajghat visit on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti despite three shots being fired at him. With Manmohan Singh, security breaches were reported from Kerala more than once. In December 2010, a private vehicle almost 'entered' the road from where the Manmohan Singh's convoy was passing. The Kerala government denied that there was any security breach during the Prime Minister's visit. In November 2006, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) had actually sought an explanation from the Kerala government about the security breach that took place when Manmohan Singh's convoy stopped after the pilot vehicle was on the 'wrong route'. The alleged security breach happened in Thiruvananthapuram between airport and Raj Bhavan. The National Security Guards (NSG) also had called for an explanation from the Director General of Kerala Police, Raman Srivastava, on the same. According to a book, 'Journalism Through RTI' penned by journalist Shamlal Yadav, while "most curious" foreign trips were undertaken by Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Vice President Rahul Gandhi during the 10 years of UPA rule, "information of none of the foreign trips except that of Sonia Gandhi's Bangkok trip was available to the PMO, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs or the National Advisory Council (NAC) as per their responses (to a series of RTI queries)". On queries pertaining to foreign visits by the Members of Parliament, the Lok Sabha Secretariat had said: "As per the convention, the members of



Lok Sabha inform the Honourable Speaker about their foreign visits private or official. However, there is no rule available in the Rules of Procedure or Direction by the Lok Sabha or any other document in the Lok Sabha Secretariat, whereby it has been made mandatory for the members to give prior or subsequent information about their foreign visits to the Speaker, Lok Sabha." The book further says that the Lok Sabha Secretariat has also informed that both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi were never part of any parliamentary delegation to foreign countries from 2004 to 2012, therefore political clearance for them was never sought from the Ministry of External Affairs. As to whether there was any 'exemption' for SPG protectees from getting MEA clearance, the Ministry of Home Affairs for its part had forwarded the RTI application to the Cabinet Secretariat and National Security Guard (NSG) to provide the information, if any. Yadav in his book further refers to a response from the PMO on this, which had said, information regarding overseas travel by the top Congress leaders "does not form part of records held by the PMO". However, the PMO had said that between July 14 and 17, 2004, Sonia Gandhi had visited Bangkok to attend a conference on AIDS. In 2019, the Centre decided to change the security mechanism for Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi. A high-decibel controversy broke out over the withdrawal of Special Protection Group cover to the members of the first family of the Congress. Home Ministry sources had claimed the Gandhis had made 'undesirable' remarks against SPG and also charged the elite force with collecting their 'personal and confidential information.' "Since May 2014, Priyanka Gandhi has often levelled allegations that SPG officials were collecting her personal and confidential information and sharing it with unauthorised persons. She even threatened to drag top officials of the SPG to court," one source said. In another instance, Rahul Gandhi, during his visit to Banaskantha in Gujarat in 2017, 'violated security norms' himself which could have endangered his life.

**Disclaimer: Nirendra Dev is a New Delhi-based journalist. He is also the author of books, 'The Talking Guns: North East India' and 'Modi to Moditva: An Uncensored Truth'. The opinions expressed within this article are the personal ideas of the author. The facts and conclusions appearing in the article do not reflect the views of Y Media and Midweek Newspaper, and Y Media does not assume any responsibility or liability for the same.**

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# ONTARIO BUSINESS COSTS REBATE PROGRAM PORTAL OPEN JANUARY 18

**Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant**

*PREMIER FORD*

## ONTARIO INTRODUCING \$10,000 GRANT SUPPORTS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES, WORKERS AND FAMILIES

**TORONTO** — The Ontario government is providing targeted relief for businesses and people impacted by the current public health measures aimed at blunting the spread of the Omicron variant. As part of this plan, the government is introducing a \$10,000 grant for eligible businesses that are subject to closures under the modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen and is providing additional electricity-rate relief for businesses, as well as workers and families spending more time at home.

“Our government understands that public health measures needed to blunt the spread of the Omicron variant are impacting the lives and livelihoods of small businesses, workers and families across Ontario,” said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance. “Since the first day of the pandemic, we have provided unprecedented levels of support to protect people, jobs and our economy. We will continue to deliver on that commitment.” As part of a comprehensive plan to support workers and businesses, the government is announcing an Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant for small businesses that are subject to closure under the modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen. It will provide eligible small businesses with a grant payment of \$10,000.

Eligible small businesses include:

- Restaurants and bars;
- Facilities for indoor sports and recreational fitness activities (including fitness centres and gyms);
- Performing arts and cinemas;
- Museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos, science centres, landmarks, historic sites, botanical gardens and similar attractions;
- Meeting or event spaces;
- Tour and guide services;
- Conference centres and convention centres;
- Driving instruction for individuals; and
- Before- and after- school programs.

Eligible businesses that qualified for the Ontario Small Business Support

Grant and that are subject to closure under modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen will be pre-screened to verify eligibility and will not need to apply to the new program. Newly established and newly eligible small businesses will need to apply once the application portal opens in the coming weeks. Small businesses that qualify can expect to receive their payment in February.

