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CONSULATE GENERAL OF INDIA IN TORONTO CELEBRATED GOLDEN JUBILEE OF VIJAY DIWAS.

| DETAILS ON PAGE 4

## BHAGWANT MANN IS AAP'S CM CANDIDATE FOR PUNJAB POLLS

The Aam Aadmi Party declared Sangrur MP Bhagwant Mann as its chief ministerial candidate in the Punjab Assembly polls. The politician whose resolve to give up drinking was applauded by AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal is now the party's chief ministerial face for the Congress-ruled 117-member legislative Assembly of Punjab that will go to the polls on February 20.

Announcing Mann's candidature, AAP convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said: "Some people have put forward my name for CM's face, 93.3 per cent favoured Mann as Chief Minister's candidate, while three per cent preferred Navjot Singh Sidhu."

Last week, Kejriwal had announced that the party will elect the Chief Ministerial candidate based on people's suggestions. The party had issued a mobile number and conducted a phone-in poll. Earlier also the AAP chief had said he wanted the party's state unit chief Mann as the chief ministerial candidate. In the last five years, the party faced many troubles and protests. The party saw the exit of leaders like H.S. Phoolka, Sucha Singh Chhotepur and Sukhpal Singh Khaira, but Mann remained loyal to Kejriwal.



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## PUTIN'S POLITICAL CHESS

Russia has demanded for a new security arrangement in Europe, and threatened war if the US and its NATO allies fail to comply. Western analysts are split over interpreting Russian President Vladimir Putin's motives. Some say he is using the impossible list of demands as a pretext to invade Ukraine. Others think he is playing a weak hand to try to divide the West and reorder Europe's security architecture in Russia's favour.

The Russian Foreign Ministry, asking the US to remove its nuclear umbrella from Europe and allow Russia to re-establish its Soviet-era sphere of influence over Eastern Europe, issued the new Russian demands, in a rather unusual manner.

On December 17, 2021, the Russian Foreign Ministry unilaterally published two draft treaties: one focussing on Russia and the US, and the other between Russia and NATO.

**Russian demands**

Russia's draft "Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees" listed more than a dozen demands, including: no NATO membership to all states of the former USSR, including the Baltic states which have been members of the alliance since 2004, it prohibits NATO to expand further eastward, Further, the US can't fly bombers or deploy warships, armed forces or armaments,



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## CIF MARKS DIASPORA DAY WITH WEBINAR ON STRONGER CANADA INDIA TIES



**TORONTO:** Canada India Foundation organized a successful webinar, focusing on the need for strong Canada India relationship on the occasion of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Global Indian Diaspora Day) on 11 January 2022. Beginning 2003, January 9th has been declared as the Indian Diaspora Day to recognize the achievements of the over twenty-five million people of Indian origin, settled across the world, including the 1.9 million Indo Canadians.

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## LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY FROM WILLIAM OSLER HEALTH SYSTEM

On January 1, we welcomed in a new year – albeit one that looks very different from what we imagined even just a few weeks earlier. The highly-transmissible Omicron variant struck relentlessly, spreading rapidly through our community and across the world, pushing us all into uncharted waters. The emergence of Omicron, at this particular moment in time, has put our health care system under enormous pressure. Despite this, Osler remains a safe place to receive care and to work. Our teams continue to act swiftly to navigate the evolving situation and ensure our community has access to the health care services it needs and depends on during this difficult time.

| CONTD. ON PAGE 3



## WILL COVID-19 PILL APPROVAL IN CANADA BE A GAME-CHANGER?

Health Canada has authorized the use of Pfizer's PAXLOVID for the treatment of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 in adults (18 years of age and older). An effective pill that's easy to self-administer at home could relieve some of that pressure and change the trajectory of the pandemic. Harvard experts in medical therapeutics say the recent development of pills to treat COVID-19 may turn out to be a pandemic game-changer for a simple reason: When it comes to treating the ailment, the earlier the better.

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## AVERAGE HOME PRICE HITS \$713,500 IN CANADA, UP 17.7% FROM DEC. 2020

Canadian home buyers face record listings shortage to begin 2022 Statistics released today by the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) show national home sales remained historically high in December 2021, as the end-of-month supply of properties for sale hit an all-time low.

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## PFIZER CEO SAYS THIS MAY BE LAST COVID WAVE WITH RESTRICTIONS

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said on Monday that although the "most likely scenario" is that Coronavirus will be circulating for many years to come, he believes the current wave of infections will be the final one that requires restrictions, Times of India reported. Bourla gave an interview to French outlet BFM TV to mark the announcement of an investment package by the pharma firm in France.

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## Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT


- Paxlovid, Pfizer's Oral Covid-19 Pill, Approved In Canada For Adults 18+.
- Pfizer's Paxlovid Pill Not A Replacement For Covid-19 Vaccine, Officials Say.
- Covid Virus Will Keep On Circulating For Years; Restrictions May Not Be Needed For Future Covid Waves: Pfizer CEO.
- Moderna To Come Up With Combined Covid And Flu Booster By 2023.
- Peel Opens New Covid-19 Vaccination Clinic At Rockwood Mall (4141 Dixie Road) In South Mississauga.
- Ontario Premier Doug Ford Says Residents Can Expect 'Positive News' This Week About Loosening Current Pandemic Restrictions.

Y MEDIA EDITOR'S TAKE

Punjab Assembly Total Seats - 117, 59 seats for Majority


Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX

PUNJAB ELECTIONS 2022 SEAT PROJECTION




AAP

40-50 SEATS




CONGRESS

30-40 SEATS




AKALI DAL

15-25 SEATS




SKM

04-14 SEATS



BJP

02-12 SEATS



YUDHVIR JASWAL

Group Editor - Y MEDIA

\*The above mentioned seats for the Punjab assembly are only the opinion of Yudhvir Jaswal as a Group Editor. And we do not claim that these will be the actual number of seats won by respective party during punjab elections

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CIF Marks Diaspora Day with Webinar on Stronger Canada India Ties

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

January 9th is also the day when Mahatma Gandhi arrived back on the shores of India from South Africa to pick up the fight against British occupation.

Among those who addressed the online audience, making a strong pitch in favour of deeper economic partnership between Canada and India were: Canada's Minister of National Defence, Hon. Anita Anand, H.E. Ajay Bisaria, India's High Commissioner to Canada and Ms. Apoorva Srivastava, Consul General of India in Toronto.

Opening the session, Satish Thakkar, Chair, CIF, noted, "The Indo Canadian community remains extremely attached to India, having deep family and cultural roots there. The enormous goodwill and talent available among Indo Canadians, once united and channeled productively, can help strengthen the bonds between our governments and our peoples."

Minister Anita Anand acknowledged the role of the diaspora, saying, "Our people-to-people ties have been built over generations. They embody over 1.4 million Indo Canadians that contribute each day to Canadian society. Prime Minister Trudeau often talks about how diversity is our strength. Our successes highlighted in so many communities across the country are the very foundation of a day like Pravasi Bharatiya Divas."



India's High Commissioner, Ajay Bisaria noted that from a low of \$5 billion dollar investment from Canada in India in 2014, it now stands at \$60 billion. "It is going to breach the \$100 billion mark even before 2025." He also informed the participants "we are in a very positive space in terms of starting a discussion on comprehensive economic partnership agreement." While welcoming a possible visit by Prime Minister Trudeau to India sometime during 2022, Bisaria said, "We are very committed to taking this relationship forward on multiple sectors in a very positive direction."

CIF celebrated the event by assembling an august panel of experts who deliberated on the Canada India bilateral relationship. The first panel, moderated by Stewart Beck, a former High Commissioner of Canada to India, saw participation from key people, working directly in the bilateral space: Sara Wilshaw (Canada's Chief Trade Commissioner), Gary Comerford (Board Member, Novelis Canada), Vijendra Gairola (Executive Chairman, Induscann Biogrowth) and Ajay Ramasubramaniam (Founder CEO, Startup Reseau). The theme chosen



was: Stronger Canada India Relationship for Speedy Economic Recovery. During an hour and a half of deliberations the panel members offered several helpful suggestions for taking the relationship forward. All panelists agreed on the advantages of a close economic partnership between Canada and India, pointing out the numerous areas that each economy can meet mutual expectations. A proactive push by the governments on both sides, some panelists felt, would make the way easier for businesses to take long term view and make plans for the future. The second panel, consisted of elected representatives of Indian origin from three different political parties: Prasad Panda (Minister of Infrastructure, Alberta), Nina Tangri (Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, Ontario) and Chandra Arya, Member of Parliament. The session was moderated by Yudhvir Jaswal, CEO, Ymedia Group. The theme for the session was Deepening Ties: Role of Indo Canadian Diaspora.

On the role that the large Indo Canadian community can play to advance the Canada India bilateral ties, the need for a joint front to help create the right framework was put forward. While individuals of Indian origin have succeeded at every level in Canada, it was felt that the Indo Canadian diaspora is yet to assert its full force as a united diaspora community in Canada. The panelists also stressed on the need for Canadian Provinces to separately engage with Indian states and companies, wherever opportunities existed.

