

Y MEDIA EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH SONU SOOD



**Y MEDIA
EXCLUSIVE**

'PARTY IS NOT IMPORTANT BUT THE POLICY IS'

'IF I GET INTO POLITICS, I'LL GIVE MY 100%'

'I DO NOT LIKE THE WORD 'RAJNEETI' AS
POLITICS IS NOT ABOUT COMING TO
POWER BUT SERVING PEOPLE SELFLESSLY'

'PUNJAB NEEDS TO WORK ON
HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT'

'I AM THE PLAYER WHO CAN HIT
SIX SIXES ON SIX BALLS'



SONU SOOD
Bollywood Actor, Producer & Philanthropist

YUDHVIR JASWAL
Group Editor - Y MEDIA

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CANADA ALIGNS MORE WITH INDIA, LESS WITH CHINA

POOJA LUTHRA

In an exclusive interview with the Canadian Press, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he came to power in 2015, hoping to deepen economic and political relations with China. Nevertheless, the effort faltered in 2017 when the two countries could not reach an agreement on launching free trade talks. Relations between the two countries plunged to an all-time low in late 2018 with the arrests of Meng and the two Michaels. In a year-end interview with The Canadian Press, PM Trudeau said Canada remains committed to working in tandem with allies to confront China. He said, "You, of course, continue to work with your partners and appreciate the support and alignment that is there. But we were able to do this by fulfilling the principles and the values (that) Canadians hold dear, and that's extremely important in this issue." In the mandate letters released by PM Trudeau for his new cabinet ministers, he asked Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly to "develop and launch a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy to deepen diplomatic, economic and defence partnerships and international assistance in the region." The "Indo-Pacific" label is widely viewed in foreign policy circles as shorthand that excludes China in discussions about the vast geopolitical entity on the other side of Canada's Pacific Ocean border.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 9



THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL INDIAN BEAUTY QUEEN: HARNAAZ SANDHU

Successful people often say that the first step toward achieving one's dreams is to have faith and walk confidently. Harnaaz Sandhu is one of them, purposefully and confidently achieving her goal. Harnaaz Sandhu's Twitter bio reads, "Shine like the whole Universe is yours," and it certainly is, as she was crowned the 70th Miss Universe at the Universe Dome in Eilat, Israel. Sandhu is the third winner of the title from India, after Sushmita Sen and Lara Dutta who won the prestigious spot in 1994 and 2000 respectively. Sandhu has previously won the Femina Miss India Punjab 2019 and Miss Diva Universe 2021 titles. She has also acted in Punjabi films such as "Yaara Diyan Poo Baran" and "Bai Ji Kuttange." Former Miss Universe Lara Dutta congratulated her on her victory, tweeting, "Congratulations @HarnaazSandhu03 !!!! Welcome to the club!!! We've waited 21 long years for this!!! You make us So So proud!!! A billion dreams come true!! @MissDivaOrg @MissUniverse" Following Sushmita Sen, actress Lara Dutta Bhupathi became the second Indian to win the title. She was crowned the 49th Miss Universe in Nicosia, Cyprus. She later made her Bollywood debut in 2003 with the film "Andaaz." Lara was last seen in the new film "Bell Bottom," which stars Akshay Kumar, Vaani Kapoor, and Huma Qureshi.

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Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX - ONTARIO ELECTION, 2022



PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES: 38%	NDP: 28%	LIBERAL: 25%
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THE ONLINE POLL SURVEYED 1,000 CANADIANS OVER THE AGE OF 18 BETWEEN DEC. 10 AND 13 THROUGH LEGER'S ONLINE PANEL. A COMPARABLE PROBABILITY SURVEY OF THIS SIZE HAS A MARGIN OF ERROR OF PLUS OR MINUS 3.1 PER CENT.

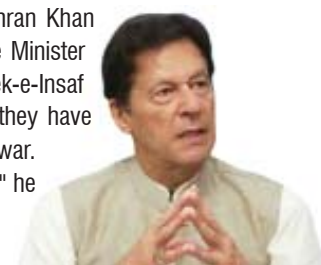
HOME SALES IN CANADA RISES 0.6%, AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE HIT ALL-TIME HIGH OF \$720,850: CREA

Statistics released today by the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) show national home sales edged up slightly in November, holding onto all of the gains made in October. Highlights: National home sales rose 0.6% on a month-over-month basis in November.

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WARNING BELLS FOR PM IMRAN KHAN'S RULING PARTY

(IANS): Senior Pakistan TV anchor Kamran Khan has said that the biggest proof of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government's unpopularity is that they have lost the local government polls in Peshawar. "If you lose Peshawar, you lose Pakistan," he said, Friday Times reported.



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2022 MUST BE YEAR TO END COVID-19: WHO

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), has called on the world to pull together to end the Covid-19 pandemic within the next year. Addressing reporters here on Monday, Tedros said the "fastest way" to get back to normal is to make "hard decisions," this festive season amid the Omicron Covid-19 variant's quick spread.

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INDIA CLEARS PROPOSAL TO INCREASE LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE OF WOMEN TO 21

The Union Cabinet has passed a proposal to increase the minimum legal age for marriage of women from 18 to 21 years. Sources said the government approved the proposal in a meeting of the cabinet on Wednesday. Currently, the legal minimum age of marriage for men is 21 years and 18 for women. Sources said the proposal was based on the recommendation of NITI Aayog task force headed by Jaya Jaitley. Senior officials of the health ministry, women and child development ministry, and law ministry were members of the task force set up in June last year.

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Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

- **Pfizer Pill, Paxlovid, Becomes 1st US-Authorized Oral Antiviral Home Covid Treatment.**
- **Omicron Variant Now Accounts For 91% Of Coronavirus Cases In Ontario.**
- **All Ontarians 18+ Are Now Eligible For Covid-19 Booster Appointments; To Book Visit ontario.ca/bookvaccine Or Call 1-833-943-3900.**
- **All Travellers Will Once Again Need To Get A Covid-19 Molecular Test Before Returning To Canada, Regardless Of Trip Duration.**
- **90.5% Of Ontarians 12+ Have Received One Dose & 87.9% Have Two Doses.**

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STATISTICS CANADA SAYS ANNUAL INFLATION RATE STAYS AT 18-YEAR HIGH OF 4.7% IN NOVEMBER

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 4.7% on a year-over-year basis in November, matching the increase in October.

Higher prices for gasoline (+43.6%), furniture (+8.7%) and food (+4.4%) were the main drivers of growth in headline CPI. Excluding gasoline, the CPI rose 3.6% year over year, the same as in October. On a monthly basis, the CPI edged up 0.2% in November, following a 0.7% increase in October.

On a seasonally adjusted monthly basis, the CPI increased 0.3%. Prices rose in all eight major components on a year-over-year basis in November. Transportation and shelter prices contributed the most to the increase in the CPI.

Year over year, prices for goods (+6.9%) rose at a faster pace in November compared with October (+6.5%). Prices for services (+2.9%), however, grew at a slower pace than in October (+3.2%), moderating the price growth in the CPI. Declines in prices for cellular services (-17.9%) contributed to the slowdown in the increase in service prices.

Inflation is often compared to changes to average wages. In November 2021, the CPI rose 4.7% on a year-over-year basis. Wage data, which maintains employment composition by occupation and tenure, from the Labour Force Survey found that wages rose 2.8% during the same period, meaning that, on average, prices rose faster than wages, and Canadians experienced a decline in purchasing power.

Grocery prices increase at a faster pace

Year over year, shoppers paid more for groceries, as prices for food purchased from stores rose at a faster pace in November (+4.7%) than in October (+3.9%). This is the largest increase since January 2015 when prices went up by 5.4%. Fresh vegetable prices increased 2.3% in November, the first yearly increase since February 2021. Prices for other fresh vegetables, including cucumbers, mushrooms and broc-



coli, drove the increase, rising 6.4% on a year-over-year basis as a result of higher shipping costs and supply chain disruptions.

Prices for fresh or frozen beef increased 15.4% year over year in November. Poor crop yields resulting from unfavourable weather conditions have made it more expensive for farmers to feed their livestock, in turn raising prices for consumers.

Regional highlights

Year over year, prices rose at a faster pace in November than in October in four provinces, with prices increasing the most in Prince Edward Island (+7.0%), mainly due to higher heating costs. Prices in Saskatchewan grew at a faster rate, largely the result of higher prices for natural gas (+13.4%).

The slowdown in British Columbia, which is unrelated to the flooding as most prices were collected prior to the weather events, is partly due to lower prices for clothing and footwear (-2.4%).

PM IMRAN KHAN SAYS PAKISTAN'S WOUNDS ARE SELF-INFLICTED

During the 20 years of the war on terror, all the wounds Pakistan suffered were self-inflicted, according to Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, Samaa TV reported. At a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday, he said that every nation has its fair share of highs and lows, so did Pakistan. "When you move away from your principles and make materialistic decisions it will have consequences." He recalled that the previous government chose dollars over human life. "And we can't hold anyone else responsible for what they did." The Pakistan Premier reassured that Pakistan will soon come out of its problems. "We just have to fix the system, bring a rule of law and meritocracy. We need to end this elite capture." "But this won't happen overnight. We need to work together on this," the PM highlighted, adding that Pakistan will soon come out of its current account problem and achieve growth that was last seen in the 1970s, the report said. But throughout these years, Pakistan's reputation, internationally, has gotten better despite facing challenges as severe as the coronavirus pandemic. "We shouldn't be under the impression that we're out of the woods, but, undoubtedly, the image of the country has improved. And this was seen in the OIC conference." The Prime Minister remarked that Pakistan's stance was not just accepted by the world but the country's objectives for Afghanistan were adopted by European nations and even the World Health Organisation. "We need to understand this. Whether you like the Taliban government or not, you have to think about the 40 million people who live in the country. Their lives are at stake." This is a humanitarian crisis and it's manmade, he pointed out. "We can avert it by defreezing Afghanistan's assets and improving liquidity." (IANS)

CFIB AND RESTAURANTS CANADA ISSUE OPEN LETTER TO PREMIERS CALLING FOR MORE BUSINESS SUPPORT AMID OMICRON FEARS

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) and Restaurants Canada issued a joint open letter to all Premiers urging them to provide financial support to small businesses facing renewed lockdowns, restrictions and loss of business in the face of the Omicron variant. The full statement is copied below.

Dear Premiers:

We are writing to ask for your immediate help. With many public health officials ringing Omicron alarm bells across Canada, many small businesses are, once again, deeply affected. Most provinces have now announced a fresh round of restrictions, on top of the ongoing restrictions like vaccine passport requirements that exist across the country. In addition, the panic that has set in among the public has meant that, even in areas that have not added fresh restrictions, many more consumers are staying home, cancelling reservations and events and doing their shopping online. Even before Omicron fears, nearly two-thirds of small firms across Canada have not seen sales return to normal levels. And of this group, nearly a quarter report their business may fail within the next six months.