“Small businesses, job creators and the entrepreneurial spirit are the backbone of Ontario’s economy. Unfortunately, these businesses have been some of the most impacted by COVID-19, and many continue to struggle,” said Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. “Since the start of the pandemic, we have provided unprecedented supports for businesses in every region of the province. With the new Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant, our government will provide relief for thousands of small businesses that create jobs for hard working Ontarians.” The Ontario government is also providing electricity-rate relief to support small businesses, as well as workers and families spending more time at home while the province is in Modified Step Two. For 21 days starting at 12:01 am on Tuesday, January 18, 2022, electricity prices will be set 24 hours a day at the current off-peak rate of 8.2 cents per kilowatt-hour, which is less than half the cost of the current on-peak rate. The off-peak rate will apply automatically to residential, small businesses and farms who pay regulated rates set by the Ontario Energy Board and get a bill from a utility and will benefit customers on both Time-of-Use and Tiered rate plans. “We know that spending more time at home means using more electricity during the day when prices are higher, that’s why we are moving to off-peak electricity rates 24 hours per day, seven days a week,” said Todd Smith, Minister of Energy. “The off-peak rate will provide immediate savings for families, small businesses and farms as all Ontarians work together to slow the spread of the Omicron variant.” Further, online applications for the previously-announced Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program will open on January 18. This program will provide eligible businesses that are required to close or reduce capacity with rebate payments for up to 100 per cent of the property tax and energy costs they incur while subject to public health measures in response to the Omicron variant.

## ROGERS COMMUNICATIONS APPOINTS TONY STAFFIERI AS PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Rogers Communications announced today that Tony Staffieri has been appointed President and CEO of the company effective immediately. The appointment follows a search by the Rogers Board of Directors that commenced on November 16, 2021 when Mr. Staffieri was appointed interim CEO. Mr. Staffieri has also been appointed to the Board of Directors.

“The appointment of Tony as President and CEO puts Rogers in a strong position as we prepare for the closing and integration of the Shaw transaction in the first half of 2022,” said Edward Rogers, Chairman of the Board. “This is a pivotal point in the company’s history and the Board has full confidence in Tony’s ability to lead Rogers as we move forward.” “It is a tremendous honour to be appointed President and CEO and I am very excited for the opportunities that lie ahead for Rogers with our exceptional set of assets and strong team,” said Tony Staffieri, President and CEO, Rogers Communications. “I remain focused on driving shareholder value with improved execution and completing the Shaw transaction to create one strong organization focused on delivering exceptional customer service and the best networks in Canada.”



## PEEL CONSTABLE GURPREET CHOCHAN CHARGED WITH CRIMINAL OFFENCES

In December of 2021 and in January of 2022, Peel Regional Police Internal Affairs Bureau arrested and charged Constable Gurpreet Chohan, a 3-year-member of the service. In December of 2021, two unrelated victims came forward to Peel Regional Police with several criminal allegations about their previous relationships with Constable Gurpreet Chohan. The allegations spanned from 2018 to 2021 and were alleged to have occurred in the Cities of Cambridge, Brampton and Toronto.

On December 28, 2021, Constable Gurpreet Chohan was arrested and charged with three counts of Assault and he was arrested again on January 7, 2022, and charged with Assault, Assault with a Weapon and Mischief Under \$5000. Constable Gurpreet Chohan is scheduled to appear at the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton on March 7, 2022. Upon completion of the criminal court proceedings, a Police Services Act investigation will follow.



## ECONOMY ADDED 55,000 JOBS IN DECEMBER, UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 5.9%



**CONTD. FROM PAGE 1**

Nationally, gains were driven by the construction and educational services industries. After having regained its pre-COVID level for the first time in November, total hours worked were little changed in December. December Labour Force Survey (LFS) data reflect labour market conditions during the week of December 5 to 11. Public health measures in place during the reference week were largely similar to those in place in November, and were among the least restrictive seen during the pandemic. The widespread emergence of the Omicron variant, and associated adjustments to public health measures, occurred after the December reference week.

**Employment growth continues in December**

Employment rose by 55,000 (+0.3%) in December, driven by gains in the goods-producing sector (+44,000).

Full-time employment rose by 123,000 (+0.8%), while part-time employment declined by 68,000 (-1.9%).

Total hours worked were little changed in December.

Among core-aged men aged 25 to 54, employment increased by 63,000 (+1.0%), making it 162,000 (+2.5%) higher than in February 2020.

Although little changed in December, employment for core-aged women has also trended upward since June and was 130,000 (+2.2%) above its pre-pandemic level in December.

Public sector employment rose by 32,000 (+0.8%), while there was little change in the number of private sector employees and the number of self-employed workers. Among workers who worked at least half their usual hours, the proportion who worked from home was little changed in December at 23.8%. Average hourly wages increased 2.7% (+\$0.80) on a year-over-year basis in December.

