



**FEDERAL LABOUR MINISTER SEAMUS  
O'REGAN TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19,  
IS SELF-ISOLATING**



**CANADA'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER  
MELANIE JOLY HAS TESTED POSITIVE  
FOR COVID19**



**'THE YEAR MAY BE COMING TO AN END -  
BUT, WITH OMICRON SPREADING QUICKLY  
AROUND THE WORLD, IT'S CLEAR THAT THIS  
PANDEMIC ISN'T': PM JUSTIN TRUDEAU**

## IS IT END OF THE ROAD FOR SOME IN G-23 OR REVIVAL AHEAD?



The members of the G-23 group, who wrote the letter of dissent to Sonia Gandhi seeking sweeping reforms in the Congress party, are fighting for survival as team Rahul is taking key party decisions and have full say in the appointments and nominations. **| CONTD. ON PAGE 9**

## IS THE END OF COVID PANDEMIC IN SIGHT?

The Covid-19 pandemic that began in December 2019 continues to rage like wildfire, threatening human lives, mental peace as well as the economy. Official figures note that nearly 5.5 million people have died worldwide so far due to Covid, although the actual toll could likely be several notches higher.

In the last two years, the world has witnessed a consistent pattern of various strains of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing the Covid-19 disease, hitting just when life starts limping back. **| CONTD. ON PAGE 9**

## CANADA BREAKS ALL-TIME IMMIGRATION RECORD OF WELCOMING 401,000 IMMIGRANTS IN 2021

December 23, 2021—Ottawa—With the significant exception of Indigenous people, all Canadians originally come from somewhere else. The story of immigration fills many chapters in the history of Canada—including the most recent one. To support Canada's post-pandemic recovery and chart a more prosperous future, the Government of Canada set a target of welcoming 401,000 new permanent residents in 2021, as part of the 2021–2023 Immigration Levels Plan. **| CONTD. ON PAGE 7**

## JASWANT SINGH CHAIL, 19, ARRESTED FOR THREATENING TO 'ASSASSINATE QUEEN'

A shocking video showing a crossbow-wielding man threatening to "assassinate the Queen in revenge for the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre" has emerged, after a 19-year-old who scaled the Windsor Castle's spiked fence was sectioned, the Daily Mail reported.



**| CONTD. ON PAGE 8**

## CHANDIGARH CIVIC POLLS: AAP PIPS BJP ON DEBUT; RULING PARTY'S MAYOR AMONG LOSERS



The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday won most seats in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation polls on its debut.

The ruling BJP's Mayor, Ravi Kant Sharma, and two former Mayors, Daves Moudgil and Rajesh Kalra, faced humiliating defeats. Of the total 35 seats, AAP managed to win 14, followed by BJP (12), Congress (8) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (1). **| CONTD. ON PAGE 9**

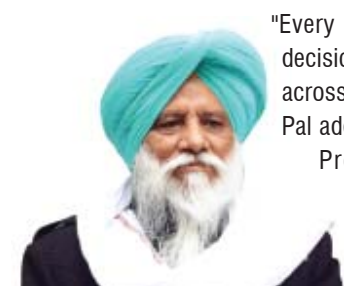
## Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

- **Canada Surpasses 2 Million Covid-19 Cases Since Start Of Pandemic.**
- **Canadian Doctor Asks People Not To Go To The Er For Covid-19 Tests.**
- **Covid-19 Third Dose Can Increase Protection By As Much As 5 Times, Says Head Of Ontario's Science Table**
- **90.7% Of Ontarians 12+ Have One Dose & 88% Have Two Doses.**
- **In Quebec, Appointments For 3rd Vaccine Doses To Become Available For All Adults By Jan. 21.**
- **US CDC Cuts Isolation Time For Americans Who Test Positive From 10 Days To 5.**
- **Covid-19: Corbevax&Covovax Vaccines, Molnupiravir (Merck) Pill Approved For Emergency Use In India.**

## 22 FARMER UNIONS FORM POLITICAL FRONT FOR PUNJAB POLLS

Twenty-two unions of farmers, which were part of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) to protest three contentious farm laws, on Saturday announced to form a political front 'Samyukta Samaj Morcha' to contest the 2022 assembly elections in Punjab on all 117 seats. Chief Minister's face Balbir Singh Rajewal, however, clarified there was no alliance as of now with any political party, not even with AAP. But at the same time he didn't rule out any future possibility. Rajewal told the media here that they were doing it on public demand. "Some of the unions are against it but won't oppose," he said. Ten other unions belonging to the state and were part of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha have refused to be part of the political front. They comprised the Krantikari Kisan Union (Darshan Pal), the BKU Krantikari (Surjit Phool) and the BKU Sidhupur (JagjitDallewal).

Responding to the announcement of the political front, farmer leader Darshan Pal said, "Most of the demands of the farmers like the MSP (minimum support price) are yet to be accepted. By launching the political front, the movement of farmers might be weakened." He said the SKM was formed for bigger purpose and he has suggested that the farm leaders should not do injustice to farmers by entering politics.



"Every union has the right to make its own decisions. We have earned the trust of farmers across the country and will not enter politics," Pal added. Earlier this month, BKU (Haryana) President Gurnam Singh Chaduni announced his political outfit Samyukta Sangharsh Party, saying the party will fight the upcoming Punjab elections.

## HOW FAKE INVOICES BELOW RS 50K LED TO THE RECOVERY RECORD WEALTH FROM PIYUSH JAIN

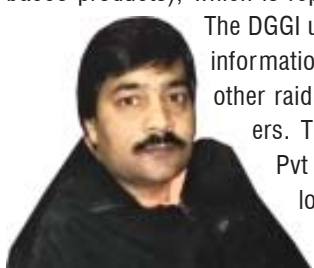
BY ATUL KRISHAN

**NEW DELHI, (IANS):** The raids by multiple financial agencies are still underway at the different premises of Kanpur-based perfumer Piyush Jain, who was arrested by the Directorate General of GST Intelligence(DGGI) under the GST Act on Monday. Cash worth around Rs 200 crore, gold bars and sandalwood oil have been found from his premises in Kanpur and Kannauj, following which more agencies have been roped in to probe the matter. IANS now takes a look at how it all started.

Tip of the iceberg was fake invoices of Rs 50,000. It all started when a special team of the Ahmedabad unit of DGGI found fake invoices of below Rs 50,000, which were issued by Ganapati Road Carriers to avoid Customs duty and taxes. Piyush Jain had connection with Ganapati Road Carriers.

After gathering information about Ganapati Road Carriers and its owners and partners, the DGGI team decided to raid their premises. The first raid was conducted at the premises of Trimuti Fragrance Pvt Ltd (the manufacturers of Shikhar brand pan masala and other tobacco products), which is reportedly owned by Piyush Jain.

The DGGI unit did not stop there, as they had more information about the uncounted cash. Later, another raid was conducted at Ganapati Road Carriers. The products made at Trimuti Fragrance Pvt Ltd were being transported to different locations by Ganapati Road Carriers.



**| CONTD. ON PAGE 9**

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## Ontario introduces new Business Costs Rebate Program, 6-month interest & penalty free period for most provincial taxes to support businesses that are required to operate at 50% reduced capacity

**TORONTO** — The Ontario government is introducing new supports for many of the businesses that are most impacted by public health measures in response to the Omicron variant. These supports include a new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program and a six-month interest- and penalty-free period to make payments for most provincially administered taxes. “Ontario businesses have already contributed so much to the province’s fight against COVID-19,” said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance. “We recognize that these necessary capacity limits to reduce the transmission of the virus will impact businesses, and that’s why we are introducing these new supports, which will put money directly into the hands of businesses and free up their cash flows during this critical time.” Through the new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program, eligible businesses will receive rebate payments equivalent to 50 per cent of the property tax and energy costs they incur while subject to the current capacity limits. This will provide support to businesses that are expected to be most impacted financially by the requirement to reduce capacity to 50 per cent. Examples of businesses that will be eligible for the Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program include restaurants, smaller retail stores and gyms. A full list of eligible business types will be made available through a program guide in mid-January 2022. Online applications for this program will open in mid-January 2022, with payments to eligible businesses provided retroactively to December 19, 2021. Businesses will be required to submit property tax and energy bills as part of the application process. “I commend business owners for pivoting quickly as we respond to the Omicron variant in our continued fight against COVID-19,” said Todd Smith, Minister of Energy. “It is essential that we support them during their time of need, and that’s why our new rebate program will provide them with the support they need right now on their energy bills.” The province is also providing additional support to help improve cash flows for Ontario businesses by providing a six-month interest- and penalty-free period to make payments for most provincially administered taxes, supporting businesses in the immediate term while capacity restrictions are in place while providing the flexibility Ontario businesses

will need for long-term planning. The six-month period will begin January 1, 2022, and end July 1, 2022.

This measure will provide up to \$7.5 billion in relief to help approximately 80,000 Ontario businesses. With this help, approximately 80,000 businesses will have the option to delay their payments for the following provincially administered taxes, helping them free up cash flow during these challenging times:

Employer Health Tax  
Beer, Wine & Spirits Taxes  
Tobacco Tax  
Insurance Premium Tax  
Fuel Tax  
International Fuel Tax Agreement  
Gas Tax  
Retail Sales Tax on Insurance Contracts & Benefit Plans  
Mining Tax  
Race Tracks Tax

As provinces across Canada grapple with the emergence of the Omicron variant, Ontario is also calling on the federal government to strengthen federal support programs to ensure businesses and workers have the support they need to weather this new challenge. This includes adjusting the eligibility requirements for the Government of Canada’s Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program and the Hardest-Hit Business Recovery Program to ensure more impacted businesses can apply, while also ensuring that businesses experiencing partial capacity restrictions can qualify for the Local Lockdown Program. Ontario is also inviting the federal government to work together with the province to further help businesses that are struggling with cash flow challenges, by developing a program that would allow hard hit businesses to temporarily defer the remittance of HST, starting with a commitment to allow eligible businesses to defer HST collected in December, interest-free, for a period of up to six months.