The need for significant and immediate financial help is critical. You may have been led to believe that with the passage of Bill C-2, the federal government has renewed the wage and rent subsidy system that has helped tens of thousands of businesses survive the pandemic so far. This is incorrect. The new federal support programs are incredibly limited in scope. CFIB's pre-Omicron data showed that 80 per cent of small businesses in need of help will no longer qualify. The more generous Tourism and Hospitality Program requires a 40 per cent loss both in the current month and over the past 12 months. And the Hardest Hit Recovery Program for other businesses requires a 50 per cent current and 12 month loss to qualify. Consider the following:

A restaurant that has a 35 per cent revenue decline will now receive zero support from Ottawa.

A retailer with a 45 per cent revenue decline will now receive zero support from Ottawa.

The federal "lockdown" support, which increases the amount of subsidy, is only available to businesses that have much of their operations fully locked down. Those facing a 50 per cent capacity restriction, are ineligible.

Put frankly, tens of thousands of small firms across Canada will receive no support from governments while government restrictions dramatically reduce their ability to serve customers and public health warnings frighten many consumers into staying home.

We urge you to ensure public health officials do not heighten the panic and fear among the public. We urge you to reconsider new or existing restrictions. We urge you to lift restrictions at their earliest opportunity.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and a Joyful New Year





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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!



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Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

OMICRON BECOMES DOMINANT VARIANT IN US,
ACCOUNTS FOR OVER 73% OF NEW CASES

Omicron has become the dominant Covid-19 variant in the US, accounting for over 73 per cent of new weekly cases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) latest estimates. The infection cases caused by the Omicron variant jumped from 12.6 per cent of all infection cases in the week ending December 11 to 73.2 per cent in the week ending December 18, the CDC estimates published on Monday showed. In the week ending December 4, Omicron only accounted for 0.7 per cent of all the cases. The Omicron variant is spreading rapidly nationwide and has been found in at least 48 states till date, since the first case in the country was detected in California on December 1. The unprecedented infectiousness of the Omicron variant and its possible ability to evade the immune system have stoked concerns across the nation. However, experts said preliminary data suggest the new variant appear to cause less severe symptoms and hospitalisations. Covid-19 cases, deaths and hospitalisations have continued to surge in the US, leading to the cancellation of large events including sports games and live concerts. Some colleges have shifted back to online classes and exams for the rest of the semester to make students go back home earlier. The country is averaging about 130,000 new cases daily, a 10 per cent increase from the previous week, according to the CDC estimates.



WEAK IMMUNE SYSTEM, OLD AGE CAN SPUR DELTA, OMI-
CRON CO-INFECTIONS: EXPERTS

A weaker immune system, old age and comorbidities can increase the risk of co-infection from Omicron and Delta variants of Covid-19 at the same time, said health experts on Monday. Last week, scientists at the UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) noted that some people have become infected by both the Delta and Omicron variants that are "operating separately as two epidemics" at the same time, making them seriously ill. The possibility of a person being co-infected with both Delta and Omicron at the same time "is rare", Dr Dipu T.S, Clinical Associate Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases, Amrita Hospital, told IANS. However, "it's not impossible to have confection of two strains, especially if the patient has an immuno-compromised status", he added. Anecdotal reports have also suggested episodes of co-infection with two different strains of Covid-19 virus in the past. "Even though Covid infections normally only involve one mutant strain, in extremely rare cases, it is also possible that two strains strike at the same time," Dr Namita Jaggi, Chairperson of Labs and Infection control at Artemis Hospital, Gurugram, told IANS. But can the combination of both variants lead to a super strain?

2022 MUST BE YEAR TO END COVID-19: WHO

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"Canceling an event is better than canceling a life. It is better to cancel now and celebrate later than to celebrate now and mourn later," he added. "All of us want to get back to normal... We need to protect ourselves now," Xinhua news agency quoted the WHO chief as further saying. He also asked the governments to exercise maximum caution in the coming weeks and avoid events with large gatherings. Since the Omicron variant was first discovered in South Africa, it has now been reported in 89 countries and the number of cases is doubling in 1.5 to three days in areas with community transmission, according to the WHO.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS & A WONDERFUL
NEW YEAR 2022

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Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX- 5 STATES ELECTION, INDIA

Captain Amarinder announces party’s alliance with BJP



Punjab Lok Congress (PLC) chief Amarinder Singh on Friday announced his party’s alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the 2022 Assembly polls in Punjab.

“Met union minister & @BJP4India in charge for Punjab, Shri @gssjodhpur in New Delhi today to chalk out the future course of action ahead of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. We have formally announced a seat adjustment with the BJP for the 2022 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections,” the former Congress leader and two-time Punjab Chief Minister said in a tweet, after meeting Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who is also the state BJP in charge.

After meeting Shekhawat, Singh said: “Our alliance is confirmed. Only seat-sharing talks are going on. We will see who will contest which seats and winnability are the sole criteria for deciding seats.

“We will support the BJP wherever it will contest... and it will support us on the seats we will be contesting. We are prepared and will win the election... 101 per cent sure of winning the election. We are not in contest with anyone,” the former Punjab chief minister said.

“After seven rounds of talks, today I confirm that BJP and PLC are going to fight the upcoming Punjab Assembly elections together. Seats-sharing and other things will be decided later,” Shekhawat said after the meeting. Later, the former Punjab chief minister tweeted photos with Shekhawat and said: “Met union minister & @BJP4India in charge for Punjab, Shri @gssjodhpur in New Delhi today to chalk out the future course of action ahead of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. We have formally announced a seat adjustment with the BJP for the 2022 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections.” Shekhawat also tweeted a picture of the meeting with Singh. He said, “Captain Amarinder Singh, former Chief Minister of Punjab and founder of Punjab Lok Congress, today visited Delhi residence. His long political experience is reflected in discussions. His priority is the interest of the people of Punjab. We had a pleasant exchange of views in this regard.”

SUKHBIR ACCEPTS CHALLENGE OF FALSE CASE AGAINST MAJITHIA

Former Punjab Deputy Chief Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Badal on Tuesday declared that his party "accepts the challenge of a false case against one of the party's leaders Bikram Singh Majithia". He warned "those abusing their official positions and playing havoc with the rule of law" to be ready to face legal consequences.

Badal also came down heavily against the state government for what he called "their playing brazen politics over the sensitive issue of the sacrilege of sacred Sikh scriptures". He warned against a deep rooted conspiracy to vitiate the atmosphere of peace and communal harmony in Punjab. "The peace and communal harmony which we preserved for 15 years suddenly faces a danger. SAD followed the great Gurus' message of 'Sarbat da bhalat'. We will continue to strive for preserving peace and communal brotherhood."

"Sachkhand Shri Harmandar Sahib is a sacred shrine where people from all religions come to pay obeisance. It's a shrine of peace and communal brotherhood. But someone is clearly not happy about it and is conspiring both against this sacred ideal and against peace in Punjab," said Sukhbir.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

“On behalf of the City of Mississauga and Members of my Council, I would like to send my best wishes for a wonderful holiday season. Let's continue to work together to protect the progress we have made and the health of our friends, family and neighbors. As we look to the New Year ahead, I wish you and your families nothing but peace, happiness and good health. Happy Holidays and Happy New Year Mississauga!"

Bonnie Crombie
Mayor of Mississauga

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Seasons Greetings

Warmest wishes for the holiday season,
with good health, happiness and prosperity
throughout the coming year!

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

Ron Starr

Councillor Ward 6

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Putin's visit to India: Deepening convergences and managing differences

BY KANWAL SIBAL

NEW DELHI, (IANS): Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India on December 6 was important for a variety of reasons. Bilaterally, it helped to address some misgivings that the two countries were drifting apart. Geopolitics and defence had bound the two countries together for decades but the perception had developed that on both counts the relationship was not as strong as before.

Geopolitics was seen as compelling both sides to strengthen partnerships with countries viewed respectively as antagonistic towards them. Russia's ties with the US, always fraught, have worsened to the point of virtual hostility at present. At the same time, India's ties with the US have vastly improved. Russia sees India as drifting steadily into the US orbit at the cost of the traditional independence of its foreign policy. India rightly believes that its increasingly close ties with the US are independent of its ties with Russia and serve the new political, economic and military requirements as we rise as a country and have the ambition to play a larger role in international governance.

Russia is being subjected to multiple pressures by the US and Europe towards its west. India is not seen by Russia as being in the same power league as China as a partner to resist these pressures and maintain its space to act in defence of its interests, both in the UN and outside. India cannot cover Russia's flanks as China can do. India is also not in phase with the development of close China-Russia ties within the Russia-India-China dialogue forum, BRICS and the SCO, as India's own relations with China have deteriorated very sharply. The deepening of Russia-China ties, especially its military dimension in the context of close China-Pakistan ties, is a matter of some concern to India, but we have possibly a better appreciation of Russia's compulsions than Russia has of the dynamics of our improved ties with the US.

Russia's opposition to the concept of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad is the case in point. India has been slow in embracing both, with our relations with China in mind principally, but also Russia to some extent. India cannot objectively count on Russia to counter the Chinese in its expansionist policies in the maritime domain, in our neighbourhood in general and its unilateralism on our territorial disputes. With the US now treating China as an adversary and seeking to counter its maritime expansionism, not to mention reducing dependence on the critical supply chains it controls, India has objective reasons to cooperate with the US to protect shared interests. The US has the capacity to strengthen our maritime surveillance capabilities in the Indian Ocean in ways Russia cannot. With Japan facing Chinese expansionism in the western Pacific and Australia subject to its bullying tactics, the case for Quad has got progressively strengthened in India's calculus. More so, as India's concept of the Quad goes beyond maritime security and covers the domain of new technologies,



INDIA IS ALSO NOT IN PHASE WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLOSE CHINA-RUSSIA TIES WITHIN THE RUSSIA-INDIA-CHINA DIALOGUE FORUM, BRICS AND THE SCO, AS INDIA'S OWN RELATIONS WITH CHINA HAVE DETERIORATED VERY SHARPLY. THE DEEPENING OF RUSSIA-CHINA TIES, ESPECIALLY ITS MILITARY DIMENSION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLOSE CHINA-PAKISTAN TIES, IS A MATTER OF SOME CONCERN TO INDIA, BUT WE HAVE POSSIBLY A BETTER APPRECIATION OF RUSSIA'S COMPULSIONS THAN RUSSIA HAS OF THE DYNAMICS OF OUR IMPROVED TIES WITH THE US. RUSSIA'S OPPOSITION TO THE CONCEPT OF THE INDO-PACIFIC AND THE QUAD IS THE CASE IN POINT. INDIA HAS BEEN SLOW IN EMBRACING BOTH, WITH OUR RELATIONS WITH CHINA IN MIND PRINCIPALLY, BUT ALSO RUSSIA TO SOME EXTENT. INDIA CANNOT OBJECTIVELY COUNT ON RUSSIA TO COUNTER THE CHINESE IN ITS EXPANSIONIST POLICIES IN THE MARITIME DOMAIN, IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD IN GENERAL AND ITS UNILATERALISM ON OUR TERRITORIAL DISPUTES. WITH THE US NOW TREATING CHINA AS AN ADVERSARY AND SEEKING TO COUNTER ITS MARITIME EXPANSIONISM, NOT TO MENTION REDUCING DEPENDENCE ON THE CRITICAL SUPPLY CHAINS IT CONTROLS, INDIA HAS OBJECTIVE REASONS TO COOPERATE WITH THE US TO PROTECT SHARED INTERESTS. THE US HAS THE CAPACITY TO STRENGTHEN OUR MARITIME SURVEILLANCE CAPABILITIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN IN WAYS RUSSIA CANNOT.

diversification of critical supply chains, climate change, disaster relief, education and anti-Covid vaccines.