The labour force participation rate held steady at 65.3%, virtually the same as before the pandemic.

Employment increased in Ontario and Saskatchewan, while it declined in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Unemployment remains slightly above pre-pandemic level**

The unemployment rate was 5.9% in December, little changed from November and slightly above its pre-pandemic February 2020 level (5.7%).

The adjusted unemployment rate—which includes people who wanted a job, but did not look for one—was 7.6%, marking the first return to the pre-pandemic level for this indicator.

The number of Canadians unemployed for 27 weeks or more fell for the second consecutive month (-25,000; -8.0%).

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## Brampton Fire connects to the community through public art

The City of Brampton is proud to display a new mural at Brampton Fire and Emergency Services (BFES) Station 211 as part of public art project that seeks to create place making opportunities around the city. With the assistance of STEPS (Sustainable Thinking and Expression on Public Space) Public Art, a new bold and colourful mural depicting the open countryside, celebrating local wildlife and the agricultural heritage of the area was installed. The production and presentation of public art is a key priority of Brampton’s Culture Master Plan, and a vehicle for facilitating meaningful exchange between diverse creators and their community. Blended with BFES’ ongoing commitments to community building, this mural supports social cohesion, connection to place and contributes to the creation of a unique and distinctive identity for Brampton. This is the third initiative the City of Brampton has worked with STEPS on. In October 2021, a public art pilot project was introduced in downtown Brampton with murals in storefronts and select traffic boxes. **About the artist** The artist behind the piece, Pam Lostracco, is a muralist and graphic designer who was born and raised in Brampton. She graduated from OCAD with two scholarships, and has worked at design studios creating brands, books and illustrations. Lostracco’s experience in design and her love for the outdoors has expanded her passion for murals, creating pieces on display across Canada. The mural at Station 211 was designed to integrate with the fire hall’s architecture and the natural environment around it. “Brampton is a Mosaic and one that continues to come to life thanks to creative collaborations like this one. Brampton Fire and Emergency Services are engrained in our community and it’s so wonderful to see the introduction of public art at their stations to connect with residents

even further and make art accessible to all,” said Patrick Brown, Mayor, City of Brampton. “It’s so wonderful to see public buildings brought to life with public art. This exciting project with Brampton Fire and Emergency Services will help to foster positivity and community relationships even more. Thank you to Pam Lostracco for creating this beautiful piece,” Rowena Santos, Regional Councillor, Wards 1 & 5; Vice-Chair, Corporate Services, City of Brampton; Council Panel Member, Arts, Culture & Creative Industry Development Agency said. David Barrick, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Brampton said, “This project with Brampton Fire and Emergency Services, our Cultural Services team and STEPS perfectly illustrates what great collaboration can bring to the community. These murals will connect our fire stations to their surroundings as spaces of safety, relationship building and creativity, contributing to our vibrant community.” “Our entire Brampton Fire and Emergency Services team is dedicated to building lasting relationships with the community through education, connection and safety. I am excited to see our first mural unveiled today and know it will provide our community with even more of an opportunity to connect and engage with one another, said Bill Boyes, Fire Chief, Brampton Fire and Emergency Services. “STEPS is delighted to collaborate with the City of Brampton and artist Pam Lostracco to bring this new mural to life; a creative reflection of the rich farmlands and natural areas surrounding Flower City,” said Erin Glover, Interim Program Director, STEPS Public Art. Pam Lostracco, Artist said, “This project is extra special to me since Brampton is my hometown where I lived on the border between city and countryside. When the Division Chief of Fire described the deer that play in the cornfields behind the station, I knew the window design had to integrate with the natural life and open landscape that staff view from those very windows.”

## ONTARIO PREPARING TO DEPLOY MORE INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED NURSES TO DEAL WITH THE OMICRON SURGE

The Ontario government is continuing to accelerate its efforts to add hospital beds and build up the province’s health care workforce to ensure patients can continue to access the health care they need when they need it. The province is collaborating with Ontario Health (OH) and the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) on initiatives to deploy internationally educated nurses to hospitals and other health care settings in need of staffing support to work as part of a team under the supervision of a regulated health care provider, such as a registered nurse or doctor. More than 1,200 internationally educated CNO applicants have expressed interest in participating in these initiatives so far and matching with health-care providers is expected to begin later this week, with onboarding new staff in the weeks ahead. “Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario’s hospitals and health care providers have worked tirelessly to protect the health and safety of patients,” said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. “Our government has continued to make critical investments in our hospital and health workforce to ensure no resource goes untapped so that our hospitals have the staffing and resources they need to care for patients during this challenging time.” Expanding opportunities for internationally educated nurses is one more way Ontario is increasing the health care workforce. Since March 2020, the government has launched emergency programs that have already added over 6,700 health care professionals to the system, including acute care settings, long-term care homes and home and community care settings that help to preserve hospital capacity. These programs will also provide hospitals with the capacity to add another 6,000 additional providers to high-need hospitals to support staffing pressures due to COVID-19 by March 31, 2022, including the deployment of nursing students and other health care providers-in-training. Ontario has also built unprecedented hospital capacity since the start of the pandemic, including \$5.1 billion to add 3,100 beds across the province for a total of approximately 17,000 medical and surgical beds. Through additional investments, the province now has a total of 2,436 adult and paediatric ICU beds. Approximately 600 ICU beds remain available today, with the ability to add nearly 500 additional beds if required.