Visit Ontario’s website to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

## Narendra Tomar clarifies, says no plan to bring back farm laws

Two days after his statement in Nagpur snowballed into a controversy, Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Narendra Tomar on Sunday clarified that the government has no proposal or plan to bring back farm reform laws.

"Honourable Prime Minister had declared to repeal the three farm laws to honour the farmers' demand. There is no proposal or plan to bring back the farm laws," Tomar said.

Tomar's remark at Nagpur on Friday that farm laws would be brought back - "We had brought in the farm laws, but a few people were not happy with it...We moved a step back and we will move forward (on farm laws). Farmers are the backbone of India" - had drawn criticism from opposition. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted on Saturday, "The Agriculture Minister has insulted the apology sought by (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi." Tomar, in a statement, "Congress has been trying to mislead people to hide their own failures. The farmers should be wary of such attempts."

Stating that the Swaminathan Committee report was submitted in 2006 but the then Congress government sat on the report instead of implementing the recommendations therein, Tomar said, "Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, we have implemented the recommendations of the Swaminathan Committee."

He also recounted the various steps taken by the Modi government over



the last seven years to bring in farm sector reforms. "Farmers are being empowered through the payment of Rs 6,000. The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Bima Yojana has come as a boon for the farmers facing losses due to natural disasters. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund worth Rs one lakh crore and 10,000 farmer producers companies (FPOs) have led to innovations in the farm sector."

## EX-AFGHAN PRESIDENT GHANI RUNNER-UP IN MOST CORRUPT LIST HEADED BY BELARUS PRESIDENT

**NEW DELHI:** Belarusian President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko has been named 2021’s Person of the Year by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) in recognition of all he has done to advance organised criminal activity and corruption, a statement said.

“Ghani certainly deserves an award, too. He was breathtaking in both corruption and gross incompetence. He deserted his people, leaving them to misery and death so he could live among the corrupt former state officials in the moral cesspool that is the UAE,” said OCCRP.

“It was a banner year for corruption, but Lukashenko stood out from the crowd,” said Drew Sullivan, a co-founder of OCCRP who served as a judge on the panel.

The other finalists include Syrian dictator Bashar Hafez al-Assad, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Assad led Syria into a destructive civil war and has stolen hundreds of millions of dollars while clinging to power, as per OCCRP.

Erdogan has overseen a corrupt government that laundered Chinese funds for Iranian oil using state-owned banks, it said.

Kurz was the leader of Austrian People’s Party (OVP), who, along with nine other politicians and newspaper persons, was accused of embezzlement and bribery.

OCCRP said Lukashenko enjoys unlimited power at home and sniffs at international opprobrium. Indeed, it was EU sanctions against his country that prompted his retaliation via refugees, it said.

He seems equally unbothered by the suffering of his own citizens and desperate migrants, including children, shivering, hungry and barred from settling in Belarus, the statement said.

Over the past year, Lukashenko has generated headlines for channeling state money to a series of oligarchs close to the Lukashenko family, intercepting a Ryanair passenger plane carrying a Belarusian dissident and forcing it to land in Minsk, in violation of international laws on aviation, manufacturing a border crisis with the European Union by luring thousands of refugees to the borders of the bloc and promulgating misinformation and fake cures for Covid, OCCRP said.



## AFTER 14 YEARS, BENAZIR BHUTTO'S ASSASSINATION STILL REMAINS A MYSTERY



Despite a lapse of 14 years, the mystery surrounding the assassination of former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was murdered after addressing an election rally in Rawalpindi’s Liaquat Bagh, is yet to be solved, and the case is still pending in the Lahore High Courts (LHC) Rawalpindi bench, Express Tribune reported.

Twenty party workers were killed and 71 others were seriously injured in the attack on the former Pakistan premier.

In the aftermath of the incident, four inquiries were conducted into the high-profile case with the police joint investigation team (JIT), the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the United Nations (UN) and Scotland Yard striving to solve the matter.

However, these inquiries and investigations yielded no results as the Bhutto family did not pursue the case in the special anti-terrorism court (ATC), the report said.

A total of 12 challans were filed in this case, 355 appearances were recorded, 10 judges were changed and 141 witnesses, including 68 prosecution witnesses, were testified. Sixteen people were accused in the case, but only eight of them were arrested.

The main accused, Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud, was killed in a drone strike. Five other accused - Nadir Khan alias Qari, Nasrullah, Abdullah alias Saddam, Ikramullah and Faiz Muhammad Kaskat - were also killed in encounters with intelligence agencies at different places.

The suicide bomber who attacked the former Prime Minister was identified as Saeed Blakel, who died in the blast. The police arrested five accused, Aitzaz Shah, Sher Zaman, Rashid Ahmed, Rafiqat and Hasnain Gul.

The FIA also arrested then Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf, former city police officer (CPO) Saud Aziz and superintendent of police (SP) Rawal Khurram Shehzad as accused in the case. However, they were later granted bail by the high court.

On August 31, 2017, Judge Muhammad Asghar Khan of the special ATC pronounced the verdict after nine years, acquitting five accused, and declaring Musharraf as a fugitive on absenteeism, and issued permanent arrest warrants, besides confiscating his movable and immovable property, the report said.

## AMID BOYCOTT, INDIA-CHINA TRADE VOLUME AT RECORD HIGH OF \$100BN: REPORT

**SANJEEV SHARMA**

Amidst repeated domestic boycotts of Made-in-China, trade volume between India and China hit a record high of \$100 billion by November, the Global Times reported citing the latest data from the Chinese General Administration of Customs.

Chinese state media pointed out that while there are those in India who are concerned about the trade deficit, advocating not to rely too much on trade with China, the data speaks for itself.

"Whatever the political considerations of these people, seeing China as India's enemy should not be an option for India and one that India cannot afford to make. Further increasing cooperation is the right choice," the Global Times report said.

India has long hoped to reduce its trade deficit with China, but making bilateral trade more balanced cannot be done by curbing Chinese exports to India, which would only hurt the Indian economy. Further boosting China's imports from India is the right way to go, and there is room for coordination between the two sides in this regard, and it should be a joint effort, the report said. The record two-way trade provides the best evidence of the two countries' economic complementarities and the strong resilience of bilateral economic relations. In particular, by importing Chinese products at relatively low prices, India has saved more foreign exchange reserves and improved capital efficiency, Global Times reported.

## CANADA TO JOIN MEXICO IN COMPLAINT ON US CAR-ORIGIN RULES

Canada plans to formally join Mexico in calling for an arbitration panel to resolve a dispute with the US over how to interpret rules governing the origin of vehicle parts, according to a media report.

The two countries expect to request in the first days of January the creation of a tribunal of experts to rule on the matter as allowed under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, Xinhua news agency reported citing a Bloomberg report as saying.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has faced pressure from business leaders to become more aggressive against what Canadians sees as growing US trade protectionism, it added.

Trudeau has instructed his top economic ministers to take "tougher positions" on trade issues amid growing disputes with the US.

## FLIGHT DISRUPTIONS CONTINUE IN US OVER OMICRON CONCERNS, ADVERSE WEATHER

Airlines continue to cut flights as rising numbers of staff are infected by the Omicron coronavirus variant and bad winter weather disrupts parts of the US. As of Tuesday morning, 2,182 flights set to depart in the day have been canceled, and the cancellations have amounted to about 13,000 since Friday morning, according to figures from the flight-tracking website FlightAware. Of Tuesday's cancellations, 675 -- just under a third -- were flights within, into, or out of the US. United Airlines has canceled 115 flights or 5 per cent of its total flights for the day. Alaska Airlines has canceled 50 flights scheduled for Tuesday or 8 per cent of its flights, and JetBlue has canceled 75 flights or 7 per cent of its schedule, according to the website's data. "The highly contagious Omicron variant of Covid-19 has fueled a rising wave of infections across the US and caused significant disruptions to holiday travel," reported CBS News, noting that from Friday to Monday, more than 5,400 flights in the country were canceled and thousands more were delayed, with airlines citing staff shortages caused by Covid-19 infections among pilots, crew and other airline workers out sick.



Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

1st dose

+

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Moderna or Pfizer

+

AstraZeneca,  
Moderna or Pfizer

booster

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Omicron evades vaccine, antibodies therapies: Study

The highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid-19 has the potential to evade the immune protection conferred by vaccines and natural infection, as well as render most monoclonal antibody therapy ineffective, according to a new study.

The study led by researchers from Columbia University in the US, in collaboration with scientists at the University of Hong Kong, suggests the need for new vaccines and treatments that anticipate how the virus may soon evolve.

A striking feature of the omicron variant is the alarming number of changes in the virus's spike protein that could pose a threat to the effectiveness of current vaccines and therapeutic antibodies.

The new study, published in the journal Nature, tested the ability of antibodies generated by vaccination to neutralise the Omicron variant in laboratory assays that pitted antibodies against live viruses and against pseudoviruses constructed in the lab to mimic Omicron. The findings showed that antibodies from people double-vaccinated with any of the four most widely used vaccines---Moderna, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Johnson and Johnson---were significantly less effective at neutralising the Omicron variant compared to the ancestral virus.

Antibodies from previously infected individuals were even less likely to neutralise Omicron.

Individuals who received a booster shot of either of the two mRNA vaccines were found to be better protected, although even their antibodies exhibited diminished neutralising activity against Omicron.

"The new results suggest that previously infected individuals and fully vaccinated individuals are at risk for infection with the omicron variant," said David Ho, Director at Columbia's Aaron Diamond AIDS

Research Centre.

"Even a third booster shot may not adequately protect against omicron infection, but of course it is advisable to get one, as you'll still benefit from some immunity," he added.

The results are consistent with other neutralisation studies, as well as early epidemiological data from South Africa and the UK, which show efficacy of two doses of the vaccines against symptomatic disease is significantly reduced against the omicron variant.

Further, the study suggests that all of the monoclonal antibody therapies currently in use and most in development are much less effective against Omicron, if they work at all.