Thanking all the participants to the webinar, Satish Thakkar, said, "We are very glad to see the huge response we have received from social media on the subject. Naturally, we are encouraged to hold further such events, and certainly, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will become an annual event in the CIF calendar." Ritesh Malik, National Convener, CIF, added, "After listening to all the panelists, it is clear that the need for a comprehensive partnership between Canada and India is no longer in dispute, it is only a question of when and how soon. We hope it is sooner."

Consulate General of India in Toronto celebrated golden jubilee of Vijay Diwas

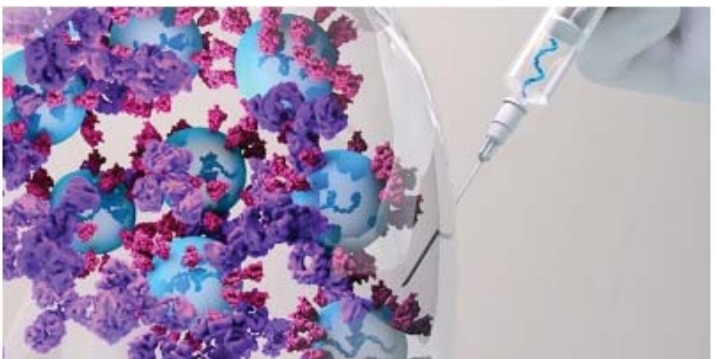


Consulate General of India in Toronto celebrated golden jubilee of Vijay Diwas on 17 December, 2021. The celebration was attended by 24 veterans of the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. Mr. Nayim-Uddin Ahmed, Consul General of Bangladesh in Toronto also attended the event. The event was addressed by Consul Generals of India and Bangladesh, who thanked the veterans for their services during the war. The celebration turned out to be an emotion-filled event with many veterans sharing anecdotal stories on patriotism, passion and courage at the battle field. Consul General of Bangladesh spoke highly of the Indian armed forces, who, he said, worked in close coordination with Mukti Bahini and ensured victory in the liberation war. He also talked about deep and enduring ties between India and Bangladesh. On this occasion, a photo exhibition was also organized within the

Chancery premises. The exhibition showcased iconic photographs of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.



EXPLAINED: INDIA'S FIRST MRNA COVID VAX



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** India is soon set to begin human trials on its first home-grown Covid vaccine based on Messenger RNA (mRNA) technology. Pune-based Gennova Biopharmaceuticals is making India's first mRNA vaccine known as HGC019, in collaboration with US-based HDT Bio Corp. In August, the Drug Controller General of India had approved the Phase 2 and 3 clinical trials.

"The Vaccine Subject Expert Committee (SEC) reviewed the data, and found HGC019 to be safe, tolerable, and immunogenic in the participants of the study," the company had said in a statement.

The company will start testing the vaccine on humans for efficacy and immunogenicity from next month. The mRNA vaccine is also reportedly effective against the newA Omicron variant.

The mRNA vaccines carry the molecular information to make the protein in the host using the synthetic RNA of the virus. The host body produces the viral protein that is recognised by the immune system, thereby enabling the body to fight against the disease.

mRNA vaccines are considered safe as mRNA is non-infectious, non-integrating in nature, and degraded by standard cellular mechanisms. They are highly efficacious because of their inherent capability of being translated into proteins in the cell.

These vaccines also represent a promising alternative to conventional vaccine approaches because of their high potency, capacity for rapid development, and potential for low-cost manufacture and safe administration. Researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades.

MODERNA TO COME UP WITH COMBINED COVID AND FLU BOOSTER BY 2023



**WASHINGTON, (IANS)** US drugmaker Moderna is working on a combined Covid-19 and flu booster shot, which could be available in some countries by fall 2023 at the earliest, CEO Stephane Bancel has said. In his speech at the Davos Agenda, a virtual event being held this week by the World Economic Forum, Bancel said this date was a "best case scenario", but that he believed it was possible for some countries next year, CNN reported.

He explained it was a goal for the company to have a single annual booster shot available to avoid "compliance issues" where people are wary about getting multiple shots every winter.

Meanwhile, Bancel also said that the company will have data available on its Omicron-specific Covid-19 vaccine in March "It should be in the clinic in the coming weeks. And we're hoping in the March timeframe, we should be able to have data to share with regulators to figure out the next step forward," he was quoted as saying in a panel conversation at Davos. "That's always been a great partnership between public health experts, the regulators and vaccine makers to figure out what's the best path," he said. Scientists at Pfizer are also using the mRNA technology that helped Covid-19 vaccines succeed in exploring ways to inoculate the masses from the flu. According to Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, its Omicron specific vaccine will be ready by March, while AstraZeneca is also looking at a variant specific jab.

COVID: 92% OF PATIENTS TREATED WITH PFIZER ANTI-VIRAL SHOWED BETTER HEALTH



**JERUSALEM, (IANS)** More than 90 per cent of Covid patients treated with Pfizer's antiviral drug Paxlovid showed significant improvement within three days, according to a report.

The report by Israel's Maccabi Healthcare Services showed that of the individuals who received Paxlovid, 60 per cent started to feel better within the first day, Jerusalem Post reported.

"We recommend to anyone who has fallen sick with Covid and is found suitable for the treatment with this drug to take it and get protected against a serious illness that can lead to hospitalisation and even death," Maccabi division head Dr. Miri Mizrahi Reuveni was quoted as saying.

"The results of the survey indicate the quality of the treatment, its effectiveness and importance during the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, and especially in the midst of the current wave," she said.

Israel started administering Paxlovid on January 3.

The treatment involves taking three pills twice a day for five days, starting as soon as possible and no later than five days after the patient shows the first symptoms. It is intended for individuals in mild to moderate condition who are considered at high risk of developing serious illness. Data from Pfizer's clinical trial showed that when the treatment was started within three days of the first symptoms, hospitalisations and deaths dropped by 89 per cent compared with a placebo. In the survey, about 62 per cent participants said they suffered from side effects. Of these one-third experienced a bitter metallic taste, 18 per cent had diarrhoea, 11 per cent reported a loss in taste or smell, 7 per cent had muscle aches, and 4 per cent experienced a headache. So far, no patient who has received Paxlovid has died, the report said. As per data by the Israeli Health Ministry as of last week, almost a third of patients did not accept the treatment - 753 refusals compared with 1,623 who accepted the drug.





## BHAGWANT MANN IS AAP'S CM CANDIDATE FOR PUNJAB POLLS

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Prior to getting declared as the AAP's chief ministerial face, Mann said: "I am a loyal soldier of the party. I will do whatever duty is assigned to me. If I am asked to paste posters on walls or wave party symbol, I will gladly do that. Punjab is very important to me. Kejriwal has placed a lot of faith in me." Mann is the only party leader who got elected to the Lok Sabha twice after winning polls. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, he was the only AAP leader who won for the second time. Mann has so far not opposed the party's leadership. Before entering the world of politics, Mann was a big comedian. He is the only leader in the Punjab's AAP unit who has a strong fan base and is a crowd puller. Experts are of the view that AAP in Punjab has an image of a party of Delhi and non-Punjabis. Because of this image, Kejriwal lost the polls in 2017 in the state and this time selected a 'Sardar' for the Chief Minister's post. Mann's mother Harpal Kaur and

sister Manpreet Kaur were present during the announcement. "We were born and brought up in a very simple family. That is why my son is well aware of the problems and miseries of the common people," Harpal Kaur told the media. Responding to his elevation, Mann's sister Manpreet Kaur, a teacher in a private school in Patiala, said she got emotional when her brother's name was announced as the chief minister candidate. He had raised the problems of society in his comedy too. "Before joining politics, he used to say laughter comes only when the stomach is full. But today that laughter of Punjab is missing," Mann's sister said. She said that like his days as comedian he'll bring a smile on the faces of the people of Punjab and this time by working for their betterment. In last assembly polls in 2017, AAP won 20 of 117 Assembly seats and became the main opposition in the state, relegating the Akali Dal to the third place. Of the 20 AAP legislators in the outgoing Assembly, 10 have defected till date.

## China-India trade at record high despite border tension

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** An increase in China-India trade in 2021, which reached a record high surpassing \$125 billion amid bilateral tensions, is just another piece of proof that New Delhi is unable to reduce its dependence on the Chinese market, Beijing's state media claimed. The total amount of trade between China and India in 2021 stood at \$125.66 billion, up 43.3 per cent from 2020, said the Global Times report citing statistics released by the General Administration of Customs (GAC). Of which, China's exports to India were \$97.52 billion, up 46.2 per cent, while China imported \$28.14 billion worth of goods from India, up 34.2 per cent. Analysts attributed the surge in trade to the complementary aspects of the industrial chains of the two countries. For example, about 50-60 per cent of chemicals and other materials used by the Indian pharmaceutical industry, which is a pillar industry, are imported from China. India was China's 15th largest trade partner in 2021, the Global Times quoted the GAC as saying. "Analysts said that the boycott of Made-in-China products will not balance the trade deficit and that boosting India's exports to China is the right choice. Meanwhile, India should not exclude China when it



seeks free trade agreements as China is already involved in international free trade mechanisms," the Global Times said. Total trade between China and countries that have signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) - 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand - expanded significantly in 2021.