## AVERAGE SELLING PRICE OF \$1.09 MILLION, HOME SALES UP 28% IN GTA: TRREB

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The result was extremely tight market conditions and an all-time high average selling price of \$1,095,475 – an increase of 17.8 per cent compared to the previous 2020 record of \$929,636. “Despite continuing waves of COVID-19, demand for ownership housing sustained a record pace in 2021. Growth in many sectors of the economy supported job creation, especially in positions supporting above-average earnings. Added to this was the fact that borrowing costs remained extremely low. These factors supported not only a continuation in demand for ground-oriented homes, but also a resurgence in the condo segment as well,” said TRREB President Kevin Crigger. One sales trend that stood out in 2021 compared to 2020 was the resurgence in demand for homes within the City of Toronto. Overall sales in the “416” area code were up by a substantially greater annual rate (+36.8 per cent) compared to sales growth for the surrounding Greater Toronto Area (GTA) suburbs combined (+23.6 per cent). The marked recovery in the condominium apartment segment was a key driver of this trend. “Tight market conditions prevailed throughout the GTA and broader Greater Golden Horseshoe in 2021, with a lack of inventory noted across all home types. The result was intense competition between buyers, pushing selling prices up by double digits year-over-year. Looking forward, the only sustainable way to moderate price growth will be to bring on more supply. History has shown that demand-side policies, such as additional taxation on principal residences, foreign buyers, and small-scale investors, have not been sustainable long-term solutions to housing affordability or supply constraints,” said TRREB Chief Market Analyst Jason Mercer. In December, GTA REALTORS® reported 6,031 sales – a strong result historically, but still down by more than 1,000 transactions (-15.7 per cent) compared to the record of 7,154 set in December 2020. Over the same period, new listings were down by 11.9 per cent to 5,174. The MLS® Home Price Index Composite benchmark was up by 31.1 per cent year-over-year in December. The average selling price was up by 24.2 per cent annually to \$1,157,849. “On February 3, TRREB will release its latest Market Outlook and Year in Review report. The report will include survey results and research that will help us navigate 2022 and beyond. The findings will highlight the latest consumer polling on home buying intentions; joint research with the Toronto Region Board of Trade on the future of employment and work; plus an outlook for home sales, listings and pricing over the next year. This will be a must-read report for Members, consumers, housing market watchers, researchers and policymakers,” said TRREB CEO John DiMichele.



## OSLER’S URGENT CARE CENTRE AT PEEL MEMORIAL TO REMAIN TEMPORARILY CLOSED THROUGHOUT JANUARY



William Osler Health System has made the very difficult decision to keep its Urgent Care Centre (UCC) at Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness temporarily closed until at least February 1, 2022, to direct its highly-skilled staff and physicians to where demand is the greatest. The decision to temporarily close the UCC for at least 21 days was made as a result of increasing volumes in Osler’s Emergency Departments (EDs) and patients who require admission for care, further compounded by extreme capacity and staffing pressures. The ability to operate the UCC will be examined at the end of the month based on available staffing and capacity across Osler’s sites. A transition plan is in place to ensure any patients who arrive at the UCC during the temporary closure, are redirected appropriately. Community members are encouraged to visit their family doctor for non-emergent concerns. Osler’s Emergency Departments remain open for any urgent and emergent health care needs. Osler asks that the general public do not come to Osler’s Emergency Departments with mild COVID-19 symptoms to seek PCR testing. Those who test positive on a rapid antigen test should isolate and do not need to seek confirmatory PCR testing. For more information on where to get tested, please visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>. For more information, please visit [www.williamoslerhs.ca/emergency-and-urgent-care](http://www.williamoslerhs.ca/emergency-and-urgent-care). ABOUT WILLIAM OSLER HEALTH SYSTEM and FOUNDATION: William Osler Health System is a hospital system, which includes Brampton Civic Hospital, Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness and Etobicoke General Hospital, and serves 1.3 million residents of Brampton, Etobicoke and surrounding communities within the Central West region. Osler’s emergency departments are among the busiest in Canada and its Mental Health Program is one of the largest in the province. William Osler Health System Foundation seeks to create a healthier community through giving by inspiring its communities to invest in exceptional health care close to home.