When administered early in the course of infection, monoclonal antibodies has shown to prevent many individuals from developing severe Covid.

In neutralisation studies with monoclonal antibodies, only one (Brii198 approved in China) maintained notable activity against Omicron. A minor form of Omicron is completely resistant to all antibodies in clinical use today, the researchers said.

The researchers note that Omicron is now the most complete "escapee" from neutralisation that scientists have seen.

In this study, Ho's lab also identified four new spike mutations in omicron that help the virus evade antibodies, suggesting a need for new approaches to combat the variant.

"It is not too far-fetched to think that SARS-CoV-2 is now only a mutation or two away from being completely resistant to current antibodies, either the monoclonal antibodies used as therapies or the antibodies generated by vaccination or infection with previous variants," Ho said.

ONTARIO OPENS NEW MASS VACCINATION CLINIC AT THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE IN MISSISSAUGA

**TORONTO** — As the province continues to urgently ramp up its capacity to administer COVID-19 vaccines, the Ontario government is opening a new mass vaccination clinic at the International Centre in Mississauga to quickly get more boosters into arms. Starting today, the new mass vaccination clinic, operated in partnership with Switch Health, will administer boosters to individuals aged 18 and over, as well as first and second doses to individuals aged five and over.

Quickly accelerating booster doses is the cornerstone of Ontario's response to the threat posed by the Omicron variant to the province's hospitals and intensive-care units. Third booster doses provide an increased level of protection for people against severe outcomes.

"Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Team Ontario and mass vaccination clinics like the one at the International Centre in Mississauga, we are getting more shots into arms every day," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "Whether you need your first, second or booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, Team Ontario will be here to help. Please get vaccinated as soon as you can."

The new mass vaccination clinic will be open seven days a week. Ontarians can book an appointment to receive their first, second or booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the clinic through Ontario's booking portal or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900. A limited number of walk-in appointments will be also available.

The clinic is working on ramping up to its full capacity of approximately 19,000 vaccinations per day, which will help to significantly increase capacity in the area and push Ontario closer to its goal of up to 300,000 doses per day. On December 22, Ontario administered over 253,000 COVID-19 vaccines in a single day.

As the province continues to work with the health care sector to ramp up its daily capacity, Team Ontario is extending its call to arms to

Ontario is opening a new mass vaccination clinic in Peel Region

support Ontario's vaccine rollout and get more shots into arms in communities across the province. Individuals who are interested in becoming a COVID-19 vaccine administrator are encouraged to register through the Health Workforce Matching Portal. Individuals who are interested in volunteering to support health care providers and others at vaccination clinics across the province are encouraged to register through the Ontario COVID-19 Volunteer Portal.

"We are using every tool available to keep Ontarians safe from COVID-19 and meet the strong demand for booster shots across the province," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "Mass vaccination clinics like this one will go a long way to help us vaccinate people as swiftly and conveniently as possible." As of December 22, 2021, more than two million COVID-19 booster doses have been administered in Ontario. Individuals aged 18 and over across the province are eligible to receive their booster dose three months (84 days) after their second dose, and are strongly encouraged to book their appointment through Ontario's booking portal, by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre, through Indigenous-led vaccination clinics, participating pharmacies, primary care settings, or mass vaccination clinics such as the new International Centre COVID-19 vaccination clinic.

Pfizer's Covid pill will take about 6-8 months to come to US markets

While the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved Pfizer antiviral pill to treat Covid-19, the White House has warned that the drug will not be available in the markets before six-eight months.

The US FDA on Wednesday issued an emergency use authorisation (EUA) for the Pfizer's Paxlovid pill to treat Covid-19 along with caution for people with certain pre-existing conditions -- heralding a new era for the future, over-the-counter treatment of the deadly respiratory disease that has killed millions. The White House said that the complex nature of the drug means it will take more than half a year to make the 10 million courses that are on order, the Financial Times reported.

"According to Pfizer, the complex chemistry involved in creating the active ingredient in the pill means production takes about six to eight months" Jeff Zients, the co-ordinator of President Joe Biden's Covid-19 response team, was quoted as saying.

"We will have 2,65,000 treatment courses of Pfizer available in January and all 10 million treatment courses delivered by late summer," he added. Pfizer has said that Paxlovid reduces the risk of hospitalisation or death in Covid-19 patients by 89 per cent. It is likely to be especially important in the coming months because early lab tests show it continues to work against the fast-spreading Omicron variant, unlike some of the monoclonal antibody treatments already available, the report said.

Biden called the decision by the FDA to authorise the pill a "significant step forward in our path out of the pandemic.

"As Pfizer works to produce these treatments as quickly as possible, we will work closely with them and provide any resource needed, including using the Defense Production Act if warranted," he added, acknowledging how difficult the drug is to make.

The Biden administration had in November, bought 10 million courses of the Paxlovid pill (consisting of nirmatrelvir and ritonavir tablets, co-packaged for oral use).

Meanwhile, on Thursday the FDA also authorised Merck's Molnupiravir. In data presented to an FDA advisory panel in late November, the drug was shown to prevent 30 per cent of infections from progressing -- far fewer than Pfizer's antiviral Paxlovid.

The US government has also pre-ordered 3 million courses of Merck's antiviral pill.

AstraZeneca has also developed an antibody drug. Laboratory tests have shown Evusheld is effective against the Omicron variant; and is 77 per cent effective in blocking infections when used as a protective measure.

COVID VAX HESITANCY IN POOR NATIONS MAY SPUR NEW VARIANTS



After lack of access to adequate doses, many poor countries are now facing vaccine resistance, which according to scientists could be a source of new variants, such as Omicron, Nature reported.

"When you have a lot of community transmission, that's where variants will emerge," Jeffrey Lazarus, a global health researcher at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, Spain, was quoted as saying.

Addressing people's hesitancy is therefore crucial, to curb viral spread and to avert hospitalisations and deaths, he said.

According to scientists, hesitancy might now be contributing to the slow uptake of vaccines in South Africa, one of the nations where Omicron was first detected, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Papua New Guinea and Nepal. These countries have large proportions of the unvaccinated populations.

"We have more hesitant people in the global south than we ever thought we did," Rupali Limaye, a behavioural scientist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland, was quoted as saying. Although in many countries, limited supply is still the main problem, the researchers said.

Until late October, many African nations "didn't have enough doses", but even after getting adequate amounts of vaccines in most countries just 64 per cent of the vaccines have so far been administered, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

In South Africa, for example, the number of doses administered each week has fallen to less than one-quarter of doses given at the peak of the vaccination drive in September. This is despite only 44 per cent of adults having been vaccinated with at least one dose.

According to Espoir Malembaka, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who is based in Bukavu, DRC, except for travellers getting ready to board flights, people are not "really in a rush to get the vaccine". He believes that the problem is not access to, but mistrust of, the vaccines. Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy has long been recognised as a problem in high- and middle-income nations.

A major concern is safety, especially because the vaccines were developed and delivered rapidly and the recommendations for their use have often changed, researchers said. Misinformation coupled with lack of trust in governments have also played a role in hesitancy.

HALF OF COLD CASES WILL BE COVID, WARN UK RESEARCHERS



Amid rising Omicron cases, a team of UK researchers have warned that if you have a sore throat, runny nose and a headache, there is a good chance it will be Covid, a media report says. According to the BBC, the Zoe Covid study team has been tracking the pandemic using feedback from the general public and estimates half of the people with cold-like symptoms have Covid. They described an "explosion" of Covid cases over the last week, driven by the new Omicron variant, the report said. About 144,000 people a day are catching it and then feeling unwell, it added. For most, Covid is a mild disease, some get no symptoms at all. But it can still cause very serious illness in some people, including those who have not been vaccinated. If you have cold-like symptoms, take a Covid test, says lead scientist Tim Spector. "The number of new symptomatic cases has exploded over the last week," he said. "For most people, an Omicron positive case will feel much more like common cold, starting with a sore throat, runny nose and a headache. You only need to ask a friend who has recently tested positive to find this out," he added.

CANADA TEMPORARILY EXPANDS ACCESS TO LOCKDOWN PROGRAM AND WORKER LOCKDOWN BENEFIT

An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19

Government Bill C-2 amends several federal acts to extend the provision of various financial subsidies and benefits related to the COVID-19 pandemic into 2022.

It also, among other things, enacts the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit Act to authorize benefits for workers in regions where a lockdown is imposed for reasons related to COVID-19.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting Canadian workers and businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, announced the federal government's intention to temporarily expand eligibility for key support programs to ensure Canadians are protected and workers and businesses get the help they need to sustain them through new and necessary public health restrictions.

Using regulatory authority provided in Bill C-2, the government intends to introduce new regulations that would:

Expand the Local Lockdown Program to include employers subject to capacity-limiting restrictions of 50 per cent or more; and reduce the current-month revenue decline threshold requirement to 25 per cent. Eligible employers will receive wage and rent subsidies from 25 per cent up to a maximum of 75 per cent, depending on their degree of revenue loss. The 12-month revenue decline test continues to not be required in order to access this support.

Expand the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit to include workers in regions where provincial or territorial governments have introduced capacity-limiting restrictions of 50 per cent or more.



Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5 STATES ELECTIONS



KANPUR: SAMAJWADI PARTY PRESIDENT AKHILESH YADAV HANDS OVER HIS PARTY FLAG TO KHAZANCHI NATH, A FOUR-YEAR-OLD BOY WHO WAS BORN IN 2016 WHILE HIS MOTHER SARVESHA DEVI WAS STANDING IN A BANK QUEUE TO WITHDRAW CASH DURING DEMONETIZATION, TO FLAG OFF THE 'SAMAJWADI VIJAY YATRA' IN KANPUR, TUESDAY, OCT. 12, 2021. (PTI PHOTO)

# 'REDRAW STRATEGY FOR PUNJAB', SAY BJP LEADERS AFTER CHANDIGARH RESULT

After the party's poor show in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation elections, a section in BJP believes that it is time to redraw strategy for upcoming Punjab assembly polls. Leaders suggested that without establishing ground connection, it will be difficult to win Punjab polls despite forming an alliance with former chief minister Amarinder Singh and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa. BJP, which is in power, has won only 12 seats in Chandigarh Municipal Corporation polls and AAP emerged as the single largest party by winning 14 of 35 seats. Congress won eight and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was able to win just one seat. Calling the result a setback, a BJP leader said that the result came as a surprise to the party when we are anticipating to retain the corporation for another term and will have an impact on upcoming Punjab assembly polls early next year. "Chandigarh Municipal Corporation results do not fully reflect the mood of Punjab but give a picture of what is going on in the state. But the results show that all is not well for the party on the ground in Punjab and AAP emerging as a big challenge for the existing political forces," he said. Another leader pointed out that the result shows that there is still

## BJP, Amarinder and Sukhdev Dhindsa form alliance for Punjab polls

After the party's poor show in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation elections, a section in BJP believes that it is time to redraw strategy for upcoming Punjab assembly polls. Leaders suggested that without establishing ground connection, it will be difficult to win Punjab polls despite forming an alliance with former chief minister Amarinder Singh and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa. BJP, which is in power, has won only 12 seats in Chandigarh Municipal Corporation polls and AAP emerged as the single largest party by winning 14 of 35 seats. Congress won eight and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was able to win just one seat. Calling the result a setback, a BJP leader said that the result came as a surprise to the party when we are anticipating to retain the corporation for another term and will have an impact on upcoming Punjab assembly polls early next year. "Chandigarh Municipal Corporation results do not fully reflect the mood of Punjab but give a picture of what is going on in the state. But the results show that all is not well for the party on the ground in Punjab and AAP emerging as a big challenge for the existing political forces," he said. Another leader pointed out that the result shows that there is still some anger among voters over the three farm laws which were repealed in winter session. "We lost the first election in the region after the repeal of three farm laws and it shows that we are not able to pacify the anger against us. It is going to adversely affect the party in Punjab assembly polls. Our leadership must redraw strategy to convince people that the government is not against the farmers," he said. Many in the saffron camp believe that forming alliance with Singh's

## Will Priyanka Gandhi get a bigger role in Congress after Uttar Pradesh elections?

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has emerged in a similar role within the party after the death of Congress's troubleshooter Ahmed Patel and all the complainants are reaching their doorsteps with their grievances. Recently, when former Chief Minister Harish Rawat targeted the party, Priyanka Gandhi stepped in to resolve the Uttarakhand crisis and pacified the disgruntled leader. This is not the first time that the Gandhi siblings have taken on the role of manager to ease the crisis in the party. He was instrumental in resolving the political crisis in Punjab in the recent past and was instrumental in removing Amarinder Singh and installing Navjot Singh Sidhu in the party. After this, when the dissidents opened a front against the Ashok Gehlot government of Rajasthan, they, along with Rahul Gandhi, put pressure on Ashok Gehlot to accommodate Sachin Pilot's loyalists in the state government. Analysts feel that after the Uttar Pradesh elections, the Congress will have to offer Priyanka Gandhi a bigger role and this is also necessary as leaders who find themselves uncomfortable in keeping pace with Rahul Gandhi, speak their mind. Can say Priyanka Gandhi with an open mind. Apart from this, she can also play a key role in nurturing the disgruntled leaders and the leaders of the G-23 group because the way she took up this matter in Uttar Pradesh after the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, it was much better in improving the image of the Congress because Other parties also had to raise this issue. For this, Priyanka Gandhi was also strongly praised in the political field. Priyanka Gandhi made people realize the presence of Congress in Uttar Pradesh by raising burning issues in such a short time and the party can also get its benefit in the upcoming assembly elections. The party is seeing her as a star campaigner in future elections and her 'LadkiHoon Lad SaaktiHoon' (I am a girl and can fight) slogan is attracting people across the country. His campaign has proved to be very fruitful in getting the membership of the party at large in the state and the party is seeing it as a response to the religion and caste based politics of the BJP. At the time when the Congress General Secretary entered the campaign, the attention of the country was towards the Kovid epidemic,

some anger among voters over the three farm laws which were repealed in winter session. "We lost the first election in the region after the repeal of three farm laws and it shows that we are not able to pacify the anger against us. It is going to adversely affect the party in Punjab assembly polls. Our leadership must redraw strategy to convince people that the government is not against the farmers," he said. Many in the saffron camp believe that forming alliance with Singh's Punjab Lok Congress and Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt) will not help the party till the BJP makes its presence felt on the ground. On Monday, the BJP announced to jointly contest the upcoming Punjab polls with Singh and Dhindsa. "Till we strengthen our own support, we are not going to gain anything from alliance with former chief minister Singh and Dhindsa. We have to work to strengthen the BJP on the ground in Punjab at war footing as time is running out," a BJP leader said. Punjab elections will be held in February-March next year along with Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa. Earlier after its alliance broke up with its oldest alliance partner Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the BJP has announced to contest all 117 assembly seats in Punjab. In 2017, BJP won three seats out of 23 it contested.



Punjab Lok Congress and Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt) will not help the party till the BJP makes its presence felt on the ground. On Monday, the BJP announced to jointly contest the upcoming Punjab polls with Singh and Dhindsa. "Till we strengthen our own support, we are not going to gain anything from alliance with former chief minister Singh and Dhindsa. We have to work to strengthen the BJP on the ground in Punjab at war footing as time is running out," a BJP leader said. Punjab elections will be held in February-March next year along with Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa. Earlier after its alliance broke up with its oldest alliance partner Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the BJP has announced to contest all 117 assembly seats in Punjab. In 2017, BJP won three seats out of 23 it contested.



yet he made his opposition camp feel his power by vigorously raising the Hathras and Sonbhadra issue. During the time when people were returning to their respective states due to Corona, Priyanka showed generosity by arranging buses to send them to their homes and offering to take the affected people to their homes. She remained at the forefront even during the farmers' movement, but then the second wave of Corona wreaked havoc in the country and people had to face the lockdown. Assembly elections are due in Uttar Pradesh along with Uttarakhand and Punjab early next year, and the Congress leadership is debating whether Priyanka should be given a bigger or national role in the party. Many Congress leaders are coming forward on this issue and one such person is Acharya Pramod Krishnam, who has been saying that Priyanka should be made the party president. Apart from this, many other leaders who are not happy with Rahul Gandhi's performance have suggested that Sonia Gandhi should be retained as party president and Priyanka should be made the vice-president in charge of North India. When the Congress faced a leadership crisis, a team of leaders came to the aid of Sonia Gandhi and in September last year, A.K. Antony, Ahmed Patel, Ambika Soni, K.C. A committee was formed with Venugopal, Mukul Wasnik and Randeep Singh Surjewala. After Patel's death, however, the committee has held occasional meetings.

## UP ASSEMBLY POLLS: POLITICAL PARTIES GO ALL OUT TO WOO VOTERS

Political parties are making all out efforts to woo voters in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, which will decide the political fate of many of them. Leaving no stone unturned, the ruling BJP has appointed in-charges in the state to lead the party's campaign. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited his parliamentary constituency Varanasi twice this month and dedicated various welfare schemes to the people. Foundation stones for various schemes are continuously being laid. Besides Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari and Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani have also entered the political arena to campaign for the saffron party. The BJP will take out 'Rath Yatra' in 403 Assembly constituencies to persuade the electorate in its favour. Central and state ministers are likely to join the yatra. Shah will not only hold public meetings and roadshows from December 26 to 31 but also organisational meetings, during which he will give tips to the cadres. He will stay for the night at those places and study the ground realities. Shah, who is the BJP's chief strategist and is considered a poll expert, especially for Uttar Pradesh, has a significant contribution in bringing the party to power in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, 2019 Assembly polls and the 2019 general elections. To come to power, Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav has stitched together alliances with small parties to set the caste equations right. Besides Akhilesh patched-up with estranged uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav. Shivpal has also accepted Akhilesh as his leader. In Western UP, the SP has an alliance with Jayant Chaudhary's RLD. Akhilesh had addressed a joint rally with Jayant. The SP chief took out "Vijay Rath Yatras" in Kanpur, Kanpur Dehat, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Banda, Mahoba, Lalitpur, Jhansi, Rai Bareilly, Jaunpur, Mainpuri, Etah, but whether this will convert into votes is yet to be seen. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati kicked-off her poll campaign by organising a prabudhsammelan.

## CONGRESS TURNS 137 WITH LESS THAN 90 MPS IN PARLIAMENT



**NEW DELHI, (IANS):** While the Congress on Tuesday celebrated its 137th foundation day across the country, the grand old party's presence has been reduced to just three states -- Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan - besides being part of the coalition government in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Alarmingly, the party now has less than 100 MPs -- 87 -- in both Houses of the Parliament. As per the Lok Sabha website, out of the 542 members in the Lower House, Congress has only 53 MPs as against BJP's 301. In the Rajya Sabha, the Congress has 34 MPs besides having the leader of opposition status, though the party is completely outnumbered by BJP's 97 members in the Upper House. The Congress has been decimated in the states too with regional parties taking its place in states where once the party held strong, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala where other parties have gained at Congress' expense. The Congress is a junior partner in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra where it had ruled for 15 years as a senior coalition partner with the NCP. Similarly, in Jharkhand it is in alliance with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). The Congress has around 764 MLAs across the country, as against around 1,432 of the BJP. Moreover, it has been reduced to single digits in the politically important state of Uttar Pradesh (7), while it managed to win just 19 seats in Bihar in 2020. In Odisha, it has 9 MLAs while it failed to open its account in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Delhi.