## Kerala records highest ever daily Covid-19 cases at 46,387; TPR surges to 40%

Kerala on Thursday reported 46,387 new Covid-19 cases with test positivity rate soaring to 40.2 per cent, which is the highest ever figure since the onslaught of the pandemic. The state tested 1,15,357 samples in the last 24 hours. The worst hit capital district of Thiruvananthapuram has 9720 new cases with a test positivity rate of 46.68 per cent. In the districts of Ernakulam and Kozhikode also TPR has gone up to 45.6 per cent and 42 per cent respectively. As many as 32 new Covid-19 deaths were reported, 309 other deaths have been included in the Covid-19 death tally after admitting appeals, taking the total number of deaths to 51501. Of 46387 new cases reported on Thursday, 29926 had been fully vaccinated and 2162 had the first dose of vaccine. The number of health workers, who have been first to get two doses of vaccine, getting infected has also risen. On Thursday, 385 health workers tested positive. Several institutional clusters have emerged across Kerala at hospitals, police stations, educational institutions, and hostels.



The number of active patients, number of those admitted in hospitals, field hospitals, ICU, ventilator and in oxygen supported beds has increased by 201 per cent, 70 per cent, 126 per cent, 48 per cent, 14 per cent and 64 per cent respectively, during January 13-19 compared to the previous week.

## 2 Indians killed in drone attack in UAE; Houthi rebels claim responsibility

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Yemen's Houthi rebel group claimed responsibility for a "qualitative military operation" that struck areas deep inside the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in which three persons including two Indians were killed. As per the Abu Dhabi police, three persons -- two Indians and one Pakistani, were killed. Besides, six others were injured. "An important statement will be announced in the upcoming hours to reveal details on the strategic operation deep inside the UAE," said the Houthi rebel group's spokesman Yahya Saree in a brief press statement on Monday. The Houthis' claim surfaced just after three petroleum tankers exploded in a fire near the storage facilities of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company in the UAE capital's Musaffah industrial district, the official WAM news agency reported, citing an announcement of the Abu Dhabi police. A minor fire also broke out in the new construction area of Abu Dhabi International Airport, according to the WAM. Initial investigations show the fires and explosion were possibly caused by unidentified drones in the area. The fire at both places has been brought under control and air traffic was not affected, officials told the media. The UAE is an active member of the Saudi-led coalition which has been fighting a large-scale war against the Houthi rebel militia in various areas of Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition intervened in the Yemeni conflict in 2015 to support the Yemeni internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi after the Iran-backed Houthi militia forced him out of the capital



Sanaa. The Houthi militia has recently intensified cross-border drone and missile attacks against different Saudi cities. In February 2021, the Houthi militia launched a major offensive against the government army to capture the oil-rich province of Marib in central Yemen. The Houthi group is on the radar of investigative agencies as they announced a terror attack plan against the UAE. It is said that the Houthis are not happy with the UAE government, and recently hijacked a UAE vessel 'Rawabee', claiming it was carrying weapons, supposed to be used against them. The UAE government raised the issue in the UN, supported by the Indian government. The Rawabee ship also had seven Indian nationals in the crew.

## FATAL COLLISION: PEEL POLICE ARRESTED AND CHARGED AKAMJOT SANDHU, 22, FROM MISSISSAUGA

**REGION OF PEEL** – Investigators from Peel Regional Police Major Collis Bureau have arrested and charge Mississauga man in relation to a f collision in Mississauga.



On Saturday, September 11, 202 approximately 12:30 a.m., the victim, year-old man from Toronto, was op his vehicle as a transportation service when he was involved in a collision within the intersection of Winston Churchill Boulevard and Burnhamthorpe Road West in Mississauga. The victim had a passenger in his vehicle at the time of the collision. As a result, the passenger, a 34-year-old man from Mississauga was pronounced deceased at the scene. The driver in the other vehicle involved, a 22-year-old man from Brampton, was taken to a local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. He had a 19-year-old female passenger from Brampton who was transported to a local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. On Wednesday, January 13, 2022, the 22-year-old driver of the other vehicle, Akamjot Sandhu, was arrested and charged with the following offences:

Impaired Operation Causing Death  
Impaired Operation Causing Bodily Harm (X2)  
Dangerous Operation Causing Death  
Dangerous Operation Causing Bodily Harm (X2)  
Public Mischief  
He was held for a bail hearing and attended the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton.

Anyone who may have witnessed this collision or has video surveillance, or dashcam footage of the incident, is asked to contact the Major Collision Bureau at 905-453-2121, extension 3710.

## FATAL MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISION: CANADA WIDE WARRANT ISSUED FOR KAMALJIT SINGH, 25, FROM BRAMPTON

Investigators from the Major Collision Bureau have issued a Canada Wide Warrant after a fatal motor vehicle collision occurred in the City of Brampton. On Saturday, July 3, 2021, at approximately 5:00 a.m., a violent collision occurred between two vehicles in the intersection of Hurontario Street and Sandalwood Parkway in Brampton. The victim, a 59-year-old man from Brampton, was pronounced deceased at the scene.



Kamaljit Singh, a 25-year-old man from Brampton, was operating the other vehicle involved. Kamaljit failed to remain at the collision, leaving two passengers in his vehicle. One passenger was a 25-year-old man from Brampton who was taken to a trauma centre with serious injuries. The second passenger was a 23-year-old man from Guelph who suffered non-life threatening injuries. Police located Kamaljit a short time later and charged him with the following offences:

" Impaired Operation Cause Death  
" Failure to Stop After an Accident Resulting in Death  
" Operation While Impaired Cause Bodily Harm  
" Failure to Stop After an Accident Resulting in Bodily Harm

Kamaljit Singh was released and refused to comply with his conditions. His whereabouts are unknown at this time. Investigators have issued a Canada Wide Warrant for his arrest.

Investigators from the Major Collision Bureau are appealing to anyone from the public who may have any information on his whereabouts to please contact them at 905-453-2121 x3710.

## META APPOINTS MEGHNA APPARAO AS DIRECTOR OF E-COMMERCE IN INDIA

Meta (formerly Facebook) on Tuesday appointed Meghna Apparao as the Director of e-commerce in India to lead the strategy and solutioning that is focused on the company's e-commerce advertisers. Apparao's appointment comes on the back of a series of senior leadership recruitments in the past two years, and many in the recent months, across policy, partnerships, and other key verticals, demonstrating the company's expanding charter and commitment to India. "I am thrilled to welcome Meghna as she joins our team to lead this mandate and to shape the role our apps can play in enabling the growth of some of India's largest online and retail businesses," Arun Srinivas, Director and Head of Global Business Group at Meta in India said in a statement. As a part of her role, Apparao will spearhead the company's strategic relationship with the country's leading brands in the e-commerce space, enabling a stronger partnership through Meta platform solutions. Apparao comes with 20 years of experience in senior sales, marketing, and business strategy roles at companies such as Unilever, Amazon, Godrej, and Licious. Her last assignment was with Licious, where she was the Chief Business Officer. In 2018, she was also selected for the Chevening Fellowship program at the University of Oxford.

## FBI IDENTIFIES TEXAS SYNAGOGUE HOSTAGE TAKER AS MALIK FAISAL AKRAM

Synagogue terrorist Malik Faisal Akram was being watched by British spies in the months before his 10-hour siege in Texas because of his links to extremism -- but was let off the hook, the Daily Mail reported. The Blackburn-born father of six, a career criminal and reputedly a member of an ultra-conservative Islamist sect, was put under surveillance at the end of 2020 for four weeks, the report said. But a security source said MI5 closed the case having decided that he "didn't present a terrorist threat at that time". He was not kept on the terror 'watchlist' that would have prevented him from flying to America, which security experts have said was a big mistake given the surveillance he had been under. The latest blunder emerged as Britain and the US were on Tuesday accused of 'dropping the ball' after letting him fly to New York despite police already hunting for him and his links to a religious sect banned in Saudi Arabia for attempts to 'purify Islam', the Daily Mail reported. He was also fixated with demanding the release of 'Lady al-Qaeda' Aafia Siddiqui, a convicted terrorist in a Texan jail who is a cause celebre for terror groups around the world. Akram's brother has claimed that he believes 'someone helped him' through immigration because he had been in and out of prison since he was a juvenile. Akram became known to counter-terrorism police after becoming 'completely obsessed' with Islam and displayed extreme and disruptive behaviour at Friday prayers during his most recent spell in prison, the report added.



Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5-STATES ELECTION, 2022



Battle for UP: It's back to Mandal against Kamandal

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** After spate of resignations from BJP, the narrative of the big battle of Uttar Pradesh has slightly shifted from the Hindutva to Mandal, as the resignees have alleged that BJP ignored the welfare of backward castes and had ignored issue of reservation in the state which the BJP has denied.

Each leader who had quit used the same language in their resignations and it's well though a strategy to corner BJP on the issue of social justice, that is why nobody is talking about minority but of backward class which comprises a large chunk of the population. The exits have created an impression that BJP is ignorant of the issues of backward caste which the party has denied and it believes that the community is in sync with the BJP's social engineering formula which has won three big elections in UP since 2014.