## BRAMPTON OFFERS RESIDENTS MORE WAYS TO STAY ACTIVE OUTDOORS WHILE INDOOR GYMS, OTHER RECREATIONAL FACILITIES CLOSE

Following the Government of Ontario’s announcement yesterday, the City of Brampton is preparing to temporarily return to a modified Step Two of the Province’s Roadmap to Reopen this Wednesday, January 5, at 12:01 am. City services, programs and facilities City Hall and Corporate facilities remain open for in-person services by appointment only. Walk-ins are not permitted. To book an appointment, visit [www.brampton.ca/skiptheline](http://www.brampton.ca/skiptheline). Brampton Transit Brampton Transit is operating at reduced service levels until further notice. Select terminal hours of operation may be adjusted as well. For the most up-to-date route schedule and hours of operation information, customers are encouraged to call Brampton Transit’s Contact Centre at 905.874.2999. For regular service updates, visit [www.bramptontransit.com](http://www.bramptontransit.com) or follow @bramptontransit on Twitter. When travelling, individuals who use Brampton Transit are reminded to wear a tight-fitting mask on the bus and at terminals, and avoid lowering masks for eating or drinking while commuting unless it is a medical emergency. Riders are also reminded to carry their own personal disinfectant when travelling, such as hand sanitizer or wipes, wash their hands often, and cough or sneeze into their elbow. An enhanced cleaning and sanitizing schedule remains in effect. It is Brampton Transit’s goal to disinfect all hard surfaces, operator compartments and seats every 48 hours. The majority of buses are currently sanitized every 24 hours. Facilities and terminals that have hard surfaces are wiped down and sanitized on a daily basis. Indoor recreational amenities Beginning Wednesday, January 5, 2022, City of Brampton recreation centres will be temporarily closed and all indoor recreation programs and services will be suspended. Updates regarding recreation services and amenities can be found at [www.brampton.ca/recreation](http://www.brampton.ca/recreation). Drop-in programming: Clients with existing reservations for fitness, swim, skate and sports programs scheduled will receive an automatic credit on their account. Registered programming: Winter registered sessional programs are temporarily suspended until the week of January 31, 2022. Program end dates will not be adjusted. Winter registered program registrants will receive a pro-rated credit on their client account to make up for the reduced session duration.

## MANVIR SINGH SANDHU, 33, FROM BRAMPTON ARRESTED & CHARGED WITH ONE COUNT OF SEXUAL ASSAULT & INDECENT ACT

Investigators from the 21 Division Criminal Investigation Bureau have arrested and charged a 33-year-old man from Brampton. On Friday, December 31, 2021, at 10:00 p.m., the female victim was walking on neighbourhood side-walks and trails in the area of Torbram Road and Peter Robertson Boulevard in Brampton when a lone male suspect approached her from behind. The suspect sexually assaulted the female, then exposed himself before fleeing the area. The victim did not sustain any injuries. Investigators have identified the suspect as Manvir Singh Sandhu. On Saturday, January 9, 2022, Manvir Singh Sandhu was arrested and charged with one count of Sexual Assault and Indecent Act. He was held for a bail hearing and attended the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton on January 9, 2022. Anyone with any information on this incident is asked to contact the 21 Division Criminal Investigation Bureau at 905-453-2121 ext. 2233. Information may also be left anonymously by calling Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or by visiting [www.peelcrimestoppers.ca](http://www.peelcrimestoppers.ca)







## Akali leader Majithia gets interim bail in drug case

**CHANDIGARH, (IANS)** In a major reprieve to Akali leader and former Punjab Cabinet minister Bikram Singh Majithia, the Punjab and Haryana High Court on Monday granted interim anticipatory bail to him in a drug case. Justice Lisa Gill asked him to join investigations in the case. In his petition, Majithiasaid:"It's more than apparent that the present FIR has been registered against the petitioner keeping an eye on the forthcoming elections. The petitioner's fundamental rights are at stake." Sitting MLA Majithia, who is the brother-in-law of Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Badal, had moved the high court after a Mohali

court dismissed his anticipatory bail petition in a case under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act registered on December 20. In a 49-page FIR filed by the state police Crime Branch at the Mohali police station, the SAD leader has been booked under sections 25, 27A and 29 of the NDPS Act. Majithia's case was argued by senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi, while the Punjab government's case was represented by former Union Minister P. Chidambaram. His counsel D.S. Sobti told the media that Majithia would join the investigation on Wednesday.

### BJP CHIEF JP NADDA TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, ISOLATES

President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Jagat Prakash Nadda on Monday said he had tested positive for the COVID-19 infection. The BJP chief said he was keeping fine and was self-isolating. "I got my COVID-19 test done after witnessing initial symptoms. My report has come positive. I am feeling fine now. On the advice of doctors, I have isolated myself. All those who have come in contact with me in the last few days are requested to get themselves tested," tweeted Nadda in Hindi. Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj S Bommai, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Minister of State for Defence Ministry Ajay Bhatt also tested positive for COVID-19 today. India is currently witnessing a surge in COVID-19 cases and reported 1,79,723 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, taking the daily positivity rate in the country to 13.29 per cent, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Monday. A total of 4,033 cases of the Omicron variant of Coronavirus have been reported so far. Maharashtra has reported the highest number of cases (1,216), followed by Rajasthan (529) and Delhi (513).