Russia's positions on the Taliban and Pakistan's role in Afghanistan have not been in alignment with ours. This is a sensitive area for us given the ideology of the Taliban, Pakistan's ambitions to oust us from Afghanistan and terrorism related security issues emanating from the Af-Pak region that we face. Russia has not always involved us in discussions it has initiated on Afghanistan, believing that our presence will prevent constructive cooperation by Pakistan. India has also had concerns that the expanding Russia-China strategic ties may lead to Russia accommodating China's strategic interests in Pakistan as part of a give and take involving each other's interests and concerns. It is in this broad context that Putin's visit was timely. It had become necessary to change the developing narrative of gaps developing in India-Russia ties. This risked narrowing our foreign policy space, including in dealing with the US that remains uncomfortable with our close ties with Russia, especially in the defence sector where its lobbies want it to replace Russia as our principal defence partner. Putin's gesture in travelling to India, albeit for a few hours, despite pandemic concerns and the immediacy of the Ukrainian crisis has helped to counter the narrative of the two countries inexorably drifting apart. With the first supplies of the S-400 air defence system reaching India in December, India has asserted its fundamental position that it will maintain defence ties with Russia independent of any US concerns, as they serve our vital national interest. During the visit another "significant" new contract for the manufacture of AK 203 assault rifles in India was signed, despite the overhang of CAATSA. Apparently, two further contracts will need to be signed before production can begin. Significantly, this is the first major contract in defence manufacturing in the "Atmanirbhar" framework. The AK 203 will equip our entire armed forces, including the para-military forces eventually. A complete transfer of technology is envisaged. The RELOS agreement on logistics could not be signed as expected, and this is because the Russian side apparently added a para to the already approved text at the last minute. It should be signed at the earliest appropriate occasion. The Kamov-226 contract, already delayed, still awaits finalisation. India is now much more demanding on technology transfer issues.

Apart from the extension of the Defence Cooperation Agreement for another 10 years-from 2021 to 2031, the Defence and Foreign Ministers of both countries held their inaugural 2+2 dialogue just before the Modi-Putin meeting. Notwithstanding CAATSA, Raksha Mantri mentioned India's requirement of closer military cooperation with Russia, expressed concerns about militarisation and expansion of armament in our neighbourhood and the completely unprovoked aggression on our northern border (words intentionally made public to send a message to China that India was raising these concerns with Russia knowing its increasingly close ties with China and the shared membership of the three countries in RIC, BRICS, SCO etc.), adding cryptically that India "seeks partners who are sensitive and responsive to India's expectations and requirements". India has such 2+2 dialogues with the US, Japan and Australia but not with Russia despite our Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership with it. This anomalous situation has now been corrected. That this dialogue to better coordinate our defence and foreign policies has taken place when our relations with China have slumped and its troops are massed on our border has political significance.

Raksha Mantri proposed greater engagements in the Indian Ocean region where Russia's thinking is not in alignment with ours. It remains somewhat inexplicable why despite several discussions between India and Russia at Foreign Ministers level, the reality of Chinese expansionism in Asia where China has encroached into the Russian sphere of influence in Central Asia where Chinese investments are more than four times of that of Russia and China's access to oil and gas of the region reduces the degree of its dependence on Moscow, as well as China's territorial claims on India and resort to aggression of which it has had a bitter past experience, Russia continues to

believe that the Indo-Pacific and Quad are America's ploys to create exclusive blocs and draw India into a military alliance against China. Russia still employs the term Asia-Pacific instead of the Indo-Pacific, a term earlier invented by the Americans and which did not include India as part of "Asia".

It has been noticed that Putin himself has been more prudent in his comments on the Indo-Pacific than Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. He appears to have been satisfied with Modi's enunciation of the Indo-Pacific concept at the Shangri La dialogue at Singapore in 2018 as an inclusive one and has recognised that India is free to make its choices. Any military alliance between India and the US would no doubt certainly rock bilateral ties seriously. (Interestingly, Russia has not reacted adversely to the western "Quad" of India, UAE, Israel and the US). That, according to Kremlin aide Ushakov, during the Putin-Xi call on December 15 both leaders expressed negative sentiments about the Quad (and AUKUS) is surprising coming from the Russian side.

That Putin briefed Xi on his talk with Modi and evoked the possibility of an RIC summit suggests his concern at the state of India-China ties, the need for Russia to take some initiative to prevent a further deterioration and some signal from Modi that India would not be averse to some form of a Russian effort to sensitise China against its aggressive moves on the Indian border. One cannot envisage a RIC summit unless the status quo ante in Ladakh is restored, and if China were ready to do that, it would much rather take credit directly with India rather than build Russia's diplomatic stature.

On Afghanistan, Russia's own calculations in reaching out to the Taliban and Pakistan have gone awry with the sudden collapse of the Ghani government and the take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban without resistance. This has derailed the project of an inclusive government in Kabul and raised concerns about the fall out of terrorism and radicalism in Central Asia. This has drawn India and Russian positions closer, as reflected in Putin's public remarks in New Delhi and in the joint statement which also includes a reference to the LeT as a threat. A Permanent Consultative Mechanism on Afghanistan between the National Security Councils of both countries has been established. Energy cooperation with Russia is set to expand, with more Indian investments in Russian Arctic gas and oil fields. A 2019-2024 Road Map for Cooperation in Hydrocarbons has been agreed. With the Arctic route potentially opening up, the Vladivostok-Chennai maritime corridor, whose feasibility study is being conducted, could well become a major economic Indo-Pacific link between India and Russia. With India ready to make investments in developing Russia's Far East, to facilitate which India has offered a \$1 billion credit line, the prospect of boosting the present low level of bilateral trade has improved. Russia cannot but be concerned about next-door China increasing its presence in the region. Consequently, it would objectively favour more Indian presence and involvement. At the coming Vibrant Gujarat event several governors from this region have been invited to participate.

To boost economic cooperation, Russian companies have been invited to participate in 13 key sectors in India, taking advantage of the Production Linked Incentive Scheme, especially in the steel sector. Accepting RuPay and Russia's MIR cards within the national payments structures is being explored, including UPI and the FPS of the Bank of Russia.

Many positives have emerged from Putin's visit, with a sense of assurance that despite being pulled geopolitically in different directions and Cold War-like tensions that have erupted, that both countries have to manage together, some basic understandings between the two countries on the fundamentals of long standing mutually beneficial ties have endurance.

Disclaimer: 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 is reducing social gathering limits

Indoor
10

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25

RESTRICTIONS COME INTO EFFECT ON 12:01 A.M. ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2021

Ontario is introducing a 50% capacity limit in select indoor public settings

FOOD OR DRINK ESTABLISHMENTS AND STRIP CLUBS

SHOPPING MALLS

PERSONAL CARE SERVICES

GYMS AND PERSONAL TRAINING

RETAILERS (INCLUDING GROCERY STORES AND PHARMACIES)

INDOOR RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

RESTRICTIONS COME INTO EFFECT ON 12:01 A.M. ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2021

MORE RESTRICTIONS IN ONTARIO AS OMICRON THREAT LOOMS.

ONTARIO INTRODUCES ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO CONTAIN OMICRON VARIANT

In response to the rapidly-spreading and highly transmissible Omicron variant, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is applying additional public health and workplace safety measures, including capacity and social gathering limits. These measures will help curb transmission and continue to safeguard Ontario's hospital and ICU capacity as the province continues to rapidly accelerate its booster dose rollout.

"Throughout this entire pandemic, we've never faced an enemy like Omicron given how quickly it spreads," said Premier Doug Ford. "We need to do everything we can to slow its spread as we continue to dramatically ramp up capacity to get as many booster shots into arms as possible. Doing so is the best way to safeguard our hospital and intensive care units."

The latest modelling suggests that the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant could put additional strain on Ontario's hospital capacity, making it critical to slow the spread as the government dramatically increases vaccine capacity and expands eligibility for third booster doses. The province recently doubled its vaccination capacity and continues to ramp up further to get as many vaccines into arms as possible. Over 156,000 doses were administered on December 16, 2021 with capacity increased to 200,000 to 300,000 in the coming days.

To further strengthen its response to Omicron and reduce opportunities for close contact as the province gets as many vaccines into arms as possible, Ontario is introducing a 50 per cent capacity limit in the following indoor public settings:

Restaurants, bars and other food or drink establishments and strip clubs; Personal care services; Personal physical fitness trainers;

Retailers (including grocery stores and pharmacies); Shopping malls; Non-spectator areas of facilities used for sports and recreational fitness activities (e.g. gyms); Indoor recreational amenities; Indoor clubhouses at outdoor recreational amenities; Tour and guide services; and Photography studios and services; and Marinas and boating clubs.

These limits do not apply to any portion of a business or place that is being used for a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite, or ceremony. Businesses or facilities will also need to post a sign stating the capacity limits that are permitted in the establishment.

To further reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the Omicron variant, additional protective measures are also being applied:

The number of patrons permitted to sit at a table will be limited to 10 people and patrons will be required to remain seated in restaurants, bars and other food or drink establishments, meeting and event spaces and strip clubs.

Bars and restaurants, meeting and event spaces and strip clubs will be required to close by 11 p.m. Take out and delivery will be permitted beyond 11 p.m.

Dancing will not be allowed except for workers or performers.

Food and/or drink services will be prohibited at sporting events; concert venues, theatres and cinemas; casinos, bingo halls and other gaming establishments; and horse racing tracks, car racing tracks and other similar venues. The sale of alcohol will be restricted after 10 p.m. and consumption of alcohol in businesses or settings after 11 p.m.

ALMOST HALF CANADIANS SAY THEIR OWN PROVINCE IS DOING A POOR JOB DISTRIBUTING RAPID TESTS: ANGUS REID SURVEY

COVID-19: CANADIANS CALL FOR MORE RAPID ACCESS TO RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS AS OMICRON FUELS MORE HOLIDAY SEASON ANXIETY

It's beginning to look a lot like (last) Christmas. With cases of the COVID-19 Omicron variant surging, governments are once again scrambling to provide guidelines and rules to navigate the holiday season.

One new element this year is what has been described as a "frenzied" search for rapid antigen tests, which many were hoping would add an extra layer of security to holiday gatherings.

Amid inconsistent supply and evolving distribution plans, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds nearly half of Canadians dissatisfied with the responses of their respective provincial governments on this file.

Overall, 46 per cent of residents say their own province has done a poor job providing rapid tests where they are needed. This proportion rises to majority levels in Alberta (54%), Manitoba (58%) and Ontario (52%), and is the plurality view in British Columbia and Quebec.