BJP Minister Siddharth Nath Singh says, "the biggest OBC face is Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Delhi based independent analyst Rahul Varma says, "the SP will try to make it forward-backward contest. Will the SP succeed in this -- can't say for sure."

He adds that the rebels are joining SP because, "other players will be on the margin with very little chance to win."

Former BJP ministers Swami Prasad Maurya and Dharam Singh Saini along with other MLAs, on Friday, formally joined the Samajwadi Party along with their supporters. The others are likely to join the party in coming days.

Maurya accused the BJP of coming to power in 2017 by duping backward castes. He said that the BJP had projected Keshav Maurya as chief minister, but then brought 'someone else from Gorakhpur like a Skylab'. Maurya said that all his efforts would be to free Uttar Pradesh from the misrule of the BJP. He said that the Yogi Adityanath government has misled the people of the state.

"I want to tell the BJP that its countdown to failure begins today," he said. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, while welcoming the leaders into his party, said that the BJP was robbing the poor to give benefit to the rich. Taking a dig at deputy Chief Minister Keshav Maurya, he said, "Now that these leaders have come here, I wonder what will happen to those who are made to sit on stools."

The experts differ in opinion that BJP is champion of Social engineering but not of social justice as many leaders who quit the BJP have long history and association for struggle against injustice meted out to their community socially and have huge following.

Another Delhi based independent analyst Shakil Akhtar says, "there is a feeling in the defectors that they can't return to their constituency on a BJP symbol so they went to the party which has social justice in it roots while the BJP was dependent on social engineering."

Experts say that BJP has created a winning combination in UP with taking all communities in the state which was once a winning formula for SP & BSP but was disenchanted and now the BJP is facing the same but still Yogi at its forefront, BJP will play the Hindutva issue carefully to overcome Mandal. As the Chief Minister carefully carved out 80:20 formula and threw it in public domain to debate and gave an issue and line to his supporters. While the experts believe that now the situation could reach to 50-50, and BJP will not have the clean sweep it expected.

The experts believe that the real issues are inflation, Covid deaths, stray animals, unemployment and the BJP has not been able to gauge the minds of its own MLAs and ministers.

The SP is having the last laugh in terms of defections as all roads lead to the party office on Vikramaditya Marg in Lucknow. The rebels from the BJP BSP and the Congress are lining up at Akhilesh Yadav's door, which analysts believe is in favour of the SP, as leaders like Maurya have a strong ground presence and feedback.

Battle for UP: Why Lucknow Cantt seat is now so important

**LUCKNOW, (IANS)** The Lucknow Cantt seat has suddenly turned into a much-coveted Assembly segment with several BJP leaders making a bid for it even though the party has a sitting legislator on it.

BJP MP Rita Bahuguna Joshi, who won the seat in 2017, now wants to field her son Mayank Joshi, who is making his political debut.

She had vacated the seat in 2019 after she won the Lok Sabha seat from Allahabad. Joshi has been lobbying hard for the ticket and her supporters claim that if Rajnath Singh, an MP, can get a ticket for his son Pankaj Singh, and Rajvir Singh, also an MP, can get a ticket for his son Sandeep Singh, they Rita Bahuguna Joshi also deserves to field her son.

Suresh Tiwari, a former MLA, regained the seat for the BJP in 2019 when he won the by-election from here. He had won the seat in 1996, 2002 and 2007 also. According to party sources, Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma also has an eye on this seat that has a sizeable upper caste vote.

While the other Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Maurya has been named as a candidate for the Sirathu seat in Kaushambhi district, Sharma's candidature is yet to be cleared.

According to a party leader, Dinesh Sharma would prefer the Cantt seat which has 1.5 lakh Brahmin voters, 60,000 Sindhi and Punjabi voters who are traditionally BJP supporters, 25,000 Vaishya voters and Muslim voters are only about 40,000.

What has suddenly made this seat into a VIP seat are reports that Aparna Yadav, younger daughter-in-law of Samajwadi patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav, is all set to contest this seat.



Aparna, wife of Prateek Yadav, had contested the 2017 elections from the Lucknow Cantt seat but lost to BJP's Rita Bahuguna Joshi.

There have been speculations that Aparna is preparing to join the BJP, but sources close to her claim that this is likely to happen only if she is denied a ticket by the Samajwadi Party.

Her uncle Shivpal Yadav has already advised her to stay in the family and the party and work. "She will get a reward at the right time," he said. BJP leaders, on the other hand, feel that Suresh Tiwari should be renominated for this seat since he got barely two years after he was elected in the by-election.

Punjab Polls: It's Majithia versus Majithia versus Majithia, literally!

**CHANDIGARH, (IANS)** A high-profile Majithia Assembly constituency in Punjab's Majha region has gained prominence for the February 14 poll owing to Majithia versus Majithia versus Majithia -- three namesakes in the fray -- and one among them is facing serious allegations of involvement in drug nexus. The high-profile Assembly constituency is the citadel of 'Majhe da Jarnail' and former Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) revenue minister and sitting legislator Bikram Singh Majithia, Congress turncoat and AAP candidate Sukhjinder Raj Singh, alias LalliMajithia, who lost two consecutive Assembly polls to the Akali leader, and his younger brother and Congress first-time candidate Jagwinder Pal Singh, alias Jagga Majithia, 59. A multi-cornered contest is on the cards with Congress turncoat Bhagwant Pal Sachar, who was president of the District Congress Committee (Rural) and believed to be close to Congress state chief Navjot Sidhu, joined the BJP after his claim for the candidature was denied by the Congress. He's likely to be the BJP candidate from this seat. The contest is among the SAD, the Congress, AAP and the BJP. The BJP has an alliance with former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's Punjab Lok Congress and the SAD (Sanyukt), and farm leader Balbir Singh Rajewal's Sanyukt Samaj Morcha.

This time the stakes are all the more high due to the entry of several parties, compared to the triangular contest in 2017 in Majitha, part of the Amritsar parliamentary seat. Up against his elder brother, Jagga Majithia, told IANS on Monday that when his brother LalliMajithia was in the fray in the past two Assembly polls he was the main campaigner. "Nobody knows him in the constituency as he's not a social worker. I was the main campaigner in all his previous elections and I stood with my constituents even when there was no election. No one will vote for him as he kept his doors shut for the public," he said. Before joining AAP, LalliMajithia, a confidant of former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, resigned as chairman-cum-director of the Punjab State Grains Procurement Corporation Ltd (Pungrain) on December 30. On the day of Majithia joining AAP, its leader Raghav Chadha said the Majitha constituency is usually a fixed match with a compromise candidate against SAD candidate Bikram Majithia by the Congress and to return the favour a weaker candidate given by the SAD against Capt Amarinder Singh. "Not anymore! AAP fields a political stalwart LalliMajithia, a force to reckon with," state party co-in-charge Chadha tweeted. In 2017, the AAP had fielded Himmet Singh Shergill, who faced a humiliating defeat by garnering just 10,252 votes, compared to the winner's total 65,803 votes. At that time Arvind Kejriwal vowed to send him to jail if the party came into power. The younger brother of former Union Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal and brother-in-law of former Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal, sitting legislator Bikram Majithia, who is the eye of storm again, was summoned by Enforcement Directorate in 2014 for investigating the money laundering link in the Rs 6,000 crore international synthetic drugs racket busted by the Punjab Police in 2013. In the latest drugs case, he got interim protection from arrest from the Punjab and Haryana High Court on January 10 in the case registered against him by the Punjab Police in Mohali on December 20.



ECI SHIFTS POLL DATE IN PUNJAB FROM FEB 14 TO FEB 20



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The Election Commission of India on Monday changed the February 14 date of polling in Punjab to February 20 after request from the political parties due to Sri Guru Ravidas Jayanti.

After a detailed meeting on the rescheduling of the poll date, the Commission changed the poll schedule as announced by it on January 8.

According to the new schedule for Punjab assembly polls, now the date of notification will be January 25 (Tuesday), 2022, last date of nomination will be January 22, 2022 (Tuesday), date of scrutiny - February 2, 2022 (Wednesday), date of withdrawal would be February 4 (Friday) and date of polling will be February 20, 2022 (Sunday). Counting of Votes will be taken up on March 10, 2022 (Thursday). The Election Commission received several representations from State Government, Political Parties and other organizations drawing attention regarding movement of a large number of devotees from Punjab to Varanasi for participation in Sri Guru Ravidas Ji Jayanti celebrations, which is observed on February 16, 2022, the EC said in a statement. It was brought to the notice of the Commission that a large number of devotees start moving for Varanasi around a week before the day of celebration and keeping the poll day on February 14, 2022 will deprive a large number of electors from voting. In view of this, they had requested to shift the poll date a few days after February 16, 2022, the EC officials said. "Commission has also taken inputs from State Government and Chief Electoral Officer of Punjab in this regard and after considering these new facts emerging out of these representations, inputs from the State Government and Chief Electoral Officer, past precedence and all facts and circumstances in the matter, now Commission has decided to reschedule the General Elections to Legislative Assembly of Punjab," the ECI said in a statement. Earlier, the ruling Congress party, the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party had requested the Commission to defer the polling on February 14 as it is close to the Sri Guru Ravidas Jayanti on February 16. Submitting a written request by the Congress Party on January 13, it said that over 20 lakh of Schedule Caste voters go to the religious visit to the places related to Sant Ravidas ji. The Party further said that a sizable number of SC voters visit Varanasi from February 10 to 16 every year, therefore, the scheduled date for the poll in Punjab should be postponed till Ravidas Jayanti.