## India greets France for taking over EU Presidency, discusses goals for 2022

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar on Sunday spoke to his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian and discussed what France and India can achieve together in 2022 and how to make France's EU presidency an accelerator for EU-India ties. "Delighted to speak to French Foreign Minister @JY\_LeDrian today. We recognized that our achievements of 2021 are a strong foundation for 2022. The presidency of EU that France occupies adds an important dimension to our strategic relationship," he said in a tweet. According to an official statement, he congratulated France for taking over the presidency of the European Union after 13 years and celebrates the French commitment towards a more digital, ecological, and social Europe. The year started with 16th staff talks conducted between the Indian and the French Navies in the first week of January. France was the first foreign partner of India to post a liaison officer at Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), set up for collaborating and cooperating with partners towards enhancing maritime safety and security in the area.

Vice Admiral Christophe Lucas, Head of Foreign Relations, French Navy, visited the IFC-IOR and was briefed on the efforts of the Centre towards enhancing maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean Region as the two nations are sharing more and more real-time, sensitive information on maritime awareness in the area. With the establishment of the strategic partnership in 1998, there has been significant progress in all areas of bilateral cooperation through regular high-level exchanges at the Head of State/Head of Government levels and growing cooperation and exchanges including in strategic areas such as defence, counter-terrorism, nuclear energy, and space. France was the first country with which India entered into an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation following the waiver given by the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, enabling India to resume full civil nuclear cooperation with the international community. There is also growing and wide-ranging cooperation in other areas such as trade and investment, culture, science & technology, and education. France has consistently supported India's increasing role in international fora, including India's permanent membership of the UNSC.

### SONU SOOD STEPS DOWN AS PUNJAB'S 'STATE ICON' AHEAD OF ASSEMBLY POLLS

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He took to his Twitter handle and wrote, "Like all good things, this journey has come to an end too. I've voluntarily stepped down as the State Icon of Punjab. This decision was mutually taken by me and EC in light of my family member contesting in Punjab Assembly Elections. I wish them luck for future endeavours." Earlier today, the Election Commission had announced on Twitter that it has withdrawn the 48-year-old actor's appointment as Punjab's state icon, state Chief Electoral Officer S. Karuna Raju said on Friday. He said the EC has withdrawn his appointment on January 4, but gave no details. He had said in November that his sister, Malvika Sood, will contest the upcoming Punjab polls. The decision came after his relentless work throughout the lockdown in helping migrant workers across the country get home safely. Apart from that, he had also donated food, shelter and PPE kits to those who needed them. In November, the actor had said that his sister, Malvika Sood, would contest the Punjab polls from Moga but he was tight-lipped about the party. In the 2017 Punjab Assembly polls, Congress won an absolute majority in the state by winning 77 seats and ousted the SAD-BJP government after 10 years. Aam Aadmi Party emerged as the second-largest party winning 20 seats in 117-member Punjab Legislative Assembly. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) could only manage to win 15 seats while the BJP secured 3 seats. (ANI)

### ONLINE CAMPAIGNING A WATERSHED MOMENT FOR INDIA'S ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

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The ECI on Saturday laid down unambiguous guidelines for political parties and candidates contesting the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur in view of the surge in Covid cases, especially of the Omicron variant. It said: "No road show, padyatra, cycle/bike/vehicle rally and procession shall be allowed till January 15, 2022. The Commission shall subsequently review the situation and issue further instructions accordingly. "No physical rally of political parties or probable candidates or any other group related to the election shall be allowed till January 15. "Political parties and candidates are advised to conduct their campaigns as much as possible through digital/virtual media platforms/mobile-based mode instead of physical mode ensuring strict compliance of Covid safety norms." Even if physical rallies during the campaign period are permitted later on, the Commission has said that these will be conducted subject to adherence to Covid-19 guidelines that are in force. It said: "The maximum limit of persons allowed for indoor and outdoor rally/meeting shall be as per existing directions of respective SDMA (State Disaster Management Authority). For these meetings political parties shall distribute masks and sanitisers to persons attending and maintain Covid protocol at entry and exit point." The Commission instructions may change as the Covid situation unravels, but the writing on the wall is clear -- political parties will have to rethink and rework their campaign strategies. The fight will be through social media platforms as well as television, digital and mobile-based modes of communications. Almost all political parties and leaders are active on most of the platforms -- Twitter, Koo, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram,