Opinions are most positive in Atlantic Canada, where hundreds of thousands of tests were rushed out to schools and workplaces in recent weeks. Some provinces have faced criticism for a perceived unwillingness to distribute stockpiles of tests that were delivered by the federal government, and in many cases, for requiring Canadians to pay costs for rapid testing. Three in five Canadians (63%) say their province should endeavour to make tests free and universal, while about one-in-five (18%) would prefer tests are used only to monitor higher risk spaces, conserving supply. Indeed, fully one-quarter (26%) say they have wanted to take a rapid test at some point during the pandemic but have been unable to find or afford one.

PEEL REGION URGING COMMUNITY TO GET VACCINATED AS OMICRON VARIANT SPREADS



Starting on Monday, December 20, adults aged 18+ will be able to book their booster dose, if has been approximately 3 months (84 days) after a second dose, through the following: COVID-19 vaccination portal or Calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY 1-866-797-0007), at select pharmacies and Primary care providers?like doctor's offices and walk-in clinics.

Vaccinate children 5-11 years old:

This is a busy time of year for parents, but Peel region encourages all to get their children vaccinated as soon as they can to help protect them over the upcoming school break. With cases rising in the province, it is very important for all eligible Peel residents to have the protection that comes with vaccination. Through consultation with pediatric experts (pediatricians and child life experts), we are implementing strategies to prepare staff and volunteers, optimize clinic operations and flow, and create a fun and family-friendly vaccination experience at all our clinics. "We are ready," Lisa Dhillon, Public Health Communications Outreach Liaison said.

Wait times at vaccine clinics

Vaccine clinics in Peel are currently experiencing longer than normal wait times. Please note they are experiencing lineups and wait times, and appreciate your patience and willingness to get your booster dose. Please be kind to staff and others in line and on the phone. Walk-ins for first and second doses, as well as children 5 to 11 years old, are accepted based on clinic capacity and priority will be given to those with appointments. Pharmacies and doctor's offices are also offering the COVID-19 vaccine.

ONTARIO LAUNCHING HOLIDAY POP-UP TESTING BLITZ; FREE RAPID TESTS BEING PROVIDED AT NEARLY 150 LOCATIONS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

To provide an additional layer of protection against COVID-19 and variants including Omicron, the province has launched a holiday testing blitz to offer rapid antigen tests to individuals free of charge at pop-up sites across the province, as well as at select LCBO stores across Ontario. This initiative is part of the government's enhanced COVID-19 testing strategy to mitigate the increased risk of transmission over the holiday season. "Working with local health partners, community organizations, and businesses, we are bringing free rapid testing directly to Ontarians during the holiday season by deploying pop-up teams in priority areas," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "Rapid antigen screening is an additional layer of protection to proactively identify cases and mitigate community transmission, while we continue to strengthen our vaccine rollout to protect ourselves and loved ones." Throughout December to mid-January, two million rapid tests will be provided free of charge at pop-up testing sites in high-traffic settings such as malls, retail settings, holiday markets, public libraries and transit hubs, as well as providing vaccine education. Pop-up teams will be deployed at locations across the province, some co-located with GO-VAXX mobile vaccine buses. Most sites will distribute free take-home rapid antigen test kits, subject to supply, and some will offer asymptomatic rapid antigen screening on-site. The government will also make take-home rapid tests available at LCBO stores across Ontario. Ontarians can visit Ontario.ca/holidaytesting to find out if pop-up rapid antigen screening sites will be available in their area. Additional pop-ups, including participating LCBO locations, will be added upon confirmation by individual locations with the website updated weekly. No appointment will be required.

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PeelPolice.ca/MentalHealth

IN 2021, PEELPOLICE'S MOBILE CRISIS RAPID RESPONSE TEAMS HAVE ATTENDED 2,250 CALLS FOR THE MENTALHEALTH CRISIS.




WHAT IS THE OMICRON VARIANT OF CONCERN?

Omicron is a variant of the virus that causes COVID-19

It has been detected in multiple countries and is likely to be present in many others

It is not yet known how easily **Omicron** spreads, how serious symptoms are or how it affects protection from vaccines

Do it all to protect yourself and others from COVID-19



We are learning about Omicron more every day.
Find out the latest at who.int

09/12/2021



HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS AGAINST OMICRON?

Getting vaccinated and practicing the protective behaviours are highly effective ways to protect yourself against serious illness and death from the currently dominant variant, Delta

We expect the vaccines to provide some protection against all variants

Do it all to stop COVID-19, including getting vaccinated as soon as it's your turn



We are learning about Omicron more every day.
Find out the latest at who.int

09/12/2021

KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT OMICRON VARIANT AS WHO SAYS OMICRON SPREADING AND INFECTING THE VACCINATED (WHO/ TWITTER).

ACCORDING TO ONTARIO MODELLING, 'WITH OMICRON, CASES ARE PREDICTED TO INCREASE AT A RAPID PACE BUT AN IMMEDIATE CIRCUIT BREAKER CAN BLUNT IMPACT'



- Key findings
- Cases are climbing across most public health units. The Omicron variant will shortly become the dominant variant.
 - Omicron transmits very quickly. Early evidence suggests it can produce severe disease. Without prompt intervention, ICU occupancy could reach unsustainable levels in early January.
 - Although vaccines are less effective against Omicron infection, boosters can substantially increase protection. Even 2 doses likely provide strong protection against severe illness. The risk of severe illness is dramatically higher in the unvaccinated.
 - We can help protect the most vulnerable with vaccination (children and boosters). Rapid rollout of booster doses is essential, with strong focus on the most vulnerable (e.g. long-term care, shelters, high- risk communities) and healthcare workers.
 - Increasing vaccination is not enough to slow this wave. Circuit breakers with strong additional public health measures (at least 50% fewer contacts) and strong booster campaigns (250,000 per day) could blunt the Omicron wave. High-quality masks, physical distancing indoors, improved ventilation, and increased access to rapid testing can help buy time for boosters to take effect and keep schools open.
 - Although uncertainty persists, waiting for more information will eliminate the opportunity for action.
 - Circuit breakers with public health measures that cut contacts by 50% and rapid roll-out of booster doses could blunt the Omicron wave.
 - Accelerated boosters for the most vulnerable and healthcare workers and their families, and caregivers will help reduce transmission to vulnerable people and help protect the health workforce.
 - Help keep schools, workplaces and places where people gather indoors safe by reinforcing the importance of key behaviors & public health measures: • Wear a well-fitted high-quality mask • Physical distance and avoid indoor spaces where there is crowding • Increase ventilation in all indoor spaces • Increase access to rapid testing
 - Match distribution of therapeutics to where they are needed most to mitigate the impact of potential shortages.
 - Although uncertainty persists, waiting for more information will eliminate the opportunity for action.

ONTARIANS LIKELY TO GET A THIRD VACCINE DOSE AND PLAN TO LIMIT HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS, AS THE OMICRON VARIANT SPREADS: FORUM RESEARCH POLL

With the Omicron variant of COVID-19 becoming an increasing concern, around 4 in 5 Ontario residents say they are likely to get a third vaccine dose to protect themselves against it. Those who are likely to receive a third vaccine dose are more likely to be older (65+: TOP2: 93%), earn more than \$100K (TOP2: 85%) and be concerned with the Omicron variant (TOP2: 85%). On the contrary, those who say they are not likely to get it to tend to be younger (18-24: BTM2: 15%; 25-34: BTM2: 13%) and not be concerned with the Omicron variant (BTM2: 34%). When it comes to plans for this holiday season, residents say they are limiting the people they celebrate with. Around 5 in 10 (51%) will be celebrating with only their immediate household. 4 in 10 (42%) will be celebrating with their household and members of their extended family, while 1 in 10 (7%) will be celebrating without any restrictions. Also, those who are concerned with the Omicron variant are most likely to gather with only their immediate household (TOP2: 81%). When thinking about holiday activities, people are most comfortable when it comes to gathering with only their immediate household (TOP2: 86%) and with vaccinated people outside their household (TOP2: 70%). Around 1 in 3 have plans for international travel in the next year, and they are most commonly planning a trip between 6 to 12 months from now. Those who are planning to travel are more likely to be 25-34 years old (47%), have finished post-graduate studies (32%), earn more than \$100K (48%) and be vaccinated (37%). Residents who are not born in Canada are also more likely to travel internationally (52%). This could possibly be because they haven't had the chance to travel back to their home country in the past two years and would like to do so when the situation gets better. Among those who have plans for travel next year, only 3 in 5 (56%) are currently comfortable with international travel, which could explain they are more likely to have their trip later in the year. As of November 23rd, children aged 5-11 have become eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. Since then, 2 in 5 parents have had their children vaccinated, while 2 in 5 are still planning to and 1 in 5 don't plan to at all. Parents who don't intend to get their children vaccinated are most concerned about the potential side effects on their children (TOP2: 82%). Meanwhile, parents who intend to get their children vaccinated will do so as soon as an appointment is available (44%) and will do it after school as it is most convenient for them (48%).

METHODOLOGY

The Forum Poll™, conducted by Forum Research, was based on a computer-assisted web survey of 1,001 residents in Ontario aged 18 years and above, recruited from the Forum Poll Panel.



All individuals aged 18+ are now eligible to book their COVID-19 booster appointment



ONTARIANS 18+ ARE NOW ELIGIBLE TO BOOK COVID19 BOOSTER DOSE AT [HTTP://ONTARIO.CA/BOOKVACCINE](http://ontario.ca/bookvaccine) OR 1-833-943-3900 (CHRISTINE ELLIOT/ TWITTER).

CANADA ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO CONTAIN THE SPREAD OF THE OMICRON VARIANT

Lifting entry prohibitions

With the evolving situation and overwhelming evidence of community transmission of Omicron in most countries around the world, including Canada, the Government of Canada has decided to lift the extraordinary measures for travellers returning from the ten specific countries initially listed. This will be in effect as of December 18 at 11:59pm.

While we recognize the controversial nature of this measure, we believe it was necessary to slow the arrival of Omicron in Canada and buy us some time. Given the current situation, this measure has served its purpose and is no longer needed.

Similarly, the requirements for Canadians and others with right of entry who have been in or travelled from these countries within 14 days to obtain a valid negative pre-departure molecular test in a third country, and to stay in a designated quarantine facility, upon the direction of a quarantine officer, while they await the results of their arrival test, will also be lifted.

Lifting short trip pre-arrival test exemption

As another layer of precaution, we will reinstate the requirement for a pre-arrival negative PCR test result for all travellers leaving the country for less than 72 hours. As of December 21, the requirement for pre-arrival testing will be in place again for trips of all durations. It is important to note that this pre-arrival test MUST be taken in a country other than Canada.

Testing

We have also significantly increased the on-arrival testing resources. We went from a capacity to test 11,000 air travellers a day on November

30 to 20,960 tests as of December 16. The Government of Canada is working closely with airport authorities, airlines, and testing providers and many other partners to increase capacity at airports, manage traveller flow and to make sure that the testing protocol is as efficient as possible.