## FORMER CRICKETER DINESH MONGIA, PUNJAB CONGRESS MLAS BALWINDER SINGH LADDI, FATEH JUNG SINGH BAJWA JOIN BJP



Former Indian cricketer Dinesh Mongia on Tuesday joined BJP. Two Congress MLAs Balwinder Singh Laddi, Fateh Jung Singh Bajwa and 13 others also joined the BJP on Tuesday along with cricketer Mongia. Mongia, Laddi, Bajwa and others joined BJP at the party national headquarters here in the presence of Union Minister and election in-charge of Punjab Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, national general secretary and state in-charge Dushyant Gautam and Rajya Sabha member and national media department head Anil Baluni. Left hand batsman Mongia had represented India in 57 ODIs and one T20 international match. Laddi and Bajwa have won from Shri Hargobindpur and Qadian on Congress ticket in 2017 Punjab assembly polls respectively. Others who joined BJP are former Lok Sabha member Rajdev Khalsa, senior Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader and three time MLA Gurte Singh Gudhiyana, President of United Christian Front of Punjab Kamal Bakshi, lawyer Madhumeet, jagdeep Singh Dhariwal, Praveen Deol, Jarnail Singh, Pradeep Singla, Gulsan Kumar, Vicky Mangla, Jagjeet Singh, Sukhvinder Singh and Buta Singh Dhaliwal. Shekhawat said that joining these leaders will strengthen the party and ensure formation of a BJP led alliance government in Punjab. "Bajwa family is a big name in Punjab. His father was three times minister and four times MLA. His father fought against terrorism and sacrificed his life while fighting against terrorism," Shekhawat said. The BJP has on Monday announced an alliance with former chief minister Amarinder Singh's Punjab Lok Congress and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt) to jointly contest the Punjab assembly polls. Punjab election will be held in February -March next year along with Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa.



# THIS IS WHAT INDIA NEEDS TO DO TO TACKLE NEW VARIANT

KRISHNA PRASAD NALLAMALLA

Another momentous year is coming to an end. Delta variant struck India in mid- February. Four lakh cases per day were being reported in mid-May. It left a trail of human misery and destruction. No one anticipated and was prepared for the type of surge that the country witnessed.

As we near the end of the year, India has reported 35 million positive cases and nearly 5,00,000 deaths over the two years of Covid pandemic. As per the last seroprevalence study, there were 40 asymptomatic infections for every reported positive case. An attempt is being made to arrive at true Covid deaths for every State from death registries. As the country started heaving a sigh of relief with daily positive cases dropping below 10,000, the news of Omicron raised the specter of a third wave.

India reached the milestone of fully vaccinating 50 per cent of the adult (18 years and above) population in December in less than 1 year of starting the vaccination drive. More than 80 per cent of the adult population received their first dose. Two indigenous vaccines have been tested in children. Export of vaccines has been reinitiated to honour India's commitment to other countries. Decision on vaccines for children and booster dose is expected before the year-end. The year saw a remarkable turnaround in access to personal protection equipment, Covid tests, oxygen and ventilator beds, and essential drugs. These are testimony to India's resilience in times of crises. They demonstrate a people who learnt to be innovative when faced with adversity. A combination of robust public R&D institutions along with dynamic private enterprise has been responsible for the above.

Governments at the Center and the states struggled with hard choices between lives and livelihoods. The year saw a pragmatic balance in various decisions. Few policy decisions stand out this year in the context of health systems in general and Covid in particular. Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHM) with an outlay of Rs 64,180 crores over 5-years is announced to strengthen public health infrastructure especially in the areas of critical care, disease surveillance systems, and combating health emergencies. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) is launched to leverage digital technologies to strengthen the health information system through a well-designed digital health blueprint. Production linked incentive (PLI) schemes have been announced in pharma, medical devices, and digital technologies towards self-reliance and future resilience during unexpected crises.

There is a growing realisation that health security impacts every tenet of social life – be it economy, employment, education, environment, entertainment. Today, health security assumes more importance than that of even national security. The concept of health is being expanded to include every living being (One Health) and every non-living being (One Earth) as pandemics and climate change crises do not differentiate. Covid brought out the criticality of social, food and financial security during a pandemic. Direct benefit transfer (DBT) has been increasingly used to deliver various social and



financial benefits to the intended beneficiaries during the year. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been put to use to help migrant laborers. Food rations provided needed food security to many. The investments India has been making in various social benefit schemes over the last many years have come handy when needed during the pandemic. Investments in digital technologies have improved the efficiency of delivering these benefits. In the absence of well-studied evidence, it is not clear as to the impact of Covid on core social issues of food, job, housing, education and health.

## THE YEAR AHEAD

Omicron has suddenly brought in an uncertain year ahead. Given its transmission ability, third wave looks inevitable. We may not prevent it, but we can definitely reduce the surge through responsible people's behaviour and nimble policy directives. Omicron is not the last variant. The world will continue to encounter new variants. What can India do given the above reality?

1. Leverage the available vaccines while continuing efforts to develop better vaccines

There is enough evidence that vaccines in children and boosters are beneficial. However, the policy decision is to balance between the demand for vaccinating the unvaccinated including children, boosting the most vulnerable and if needed all, honouring the global commitments and the supply of vaccines. We have witnessed the limitation of targeted vaccines. We have to continue to invest in new vaccine development towards a vaccine that is effective against multiple variants.

2. Easy access to low cost reliable tests

There should be continuing efforts in bringing out easy to use, low cost and reliable tests. These will enable people to test themselves and self-isolate if found positive.

3. Intense pursuit of affordable oral antiviral drugs

Vaccines alone are not sufficient to face the pandemic. We need safe and effective oral antiviral drugs that act in a way that they are effective against multiple variants. We need to put in place a way to generate dynamic evidence to enable approval of these drugs without compromising on the scientific rigor expected. It is equally important to ensure that these drugs are made available to all people.

4. Leverage digital and molecular technologies to strengthen disease surveillance

India should push its ambitious digital health mission to strengthen disease surveillance across the country. Healthcare providers (doctors, hospitals, labs, pharmacies etc.), public health workers, and health insurance managers should be mandated to adopt interoperable health data systems. Data privacy and security laws have to be passed to facilitate data sharing. India should invest more in genomic surveillance to be able to alert when a new variant of concern is noticed. Artificial intelligence is best suited to analyze vast amounts of health and related data to provide live dashboards on any suspicious emergence of a new pathogen or variant.

5. Accelerate plans to reach the goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) to access safe, effective, and timely care in an equitable way

While PM-JAY is designed to cover 500 million poor people, there are many more millions (the so-called missing middle) who are vulnerable to improv-

erishing health expenses. They should be brought under financial protection without further delay. In parallel to UHC, India needs to invest in its healthcare provider system so that people living in villages and small towns have timely access to high quality primary care and acute care. While it is easy to create infrastructure, India should find a way to increase health workforce with needed competencies to meet the growing needs of its people. Ayushman Bharat program that encompasses health & wellness clinics to strengthen primary health care, PM-JAY to offer financial protection to as many people who need, ABDM to leverage digital technologies in transforming our health systems, and ABHM to strengthen health infrastructure needs to be given the maximum funding and political support for it to be impactful.

6. To enlarge social protection during crises times

Covid has clearly demonstrated the social cost of the pandemic. No one should go hungry because they lost their jobs. No one should be sleeping on roads because they can't afford decent housing. No one should sell their meagre assets to survive. No child should leave their education because they can't afford it. It needs that India should have a system of knowing its people and their socio-economic conditions to transfer the benefits directly to them. The fruits of green revolution be used to feed millions during the times of need. Crores of jandhan accounts be used to transfer monetary support. The best way to provide social protection is to create more jobs. Technological advances drive efficiency. However, they also have the risk of stealing jobs. There should be a fine balance between efficiency and redundancy needed for resilience.

7. To become resilient against supply chain disruptions

We have experienced the helplessness of supply chain disruptions during the pandemic. India has taken sound policy decisions to support indigenous capacity and capability through PLI schemes. It should create emergency national stockpiles of essential drugs and tests.

8. To press for global response systems at multilateral bodies

India should play a responsible role in strengthening WHO. It should press for intellectual property waivers on critical drugs and vaccines. It should honor its commitments to other countries in accessing drugs and vaccines. Global collaboration and response is essential to face global problems like pandemics and climate change.

9. To learn from the pandemic to strengthen its health and social systems

India should invest in taking stock of various lessons that the pandemic has thrown at us. It should learn from other countries and it should share its experiences with others. It should enable its states to learn from each other. There should be collaborative learning between public and private health sector players. Innovations that arose in response to the pandemic should be nurtured to become new normal. It should put a pandemic preventive program in place. Threats from zoonotic viruses and microbes should be analyzed and mitigated.

India should enter the new year with a resolve to turn adversity into opportunity, weakness into strength, and fragility into resilience.

*Disclaimer: Krishna Prasad Nallamalla is the Regional Director, South Asia, of the non-profit global think tank, ACCESS Health International. 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 PAUSES ACCESS TO LONG-TERM CARE HOMES BY GENERAL VISITORS STARTING THURSDAY, DEC. 30

In response to the evolving Omicron situation, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is taking further actions to protect the health and safety of residents, staff and caregivers in long-term care homes. The following temporary measures at long-term care homes will go into effect at 12:01 a.m. on Thursday, December 30, 2021: Access to long-term care homes by general visitors will be paused. Designated caregivers may continue to enter long-term care homes. Day absences for all residents for social purposes will be paused. “We know that long-term care residents face an increased risk of COVID-19. Given the high community infection rates we’re seeing with the Omicron variant, the time for more action is now,” said Rod Phillips, Minister of Long-Term Care. “In addition to the steps we’ve already taken, these new temporary measures will help keep residents safe and help critical staff remain on the job.” The government will closely monitor the situation in long-term care homes and continue to adjust measures as necessary to keep residents and staff safe. Earlier this month, the government put in place policies in long-term care homes designed to optimize safety for residents and staff, including the requirement that all general visitors need to be fully vaccinated to enter a home. The province is also requiring all staff caring

for a resident with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 to wear a fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirator. However, the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant will likely mean staff being exposed to or contracting COVID-19 in the community and more outbreaks in long-term care homes. This means that it is imperative to keep COVID-19 out of homes wherever possible and prevent spread within homes, with the most important objective being the prevention of severe outcomes for residents and staff. “I understand that these new, temporary measures will impact residents’ ability to have close contact with many of their friends and family members,” said Minister Phillips. “We must remain vigilant against the Omicron variant to protect long-term care residents and families, but we must stand strong to protect our most vulnerable, which includes residents of long-term care homes,” said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. “I encourage everyone to get their booster shot as soon as possible so we can keep everyone safe with the added layer of protection that the vaccine provides.” The COVID-19 vaccine remains the single best protection against COVID-19 and variants. Every eligible Ontarian is strongly recommended to get vaccinated or receive their booster as soon as possible.