FARMERS' 'MISSION UP' ON FEB 1 IF DEMANDS NOT MET; SKM TO REMAIN APOLITICAL



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) said on Saturday that it will hit the ground again from February 1 by launching a 'Mission UP' movement if the government does not relent to their demands. Led by SKM leader Rakesh Tikait, a team of farmers would embark on a three-day tour of Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh from January 21 and meet the families of the victims of the October 4 violence. If things are not found to be satisfactory, Tikait and the SKM team will camp there and start the 'Mission UP' from February 1.

"There has been no progress. No committee has been formed on Minimum Support Price (MSP). There is only some action on withdrawing cases against farmers in Haryana, but not much progress on that count in other states, including Delhi. There has been no discussion on our demand in connection with power bills," SKM leader Yudhveer Singh told a media conference.

"That leaves us with no option but to launch Mission UP from February 1," Singh told the media in the presence of other SKM leaders, including Tikait, after a day-long meeting at the Singhu border campsite on the outskirts of Delhi.

SKM, a consortium of 40-odd farmers' organisations, had on December 9 declared to suspend their 15-month-long agitation that had started to protest the three contentious farm laws passed in 2020.

Lakhimpur Kheri was the place where on October 4 half-a-dozen people, including farmers and a journalist, were mowed down by a speeding vehicle, allegedly belonging to the son of Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Mishra Teni. The farmers have demanded action against Teni and his son, but no step has been taken yet.

POST-POLL ALLIANCE WITH NON BJP PARTY POSSIBLE IN GOA IF AAP DOESN'T GET MAJORITY : KEJRIWAL

**PANAJI, (IANS)** If the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) fails to secure a majority in the upcoming Goa polls, the party would think of forming a post-poll coalition with a non-BJP party, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday.

Addressing a press conference in Panaji, Kejriwal also ruled out a pre-poll coalition with the Trinamool Congress, while also saying that the doors of his party were open to the son of former Chief Minister late Manohar Parrikar, Utpal, whose request for a BJP ticket to contest from Panaji is tipped to be denied by the ruling party.

"If Goa gives a mandate which makes coalition post election necessary, then we can think of forming a coalition with a non BJP party. Only if there is a mandate like this. I hope the need for this will not arise," Kejriwal told reporters. When asked if the party was keen on a pre-poll alliance with Trinamool, Kejriwal replied in the negative.

Queried about whether his party would consider inducting Utpal Parrikar into the AAP, Kejriwal said: "I respect Manohar Parrikar. His son is welcome to join us if he is willing". Utpal Parrikar has been shunned to the party's margins after his father's death in office in 2019. Utpal has hinted that he may contest the elections on his own, if the BJP denies him the ticket to contest the Panaji seat. Kejriwal also said that the AAP would form a government in Punjab. "Looks like people have resolved to form an AAP government in Punjab. AAP is being looked upon with hope in the country," Kejriwal said.



# It's back to the season of 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' politics

BY DEEPIKA BHAN

As the election to the five state assemblies draws near, the pace of political activities naturally has become turbocharged. Not that rallies or road shows are happening, neither are posters and banners flooding the streets. The movement is of politicians shifting alliances in search of pastures that they believe can fetch them the necessary greens. The proverbial 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' is here again, and no matter what the law says, or what the sentiment and goal of the law is, the crossovers continue.

It is not common to see politicians who have been ministers for full five years suddenly decide to exit their parent party and join the rivals. In recent days, Uttar Pradesh, Goa and Punjab -- three of the five states going to the polls -- has this drama unfolding almost daily. It must surely have made the voters sit up and ponder.

In Goa, political defections continue unabated. At least nine MLAs resigned their seats in the state assembly to join other parties. A Minister in Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's cabinet, Michael Lobo, switched over to the Congress, which is said to have promised tickets to him (Lobo), his wife and some of his associates.

Senior Goa Congress leader and former MLA Victor Gonsalves left the party to join Mamata Banerjee's TMC. The reason for his resignation is said to be the induction of Lobo into the Congress. However, Gonsalves has himself been party-hopping, from the Congress to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to Goa Forward Party (GFP) in 2017, to the Congress in 2020, before settling in Trinamool.

Uttar Pradesh is considered to be one of the toughest political territories in the country, where political equations and affiliations are dominated by caste and religion. And the state has its own share of 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' stories. At least 20 leaders, including ministers, have jumped ship so far.

Just ahead of the election, Swami Prasad Maurya, a minister in the Yogi Adityanath government, announced his resignation on Twitter and joined the Samajwadi Party. After serving his complete five-year term as minister, he accused the BJP of neglecting Dalits, OBCs and farmers.

Maurya had switched over to the BJP from the Bahujan Samaj Party, months ahead of the 2017 Assembly elections, accusing Mayawati of corruption. Before joining the BSP in 1996, he had a stint in the Janata Dal. Soon after Maurya's resignation from the BJP, two more ministers -- Dara Singh Chauhan and Dharam Singh Saini -- followed in his footsteps.

Saini was with the BSP before joining the BJP in 2016 and now has moved to SP with Maurya. Chauhan started with the BSP in 1996, then went to SP and got elected as a Rajya Sabha MP, returned to the BSP ahead of 2009 general elections and was appointed leader of the BSP parliamentary party in the Lok Sabha, switched to the BJP in 2015, and now has again moved on.

As the exodus continued, the BJP was also inducting 'other' leaders - SP's Hariom Yadav and Dharampal Singh, and Naresh Saini of the



**“ AAYA RAM GAYA RAM' STORIES. AT LEAST 20 LEADERS, INCLUDING MINISTERS, HAVE JUMPED SHIP SO FAR. JUST AHEAD OF THE ELECTION, SWAMI PRASAD MAURYA, A MINISTER IN THE YOGI ADITYANATH GOVERNMENT, ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION ON TWITTER AND JOINED THE SAMAJWADI PARTY. AFTER SERVING HIS COMPLETE FIVE-YEAR TERM AS MINISTER, HE ACCUSED THE BJP OF NEGLECTING DALITS, OBCS AND FARMERS. MAURYA HAD SWITCHED OVER TO THE BJP FROM THE BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY, MONTHS AHEAD OF THE 2017 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, ACCUSING MAYAWATI OF CORRUPTION. BEFORE JOINING THE BSP IN 1996, HE HAD A STINT IN THE JANATA DAL. SOON AFTER MAURYA'S RESIGNATION FROM THE BJP, TWO MORE MINISTERS -- DARA SINGH CHAUHAN AND DHARAM SINGH SAINI -- FOLLOWED IN HIS FOOTSTEPS. SAINI WAS WITH THE BSP BEFORE JOINING THE BJP IN 2016 AND NOW HAS MOVED TO SP WITH MAURYA. CHAUHAN STARTED WITH THE BSP IN 1996, THEN WENT TO SP AND GOT ELECTED AS A RAJYA SABHA MP, RETURNED TO THE BSP AHEAD OF 2009 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND WAS APPOINTED LEADER OF THE BSP PARLIAMENTARY PARTY IN THE LOK SABHA, SWITCHED TO THE BJP IN 2015, AND NOW HAS AGAIN MOVED ON.**

Congress, for instance.

In Punjab, too, politicians are hopping around from one party to another in search of better deals. The Congress' Dalit face and former minister Joginder Singh Mann resigned and joined AAP after accusing the party of "patronising the tainted and giving space to opportunists".

Six days after joining the BJP, MLA Balwinder Laddi rejoined the Congress on January 2. It is being said that he returned after being assured of a party ticket in the assembly elections.

Harjot Kamal, Congress MLA from Moga, was said to be unhappy after his seat was given to actor SonuSood's sister Malvika, just weeks ahead of the state elections. A "humiliated" Kamal joined the BJP on Saturday. Congress MLA Fateh Jung Singh Bajwa, brother of senior party leader and MP Partap Bajwa, also switched sides, fearing he may lose the candidature this time.

In Uttarakhand, AAP leader Ravindra Jugran quit the party and rejoined the ruling BJP, saying it was like a homecoming for him. He had earlier been in BJP for 25 years, but had joined AAP a year ago.

Former Uttarakhand Congress president Kishore Upadhyay was reported to have met some BJP leaders because he is said to be unhappy with Harish Rawat spearheading the party's election campaign. Upadhyay was removed from all party posts on the charge of committing 'anti-party activities'.

Similar examples of jumping ships can be multiplied. The 'Aaya Rams Gaya Rams' may evoke awkward responses, but the fact is that they are a striking feature in the political space. Some may dismiss them as being disgustingly opportunistic, others may even regard them as loyalty shifts dictated by legitimate political reasons.

The fact is that 'Aaya Rams Gaya Rams' continue to exist even in 2022, a good 55 years after an independent MLA, Gaya Lal, from Haryana in 1967 switched two parties in a day and three in 15 days -- joined the Congress, then the United Front, and finally, back to the Congress to

become a part of the new government.