Advice to travellers

As of December 15, the Government of Canada is advising Canadians to avoid non-essential travel outside of Canada at this time. Travel restrictions continue to change around the world and return options could become limited at any time. Now is not the time to travel.

If they need to travel, all fully vaccinated travellers are asked to follow public health measures, including wearing a well-fitted and well-constructed mask, maintaining a list of contacts for the 14 days after entry to Canada, and exercising extra precautions by avoiding high-risk settings such as long-term care facilities. All returning unvaccinated travellers must continue to quarantine for 14 days.

All travellers arriving, by all modes of travel, must submit their information into ArriveCAN. To reduce the wait time to access a test and ease congestion at airports, travellers allowed to enter Canada are strongly encouraged to pre-register with the testing provider at their arrival airport prior to coming to Canada.

The Government of Canada recognizes that changing border measures can pose challenges for individuals and families. All border measures will continue to be evaluated and are subject to adjustments based on the latest science, evidence, and data.

HOME SALES IN CANADA RISES 0.6%, AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE HIT ALL-TIME HIGH OF \$720,850: CREA

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Actual (not seasonally adjusted) monthly activity edged down just 0.7% on a year-over-year basis.

The number of newly listed properties climbed by 3.3% from October to November.

The MLS® Home Price Index (MLS® HPI) rose 2.7% month-over-month and was up a record 25.3% year-over-year.

The actual (not seasonally adjusted) national average sale price posted a 19.6% year-over-year gain in November.

Home sales recorded over Canadian MLS® Systems edged up 0.6% between October and November 2021. The small increase followed on the heels of a 9% jump in activity in October.

Across the country, sales gains in Calgary, Edmonton, the B.C. interior, Regina and Saskatoon offset declines in activity in the GTA and Montreal.

The actual (not seasonally adjusted) number of transactions in November 2021 was very strong historically, edging down a scant 0.7% on a year-over-year basis, missing the 2020 record for that month by just a few hundred transactions.

On a year-to-date basis, some 630,634 residential properties have traded hands via Canadian MLS® Systems between January and November 2021, far surpassing the annual record 552,423 sales for all of 2020.

“November provided another month of evidence that the housing supply/demand issues facing the country have not gone away,” said Cliff Stevenson, Chair of CREA. “Even at what is traditionally the slow time of year for housing, conditions and price trends are at the same record levels we saw this spring. Things may calm down a bit through the balance of December and January, but next year’s spring market will no doubt be an interesting one. If you’re thinking about jumping into the market as either a buyer or a seller or both, your local REALTOR® has the information and guidance you’ll need to navigate the market in these challenging times,” continued Stevenson.

“Housing cycles can be very long, so market trends do not care that we’ve put new 2022 calendars up on our refrigerator doors,” said Shaun Cathcart, CREA’s Senior Economist. “The fact is that the supply issues we faced going into 2020, which became much worse heading into 2021, are even tighter as we move into 2022. Interest rate hikes will make it even harder for new entrants to break into the market next year, even though activity may remain robust as existing owners continue to move around in response to all of the changes to our lives since COVID showed up on the scene. As such, the issue of inequality in the housing space will remain top of mind. One wildcard will be what policymakers decide to do with the national mortgage stress test, which could act as a kind of cushion against rising rates for young and/or first-time buyers. It could also make things that much harder for them.”

The number of newly listed homes rose by 3.3% in November compared to October, driven by gains in a little over half of local markets, including the GTA, Lower Mainland, Montreal, and many markets in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe.

With new listings up by more than sales in November, the sales-to-new listings ratio eased a bit to 77% compared to 79.1% in October. The long-term average for the national sales-to-new listings ratio is 54.9%. About two-thirds of local markets were seller’s markets based



on the sales-to-new listings ratio being more than one standard deviation above its long-term mean. The other one-third of local markets were in balanced market territory.

There were just 1.8 months of inventory on a national basis at the end of November 2021, tied with March 2021 for the lowest level ever recorded. The long-term average for this measure is more than 5 months. In line with some of the tightest market conditions ever recorded, the Aggregate Composite MLS® Home Price Index (MLS® HPI) was up another 2.7% on a month-over-month basis in November 2021. The non-seasonally adjusted Aggregate Composite MLS® HPI was up by a record 25.3% on a year-over-year basis in November. Looking around the country, year-over-year price growth has crept back up to nearly 25% in B.C., though it remains lower in Vancouver, on par with the provincial number in Victoria, and higher in other parts of the province.

Year-over-year price gains are still in the mid-to-high single digits in Alberta and Saskatchewan, while gains have risen to about 13% in Manitoba.

Ontario saw year-over-year price growth hit 30% in November with the GTA continuing to surge ahead after having trailed most other parts of the province for most of the pandemic.

Greater Montreal’s year-over-year price growth remains at a little over 20%, while Quebec City was only about half that.

Price growth is running above 30% in New Brunswick (higher in Greater Moncton, lower in Fredericton and Saint John), while Newfoundland and Labrador is now at 10% year-over-year (lower in St. John’s).

The MLS® HPI provides the best way to gauge price trends because averages are strongly distorted by changes in the mix of sales activity from one month to the next.

The actual (not seasonally adjusted) national average home price was \$720,850 in November 2021, up 19.6% from the same month last year. The national average price is heavily influenced by sales in Greater Vancouver and the GTA, two of Canada’s most active and expensive housing markets. Excluding these two markets from the calculation in November 2021 cuts \$158,000 from the national average price.

CANADA'S JOB VACANCIES HIT RECORD HIGH OF 912,600 IN THE THIRD QUARTER OF 2021: STATISTICS CANADA



The number of job vacancies in Canada reached an all-time high of 912,600 in the third quarter of 2021, as employers and workers continued to adjust to easing public health restrictions and rapidly evolving economic conditions. Like other economies recovering from the labour market impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, record-high job vacancies coincided with growth in overall employment and falling unemployment. Quarterly data from the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (JVWS) shed light on some of the factors behind the monthly job vacancy data released previously, including sectoral and regional differences in unmet labour demand, changes in the occupation and skills profile of vacancies, and recent trends in the wages offered by employers.

CANADA ALIGNS MORE WITH INDIA, LESS WITH CHINA



CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Recently, The Canadian Press reported trade negotiators from India and Canada had have held four “consultative meetings” in the last year via video. The most recent one saw the two sides trade preliminary proposals in October, said Anshuman Gaur, India’s deputy high commissioner to Canada.

Canada seeks to lessen its economic dependence on China and diversify into new Asian markets. In an exclusive interview with Y Media Group Editor and CEO, Yudhvir Jaswal, PM Trudeau highlighted the importance of the India- Canada relationship and said Canada is ready to boost trade relationships with India.

The Liberal government’s Nov. 23 throne speech acknowledged that priority when it said: “A changing world requires adapting and expanding diplomatic engagement. Canada will continue working with key allies and partners while making deliberate efforts to deepen partnerships in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic.”

Y Media also covered the event where the Canada India Foundation (CIF) hosted the NASSCOM Delegation to Canada reception. Addressing the delegation, the Chair of CIF, Satish Thakkar, said, “Together, Canada and India can create centres of excellence here that could be a model for the world. To fully realize the growth we need, Canada will identify emerging economies like India and others to quicken the recovery. What better time for the governments on both sides to revisit the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Canada and India. This alone has the potential to be a gamechanger, leading to significant gains for both sides in terms of economic growth.”

Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said bilateral trade between India and Canada currently stands at \$10 billion. There is tremendous potential to take it to much higher levels.

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CANADA'S LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE TEN DAYS OF PAID SICK LEAVE AND ENHANCE PROTECTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS RECEIVES ROYAL ASSENT

Government of Canada took action by introducing Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code, which will provide ten days of paid sick leave to all federally regulated private sector employees and enhance protections for health care workers and those accessing health services. The legislation also amends bereavement leave under Part III of the Canada Labour Code to provide up to eight weeks of leave for employees who lose a child or experience a stillbirth. Today, Bill C-3 received Royal Assent. Minister of Labour Seamus O'Regan Jr., and Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada David Lametti, marked this important step toward continuing the fight against COVID-19 and building back better. These reforms represent permanent change to support workers in federally regulated industries and the healthcare sector. The Government will engage with federally regulated employers, including small and medium-sized enterprises towards the implementation of paid sick leave in Canada. The amendments will come into force on a date to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council. This will allow time for employers to implement payroll changes and work with unions as needed to adjust collective agreements. Further, the Government of Canada will convene the provinces and territories in early 2022 to develop a national action plan to legislate paid sick leave for all workers across the country, while respecting provincial-territorial jurisdiction and clearly recognizing the unique needs of small business owners. The amendments to the Criminal Code create a new intimidation offence targeting those who use fear to stop a health care worker or those who assist them from performing their duties or to prevent a person from obtaining health services. A specific offence is also created to prohibit obstructing any person from accessing health facilities. In addition, new sentencing provisions will require courts to consider more serious penalties for offenders who target health care workers or who impede others from obtaining health services. These amendments come into force 30 days after Royal Assent.



Quick facts

" The federally regulated sector is comprised of workplaces from a broad range of industries, including interprovincial air, rail, road, and marine transportation, banks, postal and courier services, among others.

" There are approximately 18,500 employers in federally regulated industries, including federal Crown corporations that together employ 955,000 people (about 6% of all employees in Canada), the vast majority (87%) of these people work in companies with 100 or more employees.

" The pandemic has exacerbated the already difficult work conditions experienced by health care workers, in which they have faced concerning levels of violence and threats of violence.

" A 2019 report conducted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health entitled, Violence Facing Health Care Workers in Canada (HESA Report), documented that health care workers have a four times higher rate of workplace violence than any other profession, despite most of this violence being unreported.

BRAMPTON CITY COUNCIL PROVIDES FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO LEGAL CHALLENGE AGAINST THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC'S BILL-21

At its Special Meeting, Brampton City Council approved \$100,000 of financial support to the, National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM), the World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO) and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) Legal Challenge against the Province of Quebec's Bill 21, the first Canadian municipality to contribute to this challenge. The City of Brampton is one of Canada's fastest-growing and most diverse communities, and this Term of Council is committed to advancing one of its top priorities: Brampton is a Mosaic. By approving this financial assistance, Brampton City Council shows its support for the value diversity brings to the local community and all of Canada. Today's Council meeting Resolution states: Whereas Bramptonians value the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and Whereas Brampton Council believes we cannot allow the defense of the Charter and the foundational value of religious freedom to be on the backs of racialized communities against the Province of Quebec with unlimited legal resources; and Whereas, if Canada's Big Cities assist to fund the legal challenge, then we level the playing field since it is not a fair legal fight in the absence of federal government involvement; and Whereas a Supreme Court decision allowing the infringement of religious freedom would have negative consequences for Bramptonians and all Canadians;

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 Limberlost 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 Limberlost Place, and hope that future generations will benefit from the enhanced education, knowledge and innovation it will serve to facilitate," said Cockwell. Inspired by Limberlost 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. Limberlost 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. Limberlost 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. "Limberlost Place highlights the future leadership role George Brown will play in the city's Waterfront development as a sustainable city.