## CANADA BREAKS ALL-TIME IMMIGRATION RECORD OF WELCOMING 401,000 IMMIGRANTS IN 2021

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, today announced that Canada has reached its target and welcomed more than 401,000 new permanent residents in 2021. Surpassing the previous record from 1913, this is the most newcomers in a year in Canadian history. This historic achievement is particularly significant in the face of the pandemic’s many challenges. From closed borders to domestic lockdowns, global migration has been upended by COVID-19. But the employees of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) rose to the occasion and processed a record half a million applications in 2021. To achieve this, IRCC added resources, embraced new technology and brought more processes online. These changes are all permanent improvements to Canada’s immigration system. As we continue to struggle with the pandemic, we made the most of the talent already within our borders. The majority of these new permanent residents were already in Canada on temporary status. Most notably, we launched new programs to engage essential workers, health care professionals, international graduates and French-speaking newcomers. Family reunification is another pillar of our system, and we reunited spouses and children while enabling more families to sponsor parents and grandparents. Finally, with many countries closing their doors to refugees, we continued to offer the world’s most vulnerable shelter in Canada. Canada needs immigration to drive our economy, enrich our society and support our aging population. One in 3 Canadian businesses is owned by an immigrant, and 1 in 4 health care workers is a newcomer. Business, labour market experts and economists all agree that immigration creates jobs, spurs innovation and helps address labour shortages. New Canadians contribute to communities across our country every day, and we will continue welcoming more of them as we build the Canada of tomorrow.

**Quote**

“Last year, we set an ambitious goal. Today, we achieved it. This is a historic moment for our country, as we welcome the highest number of newcomers in a century. I want to thank all the employees in my department, especially our Operations Sector, who made this possible. Canada is built on immigration, and we will continue to safely welcome the immigrants that Canada needs to succeed. I can’t wait to see the incredible contributions that our 401,000 new neighbours make in communities across the country.”

– The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

## GEORGE BROWN COLLEGE ANNOUNCES LARGEST-EVER DONATION AND ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPANSION OF WATERFRONT CAMPUS



The largest-ever donation to George Brown College paved the way for a groundbreaking event today, supporting the ongoing Waterfront Campus expansion with an Ontario first – a tall-wood, mass-timber, net-zero carbon emissions, 10-storey institutional building. Today’s \$10-million donation from Canadian philanthropist, Mr. Jack Cockwell builds upon his previous \$8M donation, making it the largest donation to an Ontario college by a single donor. Mr. Cockwell’s donation will fund Limerlost Place, a visually stunning new learning facility constructed with mass timber components sourced in Canada. “This signature building not only represents an important addition to George Brown’s waterfront campus but also signifies its strong commitment to sustainable development with its innovative design and extensive use of natural building materials. We are pleased to have had the opportunity to play a small part in the building of Limerlost Place, and hope that future generations will benefit from the enhanced education, knowledge and innovation it will serve to facilitate,” said Cockwell. Inspired by Limerlost Forest and Wildlife Reserve in Huntsville, ON, the building will house the college’s School of Computer Technology, School of Architectural Studies, and a new childcare facility. It will also be the new home of the Brookfield Sustainability Institute – a hub for innovative research and programming connected to industry. Limerlost Place will help to future-proof the economy and prepare the workforce for climate change. It will also dedicate space to Truth and Reconciliation and to celebrating and recognizing Indigenous culture. The unique wood-based structure features the strength of a traditional steel and concrete building with a fraction of the carbon footprint, harnessing the power of the sun and Lake Ontario. No fossil fuels will be used to heat or cool the building. Limerlost Place will include solar chimney systems, rooftop photovoltaics and deep-water cooling. “We are grateful to Mr. Cockwell for his incredibly generous donation that will allow us to build this impressive new centre for learning and deepen George Brown College’s commitment as a community-builder,” said Dr. Gervan Fearon, President of George Brown College. “Limerlost Place highlights the future leadership role George Brown will play in the city’s Waterfront development as a sustainable city. This stylish addition to the city skyline will add to the vitality and modernization of Toronto’s beautiful waterfront, and will help George Brown students to work, study, learn, and grow. We welcome students from around the world and we are excited to have them experience a uniquely Canadian building.” “The financial gift itself is remarkable and reflects a true commitment to the community. Seeing it used to develop Ontario’s first ever mass timber institutional building makes it exceptionally unique. Education is key to a positive future and a strong economy,” said Minister Dunlop. “This is an exciting moment for Toronto as we continue the hard work to rebuild our city post-pandemic. The new Limerlost Place will not only add to our growing waterfront, and to George Brown’s already established reputation but will help us move further in our climate action goals with its net-zero carbon emissions. This expansion and new building will bring in new jobs, new students and much more and I look forward to seeing it along our waterfront. Thank you to Jack Cockwell for his generous donation and for making this possible – people like Jack are city builders who share the same goals of making our city a better place for everyone,” said Mayor John Tory. President of the George Brown College Foundation, Dr. Cindy Gouveia stated, “The George Brown College Foundation is grateful for the thought leadership exhibited by donors like Jack Cockwell. This mass timber building will stand as a tangible testament to the positive impact on communities that can be achieved through philanthropy.” The landmark structure is designed to adjust to changing academic uses and is scheduled to be completed by summer 2024.

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### STATISTICS CANADA SAYS ECONOMY GREW 0.8% IN OCTOBER, UP 0.2% FROM SEPTEMBER



Real gross domestic product (GDP) rose 0.8% in October, following a 0.2% growth in September, as broad-based increases across sectors contributed to the fifth consecutive monthly expansion. Both goods-producing (+1.6%) and services-producing (+0.6%) industries were up, with 17 of 20 industrial sectors posting gains in October. Advance information indicates that real GDP increased 0.3% in November. Leading the growth were accommodation and food services, wholesale trade, construction and the arts and entertainment sectors, while the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector offset some of the gains. Owing to its preliminary nature, this estimate will be updated on February 1, 2022, with the release of the official GDP data for November 2021.

#### Manufacturing rebounds

The manufacturing sector rebounded 1.8% in October, more than offsetting a 1.5% contraction in September, with both durable and non-durable goods manufacturing contributing to the growth. Durable manufacturing grew 1.9% in October, led by a 9.3% rebound in transportation equipment manufacturing. The output of motor vehicle (+47.8%) and motor vehicle parts (+13.1%) manufacturing facilities bounced back strongly in October, largely offsetting September's declines, despite the ongoing global semiconductor chip shortage and other supply chain issues that have disrupted consistent production. Non-durable manufacturing was up 1.7% in October, more than offsetting a 1.3% drop in September, as the majority of subsectors expanded. Plastics and rubber products manufacturing (+5.8%) contributed the most to the growth, partly due to higher demand from motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts manufacturers. Further contributing to the growth were beverage and tobacco product (+6.3%), chemical (+1.9%) and food (+1.3%) manufacturing. Petroleum and coal product (-1.7%) and paper (-1.1%) manufacturing offset some of the gains.

manufacturing offset some of the gains.

#### Construction grows as all subsectors are up

Construction rose 1.6% in October, following four declines in the previous five months, as all forms of construction activity were up in the month. Residential building construction (+2.0%) led the growth in October as higher home alteration and improvement activities, along with an increase in multi-unit dwellings construction, more than offset continued declines in single-family homes construction.

Non-residential building construction expanded 1.3% in October, a fourth consecutive gain, as all types of non-residential building construction were up over the course of the month. Repair construction rose 1.9%, while engineering and other construction activities grew 1.2% in October.

#### Real estate grows on a country-wide increase in activity

The real estate and rental and leasing sector expanded 0.8% in October, the largest increase since December 2020. The output of offices of real estate agents and brokers jumped 8.8% in October as home resale activity rose from coast to coast, led by Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and Alberta. Legal services, which derive much of their activity from real estate transactions, increased 1.6% in October; the industry grew for the fourth month in a row. In addition to legal services, all industries comprising the professional, scientific and technical services sector (+1.2%) recorded growth as well. Computer systems design and related services (+1.5%), architectural, engineering and related services (+1.2%) and other professional, scientific and technical services including scientific research and development (+0.9%) contributed the most to the growth. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction keeps expanding Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction grew 1.5% in October, up for the sixth month in a row, as all three subsectors were up. The oil and gas extraction subsector grew 1.5% in October, up for the fifth time in six months. Oil sands extraction was up 3.9% as strong increases in crude bitumen and synthetic crude production in Alberta led the growth. Robust global demand, prices for energy products and the completion of planned maintenance activities at some oil sands upgraders contributed to the increase. Oil and gas extraction (except oil sands) contracted 1.8% as higher natural gas extraction was more than offset by lower crude petroleum extraction, particularly off of Canada's North Atlantic coast. Mining excluding oil and gas extraction rose 1.7% in October due to broad-based industry gains. Non-metallic mineral mining and quarrying increased 4.1%, driven by strength in potash mining (+5.1%). Metal ore mining rose 0.6% as iron ore mining (+3.6%) as well as copper, nickel, lead and zinc mining (+1.5%) were up, buoyed by increased exports; gold and silver ore mining (-4.6%) tempered some of the increase. Coal mining increased 1.6% in October.

### JASWANT SINGH CHAIL, 19, ARRESTED FOR THREATENING TO 'ASSASSINATE QUEEN'

#### CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The footage, which was obtained by The Sun, shows the man, thought to be the arrested suspect, holding a black crossbow and using a distorted voice as he makes threats down the camera.