According to contemporary news reports, Congress leader Rao Birender Singh addressed a press conference in Chandigarh with Gaya Lal by his side. Birender Singh told the media: "Gaya Ram ab Aaya Ram hai." A few days later, the then Union Home Minister, Yashwantrao Chavan, used the phrase 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram' in Parliament as he took a jibe at Gaya Lal.

In June 1979, Bhajan Lal formed the Janata Party government in Haryana. However, when Indira Gandhi won the Lok Sabha elections in 1980, he joined the Congress along with all his MLAs. This is also regarded as one of the worst instances of 'Aaya Aam Gaya Ram' politics.

The Rajiv Gandhi government in 1985 introduced the anti-defection law to stop the jumping jacks from ditching their mother parties. A Constitution Amendment Bill that included the Tenth Schedule to enact the anti-defection law was passed.

An MLA or MP who switches parties can avoid the anti-defection law, only if one-third of the party legislators also resign; otherwise he or she would stand disqualified.

Although 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' politics has become uncommon after the anti-defection law came into force, it keeps surfacing every now and then. The phrase is an idiom that became popular in the late 1960s, but has a deep political history laced with suspicion.

The openness on social media and the unparalleled access to all sorts of information today gives an advantage to the people and it is this that the turncoats, the 'Aaya Rams Gaya Rams', need to fear.

*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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## Paul Calandra appointed as Ontario's next Minister of Long-Term Care after Rod Phillips resigns & says he won't seek re-election

Premier Doug Ford announced the appointment of Paul Calandra as Ontario's next Minister of Long-Term Care. Minister Calandra will maintain his existing responsibilities as Minister of Legislative Affairs and Government House Leader.

"As our government's lead voice at Queen's Park helping to move forward important legislation, including the recently-passed Fixing Long-Term Care Act, Minister Calandra is a trusted voice at the Cabinet table and is well positioned to continue improving the care that long-term care home residents receive," said Premier Ford. "Our government will never stop working to build more long-term care home beds and improve the care provided to residents. Ontario's seniors have given so much to our province and we will always be there for

them." Premier Ford reiterated his gratitude to Rod Phillips for his contributions to Ontario.

"I want to thank Rod for his tireless work representing the people of Ajax and advancing important and necessary improvements in Ontario's long-term care system," said Premier Ford. "During his time as Minister of Long-Term Care, Rod helped build much-needed long-term care homes, recruit more personal support workers and nurses and, with the passing of the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, improve accountability and transparency in the sector. These initiatives will have a lasting impact as they improve the lives of long-term care residents and their families. I want to wish him and Lydia the very best in their next chapter. I have no doubt there are great things for Rod ahead."

## ONTARIO LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO SUPPORT ADVANCED MANUFACTURERS ACROSS PROVINCE

The Ontario government launched the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness (AMIC) program to help companies get the tools, technology and talent they need to grow, compete and innovate in an increasingly competitive global market.

As part of the 2021 Fall Economic Statement, AMIC is a new stream of the Regional Development Program (RDP). The two-year, \$40 million program will support advanced manufacturing businesses to invest in the equipment, advanced technologies and skilled workforce needed to improve competitiveness and growth. As Ontario continues to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, AMIC will help to create and retain good jobs and address the need to restore the essential supply chains that will support economic recovery across the province.

Starting now, eligible businesses can apply for the new program. Eligibility requirements include:

- \* minimum of 10 employees
- \* three or more years of financial statements, and
- \* minimum of \$500,000 in eligible project costs.

The first round of applications will be open until February 10, 2022.

"Since Day 1, our government has endeavored to make Ontario a more attractive investment destination, but we know there is more work to do," said Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. "With increased international competition for investment, our government wants to help Ontario's advanced manufacturers continue to thrive and be global leaders in innovation. This program will create the right conditions for our businesses and job creators to invest, grow and attract investment all across Ontario."

AMIC will support the advanced manufacturing sector in capital-intensive industries such as automotive, aerospace, life sciences, information technology, steel, and chemical by ensuring they have the necessary funds to invest in new technology and innovative equipment.

"Manufacturing is critical to Ontario's prosperity; it provides high-quality, well-paying jobs and is an important contributor to strong economic growth in the province," said Rocco Rossi, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. "The new Advanced

Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness Stream under the Regional Development Program will contribute to long-term growth, productivity and competitiveness of Ontario's manufacturing sector, which is undergoing significant change."

The Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness program will build on Ontario's successful RDP. In 2019, Ontario launched the RDP to help eligible businesses, municipalities and economic development organizations create jobs and opportunities in Eastern and Southwestern Ontario.

"Manufacturing is the cornerstone of Ontario's economy. It drives economic recovery and prosperity throughout Ontario and across Canada. This government has made it clear that it wants our sector to be global leaders in innovation," said Mathew Wilson, Senior Vice President, Policy, Government Relations & Ontario Division, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME). "To accomplish this, CME has been clear that the government must help companies invest in new technologies, new processes, and their people. For Ontario's manufacturers, this fund will be a valuable tool to support their investments, to help them scale up, and to improve their competitiveness."

The RDP is part of Ontario's plan to build smarter government and protect our core programs and services. Our goal is to ensure sustainability, now and for future generations.

**QUICK FACTS**

- \* The first application round for the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness Program will be open from January 17 to February 10, 2022.
- \* The Regional Development Program (RDP) has received 165 applications in the first 7 rounds of funding.
- \* Since the launch of the RDP, the Province has committed to investing \$60 million in 61 projects, supporting investments totalling more than \$470 million. These investments are helping to create over 1,200 jobs.
- \* Employment in Ontario increased by 46,900 in December, almost all of it in full-time jobs.

## ONTARIO PREMIER FORD'S APPROVAL RATING CONTINUES TO FALL: POLL

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

While many praised the Premier for his hands-on approach to helping Ontarians, others were skeptical, calling it an elaborate public relations stunt before elections—given that some of the photos and video came from his own office. Ford's personal approval drops, pandemic policy panned: poll

Premier Doug Ford begins an election year at an all-time low for his approval. Three-in-ten (30%) of Ontarians offer a positive assessment of Ford, matching the nadir of his approval seen before the pandemic. Ontario delayed the reopening of schools by two weeks after the winter break, continuing a pattern of closures that are wearing on the province's parents. Children in Ontario have spent more time in online school throughout the pandemic than other students across the country, as parents express a desire for a more balanced approach leaning towards keeping schools open for in-class learning. Meanwhile, business owners and workers are upset with renewed restrictions on indoor dining, gyms, theatres and large events, and health-care workers are dealing with surging hospitalizations once again. All of this likely influences the negative assessment Ontarians offer Ford on his handling of the pandemic. Three-in-ten (29%) say he has done well on his approach to COVID-19, a decline from the two-in-five (42%) who said so in July. While most Ontarians are happy with how the vaccination effort has gone in the province—two-thirds (65%) say the provincial government has done well distributing COVID-19 vaccines—few are satisfied with the distribution of rapid tests. Some have been handed out to the general public— attracting lineups of thousands of people in some cases—but more have been distributed to high risk settings. One-in-five (19%) are supportive of the PCPO government's strategy so far, but many more (73%) say the province has done a bad job getting the tests to where they need to go.

## WILL COVID-19 PILL APPROVAL IN CANADA BE A GAME-CHANGER?

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Mark Namchuk, executive director of Harvard Medical School's Therapeutics Initiative, said pills have some clear advantages over existing treatments— the drug remdesivir and a handful of antibody therapies—because they are by comparison easy to transport, store, and administer. The other treatments must be given intravenously and have largely been reserved for use by the sickest patients confined to medical facilities late in their illness' course.

"They're both oral, so much easier to get them distributed to folks early in their illness and make them more broadly available," said Namchuk, professor of the practice of biological chemistry and molecular pharmacology. "The efficacy is very encouraging, but the route of administration opens up the possibility of using it more broadly."

Until now, authorized medications for COVID-19 have had to be taken in a hospital or healthcare setting. PAXLOVIDTM is the first COVID-19 therapy that can be taken at home. The drug is intended for use as soon as possible after a diagnosis of COVID-19 and within five days of the start of symptoms. The treatment consists of two tablets of nirmatrelvir and one tablet of ritonavir taken together by mouth twice per day for five days. While the benefits of Paxlovid were found to outweigh the risks, it can cause interactions with other medications for some patients. As such, patients should discuss the risks and benefits of treatment with their healthcare provider. Canada's health officials say no drug, including PAXLOVIDTM, is a substitute for vaccination. Vaccination remains the most important tool in preventing serious illness from COVID-19 infection. Both the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada continues to strongly recommend vaccination for all eligible Canadians, including those who are pregnant, may become pregnant or are breast-feeding.



CANADA RECEIVED ITS FIRST SHIPMENT OF PAXLOVID, PFIZER'S COVID-19 ANTI-VIRAL PILL, TO TREAT 30,000 PEOPLE (HEALTH CANADA & PHAC/ TWITTER).