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Every word of AAP leadership is a lie: Punjab CM

Exposing the lies being spread by the AAP leadership directly from the ground level, Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Channi on Monday visited the school in his maternal village Makdona Kalan to show that it was not only perfect but one of the best schools in the state. The Chief Minister during a walk from Morinda to Sri Chamkaur Sahib inspected the school from where the AAP leadership has been indulging in slanderous campaign. Channi said he had already sanctioned Rs 50 lakh for this school besides astroturf worth Rs 70 lakh. Taking on the AAP leadership, he reminded them that as compared to any school of their frivolous 'Delhi model', this school has one of the best infrastructure, computer lab, library, eduset online facility and modern projector room. The Chief Minister said ironically the same school was visited some

days ago by self-contradictory Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who tried to paint it in bad colour by showing a store room. He said even the store room was better but Sisodia opted to switch off the lights of the room, when they failed to get any tangible evidence against the school, to prove their wrong point. "This exposes the propaganda unleashed by outsiders to fulfil their lust for power," added Channi. The Chief Minister said the AAP leaders are clamouring for power but their nefarious designs will be thwarted by the wise people of Punjab. He warned the AAP leaders to desist from spreading false stories about education and the health system of the state, which are one of the best in the country. Channi asked AAP leaders that instead of fault finding in Punjab and Punjabis they should focus on providing basic facilities to Delhi where people are suffering due to their poor performance.

Lok Sabha passes Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 amid din



The Lok Sabha on Monday passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 amid the Opposition's strong demand for more consultation on it. This Bill seeks to link electoral rolls to the Aadhaar number, allowing electoral registration officers to ask for Aadhaar numbers of applicants wanting to register as voters to establish their identity. Replying to the debate, Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijiju said that this Bill will bring important electoral reforms in the country. We wanted the entire House to participate in the debate but they have been protesting and sloganeering in the House. He added that this Bill was brought after wide consultations with the Election Commission and also with the state governments and it will purify the electoral process in the country. He said that the government has brought the Bill after the recommendation of the Standing Committee Report of the Department of Personnel and Training, Law and Justice, consisting of members of all political parties. The protesting members have either not gone through the draft Bill or are deliberately showing ignorance of the new provisions. "The voting age was lowered from 21 years to 18 years in 1987 but the qualifying date was kept as January 1 every year only for getting listed in the voter list. Now, under the new amendment, there will four dates such as January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 every year so that the any eligible person can get them enrolled once they attain the age of 18 years," Rijiju informed the House. He appealed to the members to pass the Bill unanimously as it was in

the interest of the voters and the country. Earlier, debating the Bill, the Congress Party floor leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury asked why the government was in a hurry to bring this Bill as many MPs have requested the government to forward it to a Parliamentary Committee. "The way Bill was introduced in the morning and being passed in such a hurry today only was not correct and it should be sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee," Chowdhury said. DMK member TR Baalu said that this Bill needs more public opinion while BSP MP Ritesh Pandey said that this Bill needed more consultation. While debating on the Bill, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee said, "the current Law Minister is killing democracy." BJP member Nishikant Dube while speaking on the Bill said that the Congress has always tried to demean the Constitutional institutions in the country and they made the former Election Commissioner of India a Member of Parliament. They even got a Nepalese citizen elected to this House on fake citizenship documents. This Bill will prevent the Bangladeshi and Nepali refugees from getting enlisted in the Indian voter list. Parties like the Congress and the TMC are objecting to this Bill as this will impact their vote banks, he said. Opposition members Asaduddin Owaisi and Supriya Sule asked the government to bring a fresh bill after more consultations while RSP MP NK Premchandran told the Chair that they were not even allowed to seek a division on this Bill.

Senior Punjab Cong leader, MLA Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi joins BJP

Ahead of the Punjab Assembly polls, senior Congress leader and MLA Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi on Tuesday joined the BJP. Before joining the BJP here, Sodhi resigned from all the posts and primary membership of the Congress. He joined the saffron party in the presence of Union Minister Bhupender Yadav, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Som Prakash. BJP national general secretary and Punjab in-charge Dushyant Gautam, Manjinder Singh Sirsa and Sanjay mayukh were also present on the occasion. Welcoming Sodhi in the party, Yadav said that he has a special place in sports, social and political life of Punjab. "Four-time MLA since 2002 Sodhi will strengthen the party in Punjab," Yadav said. Sodhi was the sports minister in the Punjab government led by Captain Amarinder Singh. Shekhawat said, "Sodhi joins BJP to serve the Punjab under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In his long political career he held important positions in the Congress party. Currently, he was vice president of the Punjab Congress and he joined after resigning from all the posts in the Congress party. He will help us to achieve the target set by Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and party chief J.P. Nadda to build 'ek Naya Punjab, BJP ke Sath' (a new Punjab with BJP)." After joining the BJP, Sodhi said that he took the decision in the best of Punjab's interest. "Punjab is a border state. Peace and harmony is in danger and the state government is not capable of handling it. Punjab is a small, but important state of India. Only the Prime Minister can save Punjab," Sodhi said. Sodhi further stated that the secular image of Congress party was demolished due to infighting in the Punjab unit and state moving towards a bigger threat. "Congress neither is concerned for the farmers nor for peace and harmony. Prime Minister Modi has solved the farmers' issues and will solve others also," Sodhi added.



PUNJAB SCRAPS 40,000 PENDING VAT CASES

Giving relief to trade and industry, the Punjab government on Monday announced to scrap 40,000 statutory form related outstanding cases under the central sales tax and the value added tax (VAT) out of 48,000 cases related to fiscal 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17. Chief Minister Charanjit Channi had announced the decision in Ludhiana earlier. An official spokesperson said the department has completed the assessment in the remaining 8,500 cases for 2014-15 and initiated the process to settle these cases by asking the traders to deposit just 30 per cent of the tax liability. In further relief, the traders will only have to deposit 20 per cent of the aforesaid tax liability during this fiscal and the balance by the end of next fiscal. The industry-friendly initiative would go a long way to instill confidence and boost morale to invest in the state, the spokesperson added.

AKHILESH POSTS CARTOON: 'I-T OFFICIALS ON ELECTION DUTY'

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Monday tweeted a cartoon to hit back at the ruling BJP after the Income Tax raided the premises of some of his close associates. Akhilesh wrote on his Twitter handle, "Tulsidas ji has said, 'Hit unhit pashu, pakshi, hu jana (animals and birds too know what is good and what is bad for them)". He also posted a cartoon of a government car carrying Income Tax officials which has a sticker saying, "On election duty" and "raids at premises of close aides of Akhilesh" written in Hindi. The reference is to the income tax raids that were carried out on his four associates in Uttar Pradesh. Earlier on Sunday, Akhilesh Yadav held a press conference and alleged that the BJP leaders were tapping the phones of his office, residence and those of other SP leaders. Akhilesh said that this showed the anger of the BJP because "they know that they are going to lose these elections". "I want to tell them that they may do anything, but SP's victory chariot is not going to stop," he said.

MORE LEADERS FROM OPPOSITION CAMP IN PUNJAB WILL JOIN, CLAIMS BJP

After enrolling senior Congress leader and MLA Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi on Tuesday in the party, the BJP hinted that more leaders from the opposition camp will join the party in future before Punjab assembly polls. A senior BJP functionary said that many leaders from opposition parties have approached us wishing to join the party. "After giving thoughtful consideration to their request, some will be welcomed in the party. Many big names from other political parties will join BJP before assembly polls in coming weeks," he said. He pointed out that only those with intention to serve the state and people will be inducted in the BJP. "Those believe in the BJP and are ready to serve Punjab and its people like other BJP workers are welcomed. There will be no pre-condition for joining," he said. It is learnt that most leaders are from Congress and BJP's former ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) who have shown interest to join the saffron party. "About 10 senior Congress leaders have shown interest to join the BJP. Some SAD leaders also showed interest to join us before the assembly polls," a BJP leader said. Another leader pointed out that joining of senior leaders from other parties will strengthen the BJP and will also definitely benefit in the elections. "Leadership has clarified to all those who have already joined and shown interest to join that their joining will happen without any pre-condition like an assurance for the ticket," he said. Punjab assembly 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, the BJP has announced that it will contest all the 117 assembly seats in Punjab. In 2017, BJP won three seats out of 23 it contested. On December 3, former Punjab DGP Sarbdeep Singh Virk, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Sarabjit Singh Makkar, former chairman of Punjab cooperative bank Avtar Singh Zira, industrialist Harcharan Singh Ranauta and other eminent personalities from Punjab joined the saffron party. On December 1, SAD leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa joined BJP. On August 2, five SAD leaders including former national general secretary of Akali Dal's women wing, Amanjot Kaur Ramoowalia and SAD leaders Gurpreet Singh Shahpur, Chand Singh Chatha, Baljinder Singh Dakoha and Pritam Singh, joined BJP. In June, six prominent personalities Harinder Singh Kahlon, Jagmohan Singh Saini, Nirmal Singh, Kuldeep Singh Kahlon, Jaswinder Singh Dhillon and Jaibans Singh had joined the saffron party.

BIGGEST LYNCHING IN INDEPENDENT INDIA HAPPENED IN RAJIV GANDHI'S ERA: BJP

Union Minister of Jal Shakti, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, said on Tuesday that Congress has no right to raise the issue of mob lynching, as the biggest incident of lynching in the history of Independent India happened during Rajiv Gandhi's era. Speaking to the media after senior Punjab Congress leader Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi joined the BJP at the party headquarters here, Shekhawat said: "I feel that Congress has no right to raise questions over lynching. The biggest such incident in the history of Independent India under any government occurred during the era of Rajiv Gandhi, the father of current Congress leader Rahul Gandhi." BJP national spokesperson R.P. Singh said, "Rahul Gandhi forgets that his father Rajiv Gandhi supported mob lynching of more than 3,000 Sikhs by Congress MPs and workers." Referring to Rajiv Gandhi's comment, 'Jab bhi bada ped girta hai, dharti hilti hai' (whenever a big tree falls, the earth shakes), another BJP leader, Manjinder Singh Sirsa, said, "It is true that Rahul Gandhi didn't hear about lynching before 2014, because they equated the killings of thousands of innocent Sikhs with fall of a big tree." "Rahul Gandhi heard the word lynching for the first time when Congress leader Sajjan Kumar was sent behind bars for the anti-Sikh riots, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014," Sirsa said. Quoting Rahul Gandhi's tweet, BJP IT Cell in-charge Amit Malviya said, "Meet Rajiv Gandhi, father of mob lynching, justifying blood curdling genocide of Sikhs. Congress took to the streets, raised slogans like 'khoon ka badla khoon se lenge', raped women, wrapped burning tyres around necks of Sikh men while dogs gorged on charred bodies dumped in drains."



AKHILESH PROMISES CASTE CENSUS WITHIN 3 MONTHS IF VOTED TO POWER

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has promised a caste census to give people their rights in accordance with their share in the population. He said that the census would be held within three months if his party is voted in power in the state. Akhilesh, who was addressing people during his Vijay Yatra in Mainpuri, which is also his father Mulayam Singh Yadav's parliamentary constituency, on Tuesday evening, said, "We all are accused of snatching someone's else's rights, but things will become clear once the caste census is done."