Zoom and YouTube as well as news television, FM radio, mobile phones and newspapers. The options are vast; strategies vary from party to party. Most of the parties and leaders have well-entrenched followership and mass base on each of these platforms. For instance, on Twitter, the BJP has 17.3 million followers; its tallest leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has 74.2 million. The Congress has 8.4 million followers, but Rahul Gandhi has 19.5 million and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra 4.4 million. The Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav has 15.3 million, but his party has 2.8 million, whereas Mayawati has 2.3 million, compared with BSP's 24.3 million. The Aam Aadmi Party has 5.8 million followers, but its national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has 23.7 million. Even among lesser parties, UP's Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party has 1.12 million followers; Rashtriya Lok Dal has 4.16 million. A number of other parties and their leaders also have similar followerships. And these numbers can be seen on other platforms as well. In 2020, the BJP organised digital rallies during the Bihar Assembly elections, the first to be held during the pandemic. Now that online campaigning has become the norm, it is to be seen how other parties conduct themselves under the new rules. Even the BSP which till recently avoided social media, is now preparing on a war footing to reach people virtually. Almost all the parties are working to have online rallies. From plans to wheel out vans with LED screens to reach out to those who are not on social media platforms to connecting through WhatsApp at the booth level, political parties have strategies mapped out for emerging challenges. According to official figures, India has 1.18 billion mobile connections, 700 million Internet users and 600 million smartphones. The extent of connectivity is huge and the percentage of voters in the poll-bound states with access to mobile phones and the Internet, logically, should be significantly high.

## INDIA MAY SEE 10 LAKH COVID CASES A DAY BY JAN-END: IISC-ISI MODEL

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** As the Omicron-triggered third Covid wave enters a key phase, a new projection by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science and Indian Statistical Institute (IISc-ISI) claims that the country is likely to witness over 10 lakh Covid cases a day at January-end/beginning of February when the third wave meets its peak. The Omicron 'Projections January-March 2022 IISc-ISI Model' by Professor Siva Athreya, Professor Rajesh Sundaresan and the team from the Centre for Networked Intelligence at IISc-ISI in Bengaluru predicts that the third Covid wave may peak in January-end and early-February, with daily cases touching 10 lakh. The peak of the third wave will vary for different states and the Covid-19 curve for India could start flattening by March-beginning. "Past infection, vaccination affected by immunity waning makes a certain fraction of the population susceptible to the new variant," said the IISc-ISI model. The model offers data on three levels of susceptibility -- 30 per cent, 60 per cent and 100 per cent. Under the 30 percent susceptibility criteria, India could see 3 lakhs cases per day, 6 lakh cases per day under 60 per cent susceptibility, and 10 lakh cases at 100 per cent susceptibility. Maharashtra could be the worst-hit, likely to experience over 175,000 daily cases at its peak (at 100 percent susceptibility). Maharashtra's single-day Covid-19 caseload shot above the 40,000-mark on Friday. For the 11th consecutive day, the state reported a massive spike in Covid-19 infections and suspect cases whose samples have been sent for genome sequencing. According to the model, Kerala and Tamil Nadu may witness one lakh and over 80,000 daily cases respectively, around the beginning of February. Delhi is likely to see almost 70,000 daily cases by the end of January, according to the IISc-ISI model. Last month, researchers from IIT Kanpur (IIT-K) also predicted that a third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic may peak in India by February 3. A report, published in the online preprint health server MedRxiv, said: "Following the trends around the world, this project report forecasts India's third wave may start around mid-December and peak in the beginning of February." The research report used the data of the first and second waves in India, and the current rise in cases triggered by Omicron in various countries, to predict a possible third wave in the country.

## ALL INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLERS TO GO FOR 7-DAY HOME QUARANTINE ON ARRIVAL IN INDIA

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** India on Friday revised the existing guidelines for all international arrivals in India in view of the rising Covid cases and the Omicron threat, to make seven days home quarantine mandatory. The new guidelines will be effective from January 11 till further notice. Travellers coming from specified countries at risk will have to undergo home quarantine for 7 days and shall undertake an RT-PCR test on the 8th day of arrival in India, as per the guidelines. These travellers will have to submit samples for the post-arrival Covid-19 test at the point of arrival (self-paid). Such travellers will be required to wait for their test results at the arrival airport before leaving or taking a connecting flight. If they tested negative, they will follow home quarantine for 7 days and shall undertake another RT-PCR test on the 8th day of arrival in India. The travellers shall also be required to upload results of repeat RT-PCR test for Covid-19 done on the 8th day on the Air Suvidha portal. If negative, they will further self-monitor their health for the next 7 days. However, if such travellers are tested positive, their samples should be further sent for genomic testing at the INSACOG laboratory network, as per the new guidelines. Travellers coming from countries other than the list of risk countries will also undergo home quarantine for 7 days and shall undertake an RT-PCR test on the 8th day of arrival in India. They will have to upload results of repeat RT-PCR test on the Air Suvidha portal and If found negative, they will further self-monitor their health for the next 7 days. The guidelines said that all travellers should submit complete and factual information in a self-declaration form on the online Air Suvidha portal before their scheduled travel, including travel details of the last 14 days. They need to upload a negative Covid-19 RT-PCR report. The test should have been conducted within 72 hours prior to undertaking the journey. The passengers coming from or travelling to at-risk countries shall be informed by the airlines that they will undergo post-arrival testing. They will be quarantined if tested negative and will be subjected to stringent isolation protocols if tested positive, as per the new guidelines.