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## Omicron Inevitability? 55% Canadians say they’ll be infected regardless of precautions; two-in-five would end all restrictions: poll

The latest tranche of government restrictions aimed at curbing the unrelentingly virulent spread of COVID-19’s Omicron variant is a provincial patchwork that is reflective of Canada’s status as a federation. Now, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute show nationally a slim majority resigned to the inevitability of being infected with this latest strain of the coronavirus. More than half of Canadians (55%) say regardless of the precautions they take, they expect to contract Omicron. Notably, this sentiment rises to at least three-in-five among parents who have children in grade school. Still, those who feel they can’t avoid an Omicron infection are split on whether it’s time to remove all public health restrictions. Among those who feel that they will be infected with the latest variant no matter what they do, half (48%) say that public health measures should be removed completely, and half (48%) disagree. The widespread transmissibility of Omicron does not appear to be changing the calculus for parents when it comes to whether schools should be open for in-person learning, however. While they are more likely than those without children in school to say that they will contract Omicron, parents of elementary and secondary students lean toward the benefits of having children in-class, rather than online learning. Asked to weigh these two aspects of the

debate, 46 per cent say both are equivalent in their priority, while 38 per cent say that the mental health and social development of children from being in school is primary. Far fewer (16%) say limiting the spread of COVID-19 in schools should be the government’s higher concern during the pandemic. **More Key Findings:** Half of men aged 54 and under would like to see the end of restrictions. For all other age-gender groups, a majority wouldn’t end restrictions, including two-thirds (66%) of women aged 55-years-old and older. A plurality in Saskatchewan (44%) and Manitoba (42%) believe restrictions should be stricter in their province. As many in Quebec believe restrictions are too strict (36%) as believe they are about right (38%). In Newfoundland and Labrador, three-in-five (60%) believe infection by Omicron is inevitable regardless of what they do. Notably, that province’s chief medical officer said at the beginning of the month she believed most people in the province would catch the variant. Few (23%) believe 2022 will be the final year of the pandemic. Women aged 18- to 34-years-old (61%) are the most likely to believe we’ll be dealing with widespread COVID-19 infection into 2023 at least.

## Letter to the Community from William Osler Health System

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The key challenges we face are shared by hospitals across the province. We have been seeing a significant increase in the need for care across our Emergency Departments and inpatient units and, at the same time, a decrease in staffing levels with growing numbers of health care workers in isolation with COVID-19 symptoms. It’s a reality that has required us to make some very difficult decisions. Please know that every decision we make is done with the health and safety of our patients and teams in mind. That is, and will always be our priority. **Addressing COVID-19 challenges** On January 3, we declared a Code Orange, a temporary measure to help bring resources, laser focus and attention to urgently address our capacity pressures and staffing challenges. Our teams and partners mobilized quickly and we were able to declare the Code Orange over on January 5. Our hospitals remain under significant pressure and on January 10, after careful consideration, we decided to temporarily close our Urgent Care Centre (UCC) at Peel Memorial in order to direct our dedicated staff and physicians to areas of greatest need. We are working towards a February 1 reopening for the UCC and are committed to doing this as soon as we are safely able. Osler’s two Emergency Departments are open 24 hours a day, every day, for anyone requiring emergency or urgent care related to a serious injury, illness or condition. We have taken other necessary steps to ensure we can continue to provide safe, compassionate care including temporarily cancelling elective and non-urgent services, procedures and surgeries, in line with a Directive by the Ontario Government. We have also adjusted our Visitor Policy to allow Essential Care Partners 24/7 access in the



hospital to support patient care at the bedside. **Looking ahead** As we near year three of the pandemic, our teams will continue to work tirelessly, and we remain grateful for the support of our community, our government, health system partners and of course our Foundation. The support of the William Osler Health System Foundation has been unwavering and helps make everything we do possible. Our experience of the last 22 months tells us that the situation can shift quickly and we know we have immense support surrounding us. As Osler steers through the pandemic’s fifth wave, we commit to keeping you updated and informed of changes to our services. Please continue to do your part by following the guidance of medical experts and public health officials on vaccination, masking, and physical and social distancing. And if you or a loved one require care in our hospitals we ask that you be patient and kind with our staff, physicians and volunteers who are working around-the-clock under difficult circumstances to care for those in need. We remain deeply committed to the delivery of high-quality care with compassion to our patients and consider it a privilege to be your community hospital. We thank you for your ongoing support and wish you all a safe and healthy 2022.

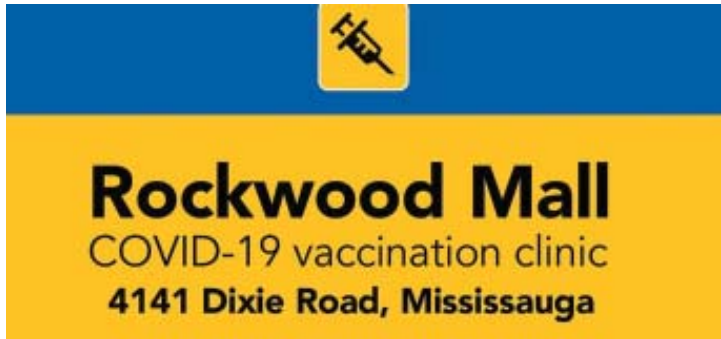
## AVERAGE HOME PRICE HITS \$713,500 IN CANADA, UP 17.7% FROM DEC. 2020

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1  
HIGHLIGHTS

National home sales inched up 0.2% on a month-over-month basis in December. Actual (not seasonally adjusted) monthly activity came in 9.9% below the record posted in December 2020. The number of newly listed properties fell 3.2% from November to December. The MLS® Home Price Index (MLS® HPI) rose 2.5% month-over-month and was up a record 26.6% year-over-year. The actual (not seasonally adjusted) national average sale price posted a 17.7% year-over-year gain in December. **NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL STATISTICS** Home sales recorded over Canadian MLS® Systems were little changed (+0.2%) between November and December 2021. Small gains in November and again in December followed on the heels of a 9% jump in activity in October, placing sales in the final quarter of 2021 between the highs and lows seen earlier in the year. (Chart A) With the exception of month-over-month sales gains in Calgary and the Fraser Valley, most other large markets mirrored the national trend of little change between November and December. The actual (not seasonally adjusted) number of transactions in December 2021 came in 9.9% below the record for that month set in 2020. That said, as has been the case throughout the second half of 2021, it was still the second-highest level on record for the month. On an annual basis, a total of 666,995 residential properties traded hands via Canadian MLS® Systems in 2021. This was a new record by a large margin, surpassing the previous annual record set in 2020 by a little more than 20%, and standing 30% above the average of the last 10 years. “With the housing supply issues facing the country having only gotten worse to start 2022, take any decline in sales early in the year with a grain of salt because the demand hasn’t gone away, there just won’t be much to buy until a little later in this spring” said

Cliff Stevenson, Chair of CREA. “But when those listings eventually start to show up, the spring market this year will almost certainly be another headline grabber. If you’re thinking about jumping into the market as either a buyer, seller or both, your local REALTOR® has the information and guidance you’ll need to navigate the market in these unprecedented times,” continued Stevenson. “There are currently fewer properties listed for sale in Canada than at any point on record,” said Shaun Cathcart, CREA’s Senior Economist. “So unfortunately, the housing affordability problem facing the country is likely to get worse before it gets better. Policymakers are starting to say the right things, but now they have to act to change this course we’re on. An aggressive national push to build more homes is what will address the issue, but it will probably have to be a greater amount of building than anything we’ve ever undertaken. A touch over the status quo won’t cut it.” The number of newly listed homes fell back 3.2% in December compared to November, with declines in Greater Vancouver, Montreal and a number of other areas in Quebec more than offsetting an increase in new supply in the GTA. With sales little changed and new listings down in December, the sales-to-new listings ratio tightened to 79.7% compared to 77% in November. The long-term average for the national sales-to-new listings ratio is 54.9%. Almost two-thirds of local markets were sellers’ markets based on the sales-to-new listings ratio being more than one standard deviation above its long-term mean in December 2021. The remaining one-third of local markets were in balanced market territory. There were just 1.6 months of inventory on a national basis at the end of December 2021 — the lowest level ever recorded. The long-term average for this measure is a little more than 5 months. In line with the tightest market conditions ever recorded, the Aggregate Composite MLS® Home Price Index (MLS® HPI) was up another 2.5% on a month-over-month basis in December 2021. The non-seasonally adjusted Aggregate Composite MLS® HPI was up by a record 26.6% on a year-over-year basis in December.