He said that his party would fulfill all its promises as it had done earlier. "Netaji (Mulayam Singh Yadav) is known for mincing no words; his actions speak," said Akhilesh.

Mounting a blistering attack on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, he said the chief minister is good only in changing colours and names of institutions, for laying foundation stones and inaugurating already inaugurated projects. "Do you need Yogi or 'yogya' (deserving) government?" he asked. Talking about his recent poll alliance with his estranged uncle Shivpal Yadav of Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party Lohia (PSPL), Akhilesh said, "Since I took 'chacha wali' (uncle's) party

along, BJP's I-T, CBI and ED cells have become active from Delhi. As elections near, these agencies will become more active because the fear of defeat haunts BJP."

Referring to the recent income tax department's raids at the premises of some SP leaders, he said, "Samajwadis are not scared of anything 'jo dar gaya woh mar gaya' (one who's afraid is dead)".

Interestingly, while Shivpal's pictures were back on the hoarding and banners with his nephew at the rally site, Shivpal himself was not present though his supporters attended the Yatra in Mainpuri. Akhilesh also took a swipe at the BJP for starting "Jan Vishwas Yatra" from multiple locations in the state. "BJP is nervous, which is evident from their yatras from six different locations in the state against one SP Rath," he said.

Talking about the BJP's dig at red colour, Akhilesh said the ruling party fears it as it symbolises "revolution and emotions". Akhilesh further said Yogi Adityanath is the first chief minister who himself had withdrawn cases lodged against him.

"BJP is the only party giving protection to criminals, and the majority of criminals are in this party," he added.

WON'T ALLOW DRUG TRAFFICKERS TO GO SCOT-FREE: PUNJAB CM

Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Channi on Wednesday said that his government won't allow any drug trafficker to go scot-free and the law will take its own course in Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia's case. Addressing a gathering here, Channi reiterated his government's firm commitment to completely eradicate the menace of drugs while adding that there was no political vendetta in the case of Majithia, the brother-in-law of former Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal.

He also announced Rs 5 crore for overall development of Gidderbaha and upgradation of Doda hospital and laid the foundation stone of the Gidderbaha bus stand. The Chief Minister also promised to construct a memorial in the memory of all those farmers who laid down their lives in the fight against the three "black farm" laws.

SACRILEGE BID WILL BE PROBED THOROUGHLY, ASSURES CM CHANNI

Expressing anguish over the unfortunate incident to attempt sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Darbar Sahib here, popularly known as the Golden Temple, Punjab chief minister Charanjit Channi (in pic) on Sunday reiterated his government's firm commitment to thoroughly probe the entire matter to get into the bottom of the case. After paying obeisance at Sri Darbar Sahib, Channi described it as the most heinous act, which has not only hurt religious sentiments but also tormented all, and should be condemned with the harshest possible words by one and all. He appealed to the people to take due care and caution to protect the religious places, including gurdwaras, temples and institutions related to any religion or faith. At the same, the chief minister exhorted the people to keep restraint during the prevailing sensitive situation by demonstrating their unflinching trust in the ethos of peace, harmony, brotherhood and religious tolerance.

NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST EXISTING VACCINES DON'T WORK ON OMICRON: GOVT



There is no evidence to suggest that existing Covid vaccines do not work on the Omicron variant, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Tuesday.

"While there is no evidence to suggest that existing vaccines do not work on Omicron, some of the mutations reported on spike gene may decrease the efficacy of existing vaccines," he told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply.

Responding to a question on whether the vaccines being administered in the country are effective to develop immunity against the Omicron variant, he informed the house that there is limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron. However, vaccine protection is also by antibodies as well as by cellular immunity, which is expected to be relatively better preserved.

"Hence, vaccines are expected to still offer protection against severe disease and, vaccination with the available vaccines remains crucial," he emphasised. The Union Health Ministry, in a statement on Tuesday morning, said that the number of cases of new Covid strain Omicron has crossed the 200-mark in India. However, out of them them, 77 patients have recovered or migrated. Meanwhile, it has asked all states and UTs to gear up against the Omicron variant as it is three times more transmissible than the Delta variant, and formulate a strategy that can ensure infection is contained at the local level itself before it spreads to other parts of the state.

INDIA CLEARS PROPOSAL TO INCREASE LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE OF WOMEN TO 21

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1


The task force was formed to examine matters pertaining to the age of motherhood, imperatives of lowering MMR (Maternal Mortality Rate), improvement of nutritional levels and related issues.

After the Union cabinet's approval, the government will amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act, and the Hindu Marriage Act to implement the new decision to increase the legal age of marriage of women," sources said. In his Independence Day speech last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that to save the women from malnutrition they are married at the right age. "The task force has also recommended that sex education be formalised and introduced in the school curriculum," sources said.

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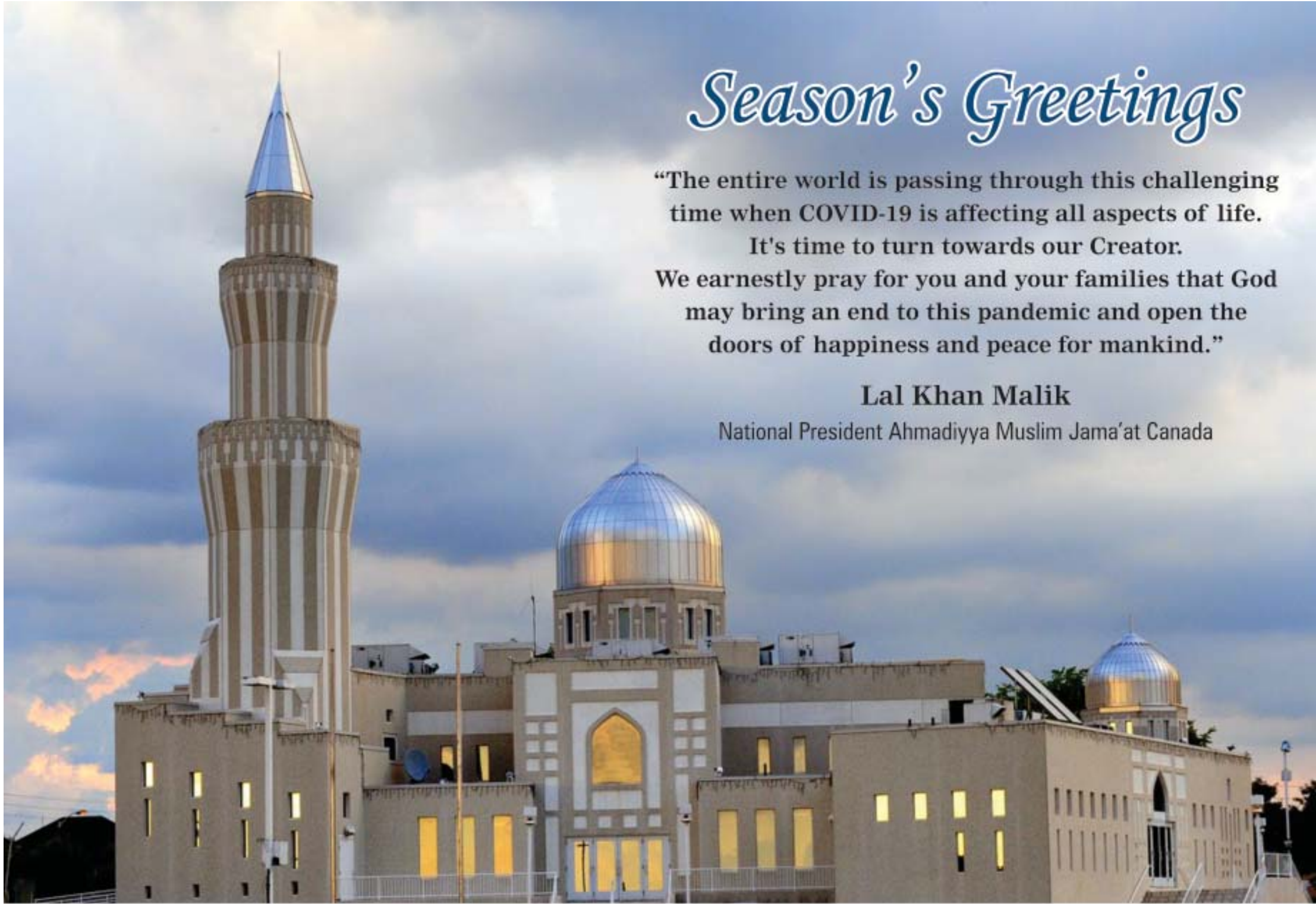
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MALALA HITS BACK AT IMRAN KHAN'S REMARKS ABOUT PASHTUNS

New Delhi: Nobel laureate and womens rights activist Malala Yousafzai has strongly reacted to Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khans statement that Taliban is predominantly a Pashtun movement, Friday Times reported.

"I nearly lost my life fighting against the Taliban's ban on girls' education. Thousands of Pashtun activists and notables lost their lives when they raised their voices against Taliban's horrors, while millions became refugees. We represent Pashtuns - not the Taliban," she wrote on Twitter.

On Sunday, Imran Khan had addressed the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) where his remarks about ban on girls' education

and Taliban generated a controversy.

The Prime Minister had suggested that the issue of restrictions on girls' education is linked to the Pashtun culture and that the Taliban had been making efforts to work towards ensuring that girls go to school.

Further, he said that the Taliban was a predominantly Pashtun movement, reiterating his earlier statement wherein he had termed Pashtuns as Taliban sympathisers.

Imran Khan's remarks sparked an outrage on Twitter with Afghan activists and journalists sharing how Taliban's position against girls' education is not endorsed by ordinary Afghan citizens.

OXFORD-ASTRAZENECA COVID VAX PROTECTION WANES AFTER 3 MONTHS: LANCET

The protection offered by the Oxford-Astra Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine declines after three months of receiving two doses of the preventive, according to a study published in The Lancet journal.

The findings drawn from datasets in Brazil and Scotland suggest that booster programmes are needed to help maintain protection from severe disease in those vaccinated with AstraZeneca, known as Covishield in India.

The researchers analysed data for two million people in Scotland and 42 million people in Brazil who had been vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine.

In Scotland, when compared with two weeks after receiving a second dose, there was approximately a five-fold increase in the chance of being hospitalised or dying from COVID-19 nearly five months after being double vaccinated, the researchers said.

The decline in effectiveness begins to first appear at around three months, when the risk of hospitalisation and death is double that of two weeks after the second dose, they said.

The researchers from Scotland and Brazil found that the risk of hospitalisation and death increases threefold just short of four months after the second vaccine dose. Similar numbers were seen for Brazil, they said.

"Vaccines have been a key tool in fighting the pandemic, but waning in their effectiveness has been a concern for a while," said Professor Aziz Sheikh, from the University of Edinburgh, UK.