## INDIA AMONG LARGEST EMITTERS COULD CAUSE EXTREME CLIMATE IMPACTS: STUDY

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The emissions of just five economies -- India, China, the US, the EU and Russia -- over the period 1991-2030 will double the number of countries experiencing extreme hot years every second year by 2030, according to a new scientific paper published in Communications Earth and Environment. The results highlight the outsized role these emitters play in driving warming and temperature extremes around the world. The study led by scientists at ETH Zurich and Climate Analytics looks at the impacts of these top five emitters over two periods: 1991-2030, and 2016-2030, over which they will contribute 52 per cent and 53 per cent of global emissions respectively. Under current emissions reductions targets, 92 per cent of all countries are expected to experience extreme hot years every second year by 2030, twice as many countries as without the 1991-2030 emissions from the top five polluters (46 per cent). Notably, 15 per cent of this increase would be attributable to the emissions of these five economies between 2016 and 2030, after the Paris Agreement was signed. "Our work shows that over a relatively short-time period, the emissions of these five economies will have a strong impact on extreme heat experienced around the globe by 2030. We're talking about annual mean temperatures that would only be experienced once every 100 years in preindustrial times happening every second year", said ETH Zurich researcher Lea Beusch, lead author of the study. The paper also looked at the per capita emissions of these major emitters. It found that if all countries had the same projected per capita emissions as the US -- the highest per capita emitter in the group -- in the period after the Paris Agreement was signed (2016-2030), global mean warming in 2030 would be 0.4 degree Celsius higher than under current pledged emission reductions. This is a full 0.5 degree higher than if all countries followed the same per capita emissions trajectory of India, which has the lowest emissions per capita in the high emitters group.





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# US BREAKS COVID-19 HOSPITALISATION RECORD AT OVER 1.3 LAKH AS OMICRON SURGES



Covid-19 hospitalisations in the United States reached a record high on Monday, according to a Reuters tally, as a surge in infections caused by the highly contagious Omicron variant strains health systems in several states. There were 132,646 people hospitalised with Covid, surpassing the record of 132,051 set in January last year. Hospitalisations have increased steadily since late December, doubling in the last three weeks, as Omicron quickly overtook Delta as the dominant version of the virus in the United States. Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Vermont, Virginia, Washington D.C., and Wisconsin have reported record levels of hospitalised Covid-19 patients recently, according to the Reuters analysis. While potentially less severe, health officials have warned that the sheer number of infections caused by the Omicron variant could strain the hospital systems, some of which have already suspended elective procedures as they struggle to handle the surge of patients amid staff shortages. The seven-day average for new cases has doubled in the last 10 days to 704,000. The United States has averaged over a half a million cases for the last six consecutive days. Only seven states have not set records for Covid-19 cases in 2022 — Arizona, Idaho, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio and Wyoming.

## PM IMRAN KHAN REGIME IN MAY UNRAVEL THIS YEAR

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

On the political front, the ruling PTI government led by Imran Khan lurched from one crisis to another; and was repeatedly rescued by the military establishment, the report said. "Since the return of (diluted and now hybrid) parliamentary democracy in 2008, no Prime Minister has been able to complete his term, be it Yusuf Raza Gillani of Pakistan People's Party or Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. The looming question at the start of 2022 is: how and why will Imran Khan be an exception to this trend? Even a bigger question is how would such instability lead to economic recovery?" The unraveling of the hybrid regime which is already underway will not be completed without a major political crisis. The year 2022 is when the incumbent army chief Qamar Ahmed Bajwaretires and his successor has to be appointed by the Prime Minister. "The Prime Minister in 2021 by dragging his feet on the issue of notifying the new DG of Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) made his choices rather clear. Not unlike the past, the civilian Prime Minister will get embroiled in a long drawn out conflict with the most powerful institution about this transition. This will be the driving force that will either push Khan out of power or will consolidate him for the future," the report said. For Pakistan getting the IMF and international finance markets on board will be a major challenge that would require US intervention or assurances that will have to be agreed upon by both the civil and military leaders. Managing this tricky process may result in further friction within the hybrid regime and it will be a real test for the Prime Minister to navigate these trouble waters, the report said. The success of opposition parties in the by-election, local bodies polls should have been an eye opener for Khan and his party that bulldozing new laws and rules without a consensus would get a serious backlash, it added. The year 2022 will also be a year when the Pakistani military establishment attempts to reset its relationship with political forces, the media and the civil society.



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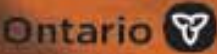
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Harvest Creek Maple Chicken Wings 2x500g Reg. \$3.97

Silken Shredded Cheese 340g Reg. \$4.97

Lactantia Softened Unsalted Butter 1lb Reg. \$5.97

Black Diamond Cheese Block 400g Reg. \$5.97

Lactantia 1% Chocstone Milk 623ml Reg. \$5.97

Al Madhavi International Halal Cheese 240g Reg. \$7.97