The suspect, identified as Jaswant Singh Chail, uploaded the pre-recorded video to Snapchat on Christmas Day, 24 minutes before a man was arrested by the police inside the grounds of Windsor Castle. Known to friends as Jas, he used a filter to distort his voice and wore a hoodie and mask, an outfit thought to be inspired by the Star Wars, the Daily Mail report reported.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what I've done and what I will do. I will attempt to assassinate Elizabeth, Queen of the Royal Family. This is revenge for those who have died in the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It is also revenge for those who have been killed, humiliated and discriminated because of their race. I'm an Indian Sikh, a Sikh. My name was Jaswant Singh Chail, my name is Darth Jones," he says in the video. Sith may be a reference to the leading villains in Star Wars while Darth Jones may relate to James Earl Jones, who voiced Darth Vader. A framed picture of Star Wars character Darth Malgus was visible in the background of the clip, according to the Daily Mail report.

The police confirmed that a crossbow was found after the intruder was detained on December 25 in the castle grounds while the Queen was in residence. The police will be looking at how the intruder was able to scale the spiked perimeter fence surrounding the Berkshire castle's grounds in the first place.

It is believed he had a makeshift ladder to gain access from the Long Walk, which Royals frequently use because of its proximity to the Queen's private apartments, the report said.

Alongside the video, a message was also sent on Snapchat which said: "I'm sorry to all of those who I have wronged or lied to. If you have received this then my death is near. Please share this with whoever and if possible get it to the news if they're interested."

The suspect, who the police have not yet named, was later sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

### OSLER ADJUSTS VISITOR AND ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER POLICY TO RESPOND TO OMICRON SPREAD

With the Omicron COVID-19 variant spreading rapidly in our communities, effective Friday, December 24, 2021, William Osler Health System (Osler) is updating its Visitor and Essential Care Partner (ECP) Policy. An ECP is a family member who provides care at the bedside for a patient. Like many other hospitals, Osler has made the difficult decision to temporarily introduce some limitations to further protect patients and all those who work within its facilities.



What Visitors and ECPs need to know:

- \* With the exception of COVID-19 positive patients and patients suspected of having COVID-19, admitted patients can have one visitor a day.
- o It must be the same visitor for the duration of the patient's stay in the hospital.
- o Visits will be permitted between 12:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. for a maximum of two consecutive hours/per day.
- \* One ECP is allowed 24/7 for patients who meet Osler's ECP criteria.
- o It must be the same ECP for the duration of the patient's stay in the hospital.
- \* Visitors must be 12 years old or older and be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- \* Visitation for special patient populations e.g. pediatric, end-of-life patients, labour & delivery is available on Osler's website.

Osler understands the importance of family presence to a patient's healing and well-being and recognizes that a restricted Visitor and Essential Care Partner Policy may be difficult for patients and families. Visitors who have already booked a visit up and until December 26 at 8:00 pm are still able to visit as planned before the restrictions come into effect. Like other hospitals in the province, Osler continuously re-evaluates its Visitor and Essential Care Partner Policy with the goal of always balancing the needs of patients and their loved ones with the health and safety of all those who work at, and are cared for at Osler.

For more information on Osler's updated Visitor and Essential Care Partner Policy including mandatory COVID-19 vaccination for Visitors and ECPs, our Virtual Visitation Program, and how to schedule an in-person visit, please visit [www.williamoslerhs.ca/visiting-us](http://www.williamoslerhs.ca/visiting-us).

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.

### CHEMOTHERAPY, RADIATION MAY NOT BE NEEDED TO TREAT CANCER: NEW RESEARCH



A team of 11 scientists from the Cleveland Clinic in the US and a researcher from Allahabad University (AU) have found a way in which chemo and radiation therapy will not be required to kill cancer cells. The work of the team led by Yang Li, Professor of Cancer Biology at the Cleveland Clinic, and assisted by Munish Pandey, Assistant Professor at the Department of Biochemistry, AU, has been published in the prestigious journal 'Oncogene by Nature'. The research bears significance as the work promises a treatment using which the cancer patients will be saved from the side effects of chemo and radiation therapy.

After its successful experiment on rats, efforts are now being intensified to apply it on the human body.

Pandey said: "The study may give relief to cancer patient who undergoes chemotherapy. Chemotherapy uses radiation and other drugs which has many side effects and evoke immune system that causes severe pain and allergic reaction. The team has earlier developed knockout mice for miR-21 and the same was published in 'Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences' of the US (PNAS) journal. MicroRNA-21 (small non-coding RNA) is one of the most abundant microRNAs in mammalian cells that regulates apoptosis (programme cell death) and oncogenic effects. "I have worked along with the American scientists and invented an alternative to chemotherapy and drugs in the treatment of cancer, which damage normal cells along with cancer cells during cancer treatment. This successful experiment was done by a team of 11 scientists in the Cleveland Clinic and Yang Li. Our team while experimenting on mice injected its anti-sense into mice to make miR-21 ineffective." Following this, it was found that the tumour formed in the body of the rat gradually became smaller and some tumours disappeared completely.

This experiment went on for a year in America. However, it has not yet been used on the human body. Now the effort has been intensified to apply it on the human body, Pandey said.

He added that due to cancer, tumours are formed in the body which are eliminated through chemotherapy and drugs. In this process of treatment along with cancer cells, normal cells are also damaged and has a negative effect on the body. The group is working on other programmed cell death mechanisms, microRNAs and chemerich antigen T-cell therapy to tackle carcinogenicity in mice model.-IANS

### DISCONTINUATION OF OPEN HOUSE SESSIONS AT THE CONSULATE GENERAL OF INDIA, TORONTO, EFFECTIVE, FRIDAY, 24 DEC, 2021

In the light of recent guidelines on covid-19 restrictions, it has been decided to discontinue the Open House sessions w.e.f. Friday, 24 Dec, 2021. In case of any query related to Passport, Visa, Police Clearance Certificates, OCI and Attestation, applicants may raise the same on SAMPARK portal <https://www.cgitoronto.gov.in/sampark/index2.php>

ARE YOU FULLY VACCINATED & A CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WITH COVID-19? IF SO, PLEASE FOLLOW THESE RECOMMENDATIONS:



All household contacts, even if fully vaccinated, need to self-isolate for 10 days.



Monitor for COVID-19 symptoms\* - self-isolate & get tested if you develop any symptoms.



Get tested right away even if you have no symptoms & again after day 7 of this potential exposure.



Wear a well-fitted mask and keep a physical distance if going out to seek medical care.



Avoid crowded settings. Limit your contact with seniors, people with health conditions & other vulnerable residents.

\*Fever, chills, cough, trouble breathing, decrease or loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, tired, sore muscles or joints, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, abdominal pain, headache, pink eye, decrease or lack of appetite.

[toronto.ca/COVID19](http://toronto.ca/COVID19)

Toronto Public Health

IF YOU ARE FULLY VACCINATED & CAME IN A CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WITH COVID19, PLEASE FOLLOW THESE RECOMMENDATIONS (CITY OF TORONTO/ TWITTER).





## HOW FAKE INVOICES BELOW RS 50K LED TO THE RECOVERY RECORD WEALTH FROM PIYUSH JAIN

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The manufacturer (Trimuti Fragrance) was supplying the goods, but was not paying the applicable taxes. Ganpati Road Carriers used to generate fake invoices of below Rs 50,000. "We intercepted four trucks full of goods. We were surprised as all the invoices were of below Rs 50,000. For products which have value of more than Rs 50,000, you will have to generate e-way bills, otherwise the states will not allow the good-laden truck to enter their territory. This was the reason they created all the bills of below Rs 50,000 to give us a slip. But we got suspicious and discussed the matter with our seniors to conduct raids at the premises of the transporter and the manufacturer," said a source. Ganpati Road Carriers always generated multiple invoices in the name of nonexistent firms. It also used to collect cash payments against the sale/purchase of the goods and would return them to Trimuti Fragrance after deducting the commission. On December 22, the DGCI seized four goods laden trucks from outside the factory premises of Trimuti Fragrance, which were cleared from the factory without invoices or e-way bills, confirming the suspicion of the intelligence agencies. The officials found that all the finished products were being supplied without paying GST. The authorised signatory of the company confessed to this during interrogation. The GST officials also recovered 200 fake invoices issued by Ganpati Road Carriers. Recovery of bundles of notes After this, the authorities sent another team to the residential address of Odochem Industries, a private firm which supplied raw materials to Trimuti Fragrance Private Ltd.

During the search proceedings, huge amount of cash was found wrapped in paper. "It was a heap of cash. We had to take the help of officials from the State Bank of India, who suggested that without note counting machine, it was not possible to count the cash. Around 20 counting machines were then used. We kept on counting the cash for three days, till December 28, which came to around Rs 200 crore," an official said. The DGCI team then roped in the Income Tax Department as the matter was not just about avoiding Customs duty, but also involved tax evasion. The interrogation The DGCI team then detained Praveen Jain, the owner of Ganpati Road Carriers. But he did not give satisfactory answers to the probe team and even tried to mislead them. The team found that Piyush Jain, the brother-in-law of Praveen Jain, played a big role in the entire nexus. A team was immediately sent to the residence of Piyush in Kanpur from where he was detained. "We questioned him about the cash but he tried to avoid our all queries. We then took him to his paternal house in Kannauj to conduct a search and recovered 2.5 kg gold from there," the official said. How did he hide the cash and gold? Piyush Jain hid the cash in a secret chamber in the basement of his house. The cash was wrapped in paper. There were sacks full of cash, while gold bars were hidden in a cupboard. The DGCI officials have so far recovered 23 kg gold, sandalwood oil worth Rs 6 crore, 500 keys, 109 locks and 18 lockers. The financial intelligence agencies have claimed that Piyush Jain has four properties in Kanpur, seven in Kannauj, two in Mumbai, and one in Delhi.