"By identifying when waning first starts to occur in the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, it should be possible for governments to design booster programmes that can ensure maximum protection is maintained," Sheikh said.

The team was able to compare data between Scotland and Brazil as they had a similar interval between doses - 12 weeks - and initial prioritisation of who was vaccinated - people at highest risk of severe disease and healthcare workers.

The dominant variant was different in each country during the study period -- Delta in Scotland and Gamma in Brazil.

This means the decline in effectiveness is likely because of vaccine waning and the impact of variants, according to the researchers.

The study also estimated vaccine effectiveness at similar fortnightly intervals by comparing outcomes of people who have been jabbed with those who are not vaccinated.

However, the experts warned that these figures should be treated

with caution because it is becoming harder to compare non-vaccinated people to those vaccinated with similar characteristics, particularly among older age groups where so many people are now vaccinated.

"Our analyses of national datasets from both Scotland and Brazil suggest that there is considerable waning of effectiveness for the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, with protection against severe COVID-19 falling over time," said Professor Srinivasa Vittal Katikireddi from the University of Glasgow in the UK.

"Our work highlights the importance of getting boosters, even if you've had two doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, as soon as you are able to," Srinivasa Katikireddi added.

OXFORD-ASTRAZENECA BEGINS WORK ON VACCINE TO TARGET OMICRON

Faced with a vaccine evading Omicron variant, Oxford university and AstraZeneca announced that they have begun the work to develop a Covid shot that specifically targets the new strain.

Early this month, all major drug makers including Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson and Johnson, and AstraZeneca had announced plans to quickly investigate and adapt their shots to the highly mutated Omicron variant.

"Like with many previous variants of concern, and together with our partners AstraZeneca, we have taken preliminary steps in producing an updated vaccine in case it is needed," Sandy Douglas, a research group leader at Oxford, was quoted as saying to the Financial Times.

PAKISTAN TO FACE DOWNFALL AFTER JUI WIN, SAYS PAK I&B MINISTER



ISLAMABAD, (IANS): Pakistan Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Fawad Chaudhry, on Tuesday predicted Pakistan would face "downfall" after the Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (JUI) scored big in the first phase of local body elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, The News reported.

Addressing a post-cabinet press conference, Chaudhry termed the victory as "unfortunate", as he stressed that the party "is against women's rights and is a supporter of extremist policies when it comes to religion".

"Imran Khan is the leader of the federation, and it is important for the leadership and workers of PTI to put aside their differences and strengthen Imran Khan," Chaudhry said.

"Without Imran Khan, Pakistan's politics would disintegrate," he added.

The minister said that it was a "misfortune that a party that should have been dismantled" won in the local body polls because of "our mistakes".

"Due to administrative problems, we suffered some setback in the local body elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," Chaudhry maintained, adding that PTI is "the only national party in the country", the report said.

He said parties like JUI could not be PTI's substitute, whereas PML-N and PPP "had no place" in national politics.

US PRESIDENT BIDEN ANNOUNCES 500 MN FREE AT-HOME COVID TEST KITS TO FIGHT OMICRON

Amid rising cases of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid, US President Joe Biden has announced 500 million free at-home test kits, even as he urged people to get vaccinated as well as take a booster shot.

The at-home tests will be available for purchase online as well as at the local pharmacy from January, which will be "reimbursed". "Because Omicron spreads easily, especially among the unvaccinated, it's critically important that we know who's infected. That means we need more testing," Biden said at the White House on Tuesday during a speech outlining the new coronavirus-response measures.

"The federal government will purchase one half billion... additional at-home rapid tests, with deliveries starting in January. We'll be getting these tests to Americans for free. And we'll have websites where you can get them delivered to your home," Biden said. The free testing will help reduce the waiting lines, as well as reduce the burden of healthcare systems.

The President also noted about over 20,000 free testing sites in the country. In addition, 1,000 military doctors, nurses, and medics will be deployed to help staff local hospitals and expand capacity, Biden said.

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PM Imran Khan bringing a bad name to Pakistan, alleges Opposition

The opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has castigated Prime Minister Imran Khan for allegedly defaming the country and its political parties only to hide his own corruption at a time when foreign dignitaries were in the capital to attend the 17th extraordinary meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Dawn news reported. Speaking at a news conference, PML-N's information secretary and MNA Marriyum Aurangzeb asked the Prime Minister to step down from the office, if he really wanted to provide relief to the masses. Referring to the Khan's interview to Al Jazeera on December 17 in which he had once again blamed the past rulers' corruption for the "country's destruction", she said the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) had already completed more than three years of its term, but it seemed that the Prime Minister had been suffering from "Sharif family phobia" as he kept on mentioning the names of Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif all the time, instead of highlighting his own achievements. Aurangzeb questioned the timing of, what she called, the political interview and alleged that it was an attempt to sabotage and damage the country's image at a time when the foreign ministers of the Islamic countries were arriving in Pakistan for the OIC meeting. She alleged that Khan had committed the same act when Chinese President Xi Jinping was to visit the country in 2014 during the PML-N government's time. She said it seemed



that the prime minister did not possess the mental capacity to understand the sensitivity and importance of the OIC gathering and how he should present a positive image of the country to the leaders of the Muslim world in Pakistan, Dawn news reported. This, she said, was because Khan knew nothing other than persecuting and victimising the opposition and blaming them for his failures. Aurangzeb further alleged that the Prime Minister was bringing a bad name to Pakistan only to hide his own incompetence.

MODERNA SAYS ITS COVID-19 BOOSTER APPEARS EFFECTIVE AGAINST OMICRON

"The dramatic increase in Covid-19 cases from the Omicron variant is concerning to all. However, these data showing that the currently authorized Moderna Covid-19 booster can boost neutralizing antibody levels 37-fold higher than pre-boost levels are reassuring," said Stephane Bancel, Chief Executive Officer of Moderna, in the statement. The company added that doubling the booster dose to 100 micrograms increased neutralizing titers 83-fold higher than pre-boost levels. The results haven't been peer-reviewed yet. The company plans to share the data with government health officials. While the 100 microgram booster dose was "generally safe and well-

tolerated", however, there "was a trend toward slightly more frequent adverse reactions" following it compared to the authorized dose. The company said it will also continue to develop an Omicron-specific booster candidate which should enter clinical trials in early 2022. The hypermutated Omicron variant of concern is spread so far to about 90 countries, raising serious concerns about the reduced vaccine efficacy and the increased risk of reinfection. The third shot of the Covid vaccine from Pfizer has also been shown to provide significant protection against the new Omicron variant, according to a study by Israeli researchers.

WARNING BELLS FOR PM IMRAN KHAN'S RULING PARTY

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Khan released a video message on his Twitter account and added that these results were out nine months ago. He said that he had predicted this result in March, but his advice to PM Imran Khan fell on deaf ears, the report said. Addressing the Prime Minister, Kamran Khan said, "I have always supported you and thought of your benefit while encouraging your government. But today I am representing the views of Pakistani citizens [who are disappointed in you]." He added that Imran Khan should do whatever it takes to resolve the issue of inflation in the country. Criticising the Pakistan Punjab government, he said that the failure of the Buzadar administration was evident. Kamran Khan said that the Prime Minister should know that every supporter of the ruling party is surprised by Chief Minister Usman Buzdar's performance. He said the Prime Minister must fire the Punjab Chief Minister and introduce a new and energetic team in the province. He claimed that almost all bureaucrats around the Prime Minister are unhappy with his principal secretary Azam Khan, adding that Imran Khan should replace him, the report said.

WHAT IS PANAMA PAPERS LEAK CASE?

In this case legal documents of a company named Mossack Fonseca were leaked. This data was released by a German newspaper "Suddeutsche Zeitung" under the name of Panama Papers on 3rd April 2016. Celebrities, businessmen and famous personalities of dozens of countries including of India were named in the papers who were accused of money laundering. The data from the years between 1977 and 2015 was given in the Panama Papers which was a shocking revelation. It had around 500 Indian names including Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai, Ajay Devgun, Vijay Mallya, Harish Salve. Most wanted underworld don Iqbal Mirchi's name was also mentioned in the papers. The matter had reached the apex court and later the government of India had formed a Multi Agency Group (MAG) to look into the matter. The CBDT, RBI, ED and FIU were asked to look into the entire matter. Amitabh Bachchan was accused of incorporating four shell companies in May 2005. These were incorporated at British Virgin Islands. Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai were directors of the separate firms. Later Aishwarya Rai was made shareholder of a company. In 2008 the companies became inactive. Panama Papers exposed alleged illegal properties worth around Rs 20,078 crore of 500 Indians who were named in the scam.

ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK PROVIDES US\$ 252.5 MILLION TO SUPPORT PAKISTAN'S GREEN AGENDA AND ANTI-COVID DRIVE

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), has approved US\$ 252.5 million for financing for two vital projects in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The projects mainly aim to support the country's green agenda in the energy sector as well as the ongoing efforts to counter the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chaired by IsDB President and Chairman of the Board, H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser, the 343rd meeting of the Board of Executive Directors of the Bank, on 18 December 2021, gave the green light to the allocation of US\$ 180 million to contribute to the financing of the strategic "Mohmand Dam and Hydropower Project" in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province.

Once completed, Mohmand Dam will be the 5th highest Concrete-Face-Rock-Filled Dam (CFRFD) in the world and will add 800 MW to the country's installed hydropower capacity.

It will also provide sustainable clean potable water to 2 million residents in Peshawar city while boosting food security through vital support for irrigation and agricultural activities on 6,773 ha of new farmlands. "It is my pleasure to announce that, yesterday, 18 December, the Board of Executive Directors of the Bank approved a US\$ 180 million financing to contribute to this strategic, multi-purpose, green, renewable energy project," IsDB President Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser stated. "We take pride in working alongside our partners from the Arab Coordination Group as well as other partners to see this great green project launched in due time. This is a testimony to the continuity of the strong partnership between IsDB and Government of Pakistan, in alignment with the country's priorities and our own commitments to allocate more funding to climate-friendly projects."

To date, Pakistan's Energy sector has received the largest share of IsDB Group development interventions by absorbing 68.4% (about US\$ 9.3 billion) of the Group's investments. Meantime, in a separate development on 13 December 2021, the Islamic Development Bank, also approved US\$ 72.5 million of funding to support Pakistan's nationwide vaccination efforts in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Under this approval, the country's "IVAC COVID-19 Vaccine Support Project" – also co-funded by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank – will receive US\$ 70 million from IsDB as well as US\$ 2.5 million from IsDB's Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD).

The funding will contribute to Pakistan's Government's efforts to vaccinate 70% of the population eligible for vaccination aged 18 years and above, including health care and frontline workers and other priority groups. This comes in the framework of the second track (R2) of IsDB Group's US\$ 4.56 billion Strategic Preparedness and Response Program (SPRP), specifically designed to support member countries with their health and economic recovery programs against the COVID-19 pandemic. Pakistan is a founding member of the IsDB and the 3rd largest beneficiary of IsDB Group financing. The development cooperation between the two parties goes back to the 1970s when the first development operation in Pakistan was approved on 05 June 1977.

Have a safe and merry Christmas

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