## IS IT END OF THE ROAD FOR SOME IN G-23 OR REVIVAL AHEAD?

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The G-23 has now reduced to a few in numbers but the still evident force are Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Manish Tewari who have been at the forefront and have advocated reforms within the party. However, many leaders who had signed the explosive letter, have been adjusted within the party or have brought down their opposition and one of the signatory Veerappa Moily had openly said that "there is no G-23", while one of the signatories Jitin Prasada has left Congress to join the BJP. But on the party foundation day on Tuesday, the presence of Anand Sharma and Bhupinder Singh Hooda at party headquarters are giving mixed signals as the members of this group have been comfortable with Sonia Gandhi but have concerns on the working style of Rahul Gandhi. Ghulam Nabi Azad, while addressing a meeting recently, had categorically denied of leaving the party, saying, "I am 24 carat Congressman". The former Jammu Kashmir Chief Minister is addressing rallies in his home state while his supporters have resigned from the party to push him as CM candidate in the state. Some of the G-23 leaders feel and privately admit that it's the end of the road for them in the party till Rahul Gandhi is at the helm, but some say they will be in the party and not as a tenant as they have given their prime years to the party. However, the party is working hard to keep up a good strike rate in upcoming elections but Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday while addressing the party workers said, "Though there have been electoral losses, the party will keep up the fight", adding that electoral ups and downs are inevitable but what is enduring and lasting is her party's commitment to the service of all people of the diverse society.



The party has tried to reach out to dissenters and roped in Kamal Nath and for some time Priyanka Gandhi stepped in to resolve the crisis, but the issue has not been resolved yet. The G-23 wants consultations and prior discussions on the appointment of key posts before any decisions are taken. Though the party is holding elections for the President's post in 2022, the group is unlikely to challenge Rahul Gandhi, but if he pushes a proxy, then the contest is inevitable. While the G-23 doesn't have enough numbers to push for a change in the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest decision making body of the party, to remove or appoint a new President, as a two-third majority is required for this. "The CWC shall consist of the President of the Congress, Leader of the Congress Party in Parliament, and 23 other members of whom 12 will be elected by the AICC, as per rules prescribed by the Working Committee and the rest shall be appointed by the President.

## CHANDIGARH CIVIC POLLS: AAP PIPS BJP ON DEBUT; RULING PARTY'S MAYOR AMONG LOSERS

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The polling, which saw 60 per cent voter turnout, was held on December 24. Former Mayor Moudgil, who was allotted ticket at the last moment on the intervention of former MP Satya Pal Jain, lost to AAP's Jasbir Singh Laddi by 939 votes in Ward 21. Moudgil was facing anti-incumbency factor owing to lack of development works in his ward. He was also facing opposition from the party leadership in the city due to his insubordination while at the helm. Sitting Mayor Sharma lost his seat to Damanpreet Singh from Ward 17 by a margin of 828 votes. Gurpreet Singh of the Congress won by nine votes in Ward 34, while Harpreet Kaur Babla, wife of leader of opposition Devinder Singh Babla, won by 3,103 votes in Ward 10, the highest winning margin so far. Sarbajit Kaur of the BJP won by 502 votes in Ward 6, SAD's Hardeep Singh won by 2,145 votes in Ward 30, while former Congress Mayor Kamlesh also faced defeat. Chandigarh Congress President Subhash Chawla's son Sumit Chawla also lost. BJP President Arun Sood's seat, from where the party's Vijay Rana contested also lost. AAP's election campaign committee chairman Chandermukhi Sharma also lost his seat. Before the elections, the AAP had promised free 20,000 litre water per month per house, free public parking lots, free door-to-door waste collection, free primary education and mohalla clinics. Responding to the results, AAP leader Raghav Chadha said it is a "victory of Kejriwal's model of governance as people were yearning for a change for years." The BJP had swept the last civic body polls, winning 20 of 26 wards. Chandigarh had 26 seats in the previous civic elections.

## PM2.5 EMISSIONS IN DELHI CAME DOWN BY 22% IN 2019 AGAINST 2016: TERI

Despite the growth in contributing sectors, PM2.5 emissions for Delhi have decreased by 22% in 2019 as compared to 2016. This is due to the closure of the Badarpur station, the introduction of Euro-IV standards across India, a ban on 10-year-old diesel vehicles, construction of eastern and western peripheral highways, and shift of industries to CNG. This was stated by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in its latest report on the cost-effectiveness of interventions for the control of air pollution in Delhi. However, in the NCR, PM2.5 emissions have only increased by 3 per cent as a decrease in emissions from residential and agricultural burning sectors has been compensated by increased PM emissions in the industrial sector, the report mentioned. It added that the shift from petcoke to coal has on the one hand reduced SO2 emissions considerably, but has led to increased PM emissions due to the use of coal, which is high in ash content. However, change in only PM2.5 emissions cannot be directly linked to PM2.5 concentrations, because of meteorology and also because of secondary particulate formations linked to Sulfur Dioxide (SO2) and Nitric Oxide (NO) emissions. The projected emission inventory of 2019 has been fed into the air quality model (CMAQ) along with meteorological inputs from the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) model. Monthly PM2.5 concentrations were derived for the whole National Capital Region (NCR) including Delhi.

## WORLD

## HEATED DEBATE ERUPTS IN PAKISTAN OVER NAWAZ SHARIF'S POSSIBLE RETURN



A heated debate has erupted in Pakistan over the rumours of PML-N supremo and former Prime minister Nawaz Sharif's possible return to the country ahead of the next general elections, Geo News reported. PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, who is also the former premier's brother, categorically said that Nawaz Sharif will not return until he has fully recovered. In a statement issued on Saturday, Shehbaz Sharif said that Nawaz Sharif might stay in the UK legally until the immigration tribunal rules on his appeal against the British Home Office's rejection for extending his visa. Meanwhile, PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz, in a tweet, said the visa issue had again proved how her father was on the nerves of the members of the incumbent Imran Khan-led government, Geo News reported. "This fake government has accepted its defeat from Nawaz Sharif who is the present and future of Pakistan. By targeting a towering personality, the stature of a pygmy cannot be elevated," she tweeted. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Accountability and Interior Barrister, Shahzad Akbar questioned whether Nawaz Sharif could participate in the country's politics despite the Supreme Court declaring him guilty and disqualifying him for life and an accountability court convicting him in an NAB case. "To make Nawaz Sharif eligible (to run for the highest office of the country) again, it is being rumoured that the Bar Council is filing a petition in court," said Akbar. "It is not appropriate for the Bar Council to file a petition in court. I do not understand how it is legally viable to make him the Prime Minister of Pakistan for the fourth time." He said the President of the Supreme Court Bar Council had recently met Nawaz Sharif. "I believe the Supreme Court Bar Council taking up the issue is a political decision," he said. "The Supreme Court Bar is a professional body, so it should avoid indulging itself into political matters. Submitting an application from the council regarding Nawaz Sharif's case was not appropriate. They have not taken up the step so far. I call upon them to review it and avoid it."

## IS THE END OF COVID PANDEMIC IN SIGHT?

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Science explains it as the evolution of the Covid virus - changes in the genetic code (genetic mutations) in response to innate and acquired immune responses of hosts as well as vaccines and therapeutic treatments. Beginning with the wild type virus in China, SARS-CoV-2 swiftly mutated majorly into Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta strains, besides many others. The current variant in circulation around the globe is the Omicron variant -- touted as more transmissible than all other variants and with the potential of evading treatment. Two years on, is the end of Covid in sight? The Omicron variant, detected first in South Africa and Botswana in late November, presents a different picture though. In barely a month, the variant, with more than 30 mutations in its spike protein, has spread to over 100 countries as well as outpaced the Delta variant in many nations, including the US, the UK, Portugal and Ireland to become the dominant strain. "The emergence of the Omicron variant shows that the virus is not done just yet," Shahid Jameel, visiting professor at Ashoka University, told IANS. At the same time, Omicron also "shows that the virus is going towards increased transmission and milder disease. This is an indication of heading towards becoming an endemic," added Jameel, who is also a senior research fellow at Green Templeton College, Oxford University. According to Pavithra Venkatagopalan, Director, Covid Task Force, Rotary Club of Madras Next Gen, going forward the pandemic will transform into an epidemic, like flu, requiring annual shots. "It is likely that Covid-19 is well in course to be a seasonal disease, with periodic yearly surges around the globe and the world reacting to the same with an annual shot of vaccine to prevent the burden of disease among the population, much like that of seasonal influenza," Kiran G. Kulirankal, infectious disease physician, Amrita Hospital, Kochi, told IANS. While according to Kulirankal, the disease is unlikely to be "wiped out from the face of the earth permanently", an end to the pandemic also depends on vaccination rates across the world. "The unvaccinated are at a higher risk than the vaccinated population," Venkatagopalan told IANS. "Everytime, an unvaccinated person is infected, the virus can grow to higher quantities and stay in the body for a longer period. The longer it grows, the higher is the chance for replicating and possibly introducing more mutations. This might give the virus an advantage to spread," she explained. Although scientists worldwide brought out vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 in an unprecedented speed, rich nations raced to pre-order vaccines and stockpile them -- many of which turned waste as they expired.

While the rich countries hoarded onto every single medical facility - from vaccines to booster doses to antibody treatments and other healthcare equipment -- the poor nations scrambled to get vaccines, storage capacities as well as medical equipment. The World Health Organization (WHO) has since the beginning of the pandemic called out on wealthy nations against vaccine hoarding, warning that the behaviour may only "prolong" the pandemic, rather than "ending" it. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus recently issued a stern warning that "we must end the Covid pandemic in 2022". So far, about 67 per cent of people in high-income countries have been administered at least one vaccine dose, but not even 10 per cent in the low-income countries have received the first shot. "The pandemic will end when there is no further transmission," Jameel said, adding, "And that is unlikely to happen in the near future." Poorly vaccinated parts of the world will continue to show increased transmissions, giving more opportunities to the virus to mutate and novel variants to emerge, prolonging the pandemic. In such a scenario, Jameel predicts that "infection spikes will continue across the world, including in India" in 2022. "We will have to continue to protect ourselves using a mix of vaccines, masks, avoiding crowded indoor spaces, etc."





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