## NEW ROCKWOOD MALL VACCINE CLINIC IN SOUTH MISSISSAUGA OPENS



Peel Public Health is pleased to announce the opening of a new COVID-19 vaccination clinic at Rockwood Mall (4141 Dixie Road) in south Mississauga. The clinic will open on Wednesday, January 19, 2021. Centrally located in south Mississauga, this new mass clinic will initially provide booster doses to our 30+ population as Peel continues to push towards 100% vaccine coverage. Eligible residents can get: First and second dose 18+ (walk-in or appointment) Booster doses for 30+ population by appointment only Appointments can be booked through the COVID-19 vaccination portal beginning Monday January 17, or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY 1-866-797-0007). Rockwood Mall Clinic address and hours of operation: Location: 4141 Dixie Road, Mississauga Opening date: January 19 Days and hours of operation: Tuesday to Saturday, 1 p.m. – 8 p.m. Peel Public Health is now adding an additional 5000 doses a week at the Rockwood Mall Clinic in Mississauga to further advance our efforts to protect our residents against COVID-19. I urge all residents to get boosters as soon as possible. Vaccination remains the cornerstone of protection against severe outcomes during this period of transition. During this omicron surge, please also continue to stay home if you are sick and mask in indoor public spaces to slow the spread and protect those in our community who have not yet been protected. against COVID-19. Dr. Lawrence Loh, Medical Officer of Health, Peel Region Residents looking to get vaccinated before the opening of this clinic can do so at any Peel clinic. New locations are added regularly as community needs are identified. To find a location near you, check peelregion.ca/covid19vaccine.

## PFIZER CEO SAYS THIS MAY BE LAST COVID WAVE WITH RESTRICTIONS

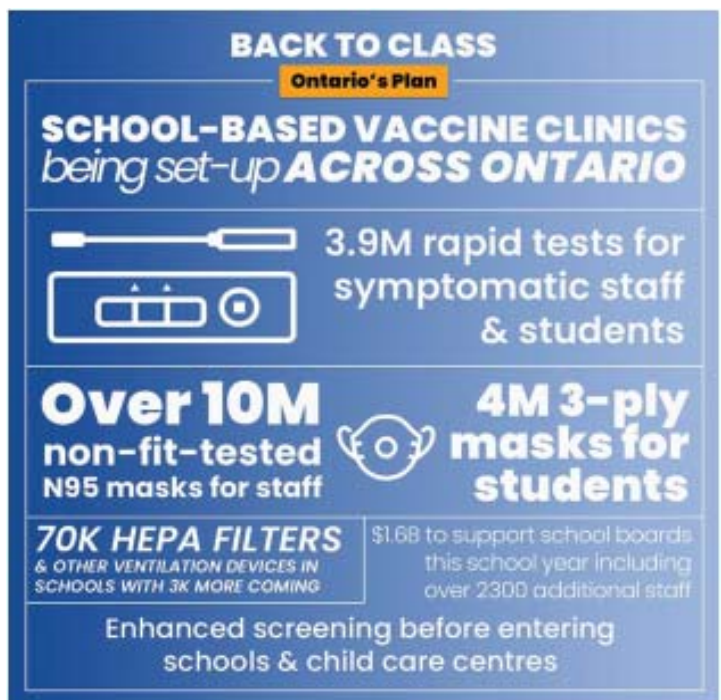


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Bourla also touted the effectiveness and safety of vaccines, saying that he believed people will continue to require booster shots, the report said. "It's important that people receive the three-dose regimen of Pfizer's Coronavirus vaccine, and will likely then require annual boosters although the immunocompromised could require them every four months," Bourla said, adding: "Children must be vaccinated in order to protect them. Its effectiveness in children is very, very, very good." Bourla also said that the company's anti-Covid pill, Paxlovid, "changes everything" as a new way to fight serious illness. Pfizer had said in December last year that its Paxlovid pill reduced hospitalisation and deaths in vulnerable people by almost 90 per cent, the report added.

## APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN FOR ONTARIO BUSINESS COSTS REBATE PROGRAM

Eligible businesses required to close or reduce capacity due to the current public health measures put in place to blunt the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 can apply for the new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program starting today. Through the new program, the government will provide eligible businesses with a rebate payment of up to 100 per cent for property tax and energy costs they incur while subject to these restrictions. “We recognize that these necessary public health measures are impacting businesses, and as we have been since the beginning of the pandemic, we are there to support them,” said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance. “With the opening of applications for this new rebate program, our government is putting money directly into the hands of impacted businesses during this critical time.” Eligible businesses required to close for indoor activities, such as restaurants and gyms, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 100 per cent of their costs. Those required to reduce capacity to 50 per cent, such as smaller retail stores, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 50 per cent of their costs. Businesses will be required to submit proof of costs associated with property tax and energy bills as part of the application process. All eligible businesses must submit an application to be considered, including those that received previous COVID-19 support payments. To learn more, including to find a full list of eligible businesses, visit the online application portal here.



AS IN-PERSON LEARNING RESUMES IN ONTARIO, FORD GOVERNMENT ADDED LAYERS OF PROTECTION (STEPHEN LECCE/ TWITTER).





## STATE OF THE WORLD ADDRESS: PM MODI SHOWCASES INDIA AS FUTURE TECH & ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Virtually delivering the 'State of the World' special address to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Davos Agenda, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday underlined the role played by India in handling the Covid-triggered crisis and managing the vaccination drive, while touching upon the need to reshape and restructure international organisations.

Armed with data, figure and facts on the Covid-19 pandemic, Modi presented India as not only a future technology and economic powerhouse of the world, but also showcased the country as an indispensable member of the world community.

Without naming the UN, he also demanded restructuring and reforms in international organisations.

"We have not just set a record of administering 1.6 billion Covid vaccine shots, but also stood with the countries which were in need during the pandemic. India always follows the vision of 'One Earth, One Health', and supplied Covid vaccines to more than 150 nations along with life-saving drugs," the Prime Minister said.

"India's health professionals, who are always regarded for their sensitivity, went on to win the hearts of the people. Our 5-million software professionals did not let the world stop digitally by working day and night tirelessly," Modi said in his speech.

Presenting India as one of the world's future tech and economic powerhouse, Modi elaborated the economic and tech reforms taking place in the country, saying that gone are the days when India's

business space was badly disrupted by government control, as the present government has removed more than 25,000 such hurdles to start a business in India.

"Today, India is the land of more than 60,000 registered startups, 80 unicorns, country of more than 4 billion UPI transactions, and a nation with 6 lakh villages connected digitally and spending about \$1.3 trillion on connectivity," Modi said. The Prime Minister also came up with a suggestion for the world in dealing with challenges like climate change, saying that time has come for the world to start thinking about its life-style, which is damaging the global environment, whereas the Indian culture still banks on its age-old traditions of preserving the nature. The Prime Minister underlined that India always advocates growth, which should be green, clean, sustainable and reliable.

"Through the International Solar Alliance and COP21, the world witnessed India's commitments towards saving the Earth," he said. Without naming the UN, he said when such organisations were formed, the world was different, but now over the years, things have changed and "it is the call of the day that all the democratic countries should come together and make the changes for a better tomorrow".

Beside PM Modi, the Davos summit is also being attended by Japan PM Kishida Fumio, Australian PM Scott Morrison, Indonesia President Joko Widodo, Israel PM Naftali Bennett, China's President Xi Jin Ping and EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, along with top industry leaders, international organisations and civil society groups.

## Delhi govt aims to bring 2,000 electric buses in coming years: CM

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The AAP government aims to bring 2,000 electric buses in the coming years, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Monday. "We aim to bring in 2,000 electric buses in the coming years. Since 2011, not a single new bus had been procured by the DTC. This is the first new bus being added to its fleet in a decade. The public should also contribute to this war against pollution by switching their vehicles to electric," he said as he flagged off the bus from the Indraprastha depot.

The chief minister further said: "Today, the Delhi Government has dedicated the state's first electric bus to the public. This marks the beginning of a new-era in the transport sector of Delhi. In my understanding, now we'll see a revolution where as and when older buses are rolled out of service, new electric buses will be added. This is a very important step in combating the problem of pollution. This is a zero emission bus and there's barely any noise made by it." While launching the environment-friendly bus, Transport Minister Shri Kailash Gahlot said that along with promoting environment-friendly transport, the government is committed to providing a world class and smooth transport service to the people of Delhi.

These state-of-the art buses are 100 per cent electric with zero tailpipe emissions. They are among the 300 electric buses that will be inducted under DTC. The total fleet of 300 buses will run from Mundela Kalan (100 buses), Rajghat (50) and Rohini Sector 37 (150 buses). These electric air conditioned buses have kneeling ramps for differently abled passengers, and special pink seats for women passengers. These buses are equipped with CCTV cameras, connected to a two-



way Central Command and Control Centre (CCC) at Kashmere Gate, 10 panic buttons in each bus and a hooter.

According to the transport department, "This Electric Bus Service of route No E-44, will be operated as a Circular Bus Service from DTC's Indraprastha Depot via ITO, AGCR, Tilak Marg, Mandi House, BaraKhamba Road, Connaught Place, Janpath, Rajesh Pilot Marg, Prithvi Raj Road, Arbindo Marg, AIIMS, Ring Road, South Extension, Ashram, Bhogal, Jangpura, India Gate, High Court, Pragati Maidan and will be terminated at IP Depot." This service will be available from 05:30 a.m. to 08:20 p.m. from Indraprastha Depot. "The bus can get charged within one to one-and-a-half hours on a fast charger. It can run for a minimum of one twenty kilometres in one charge. All our depots are being made electric charging friendly," Kejriwal added.

## India's overall economic activity remains strong despite third wave: RBI Bulletin

**MUMBAI, (IANS)** India's overall economic activity remains strong despite facing headwinds from a rapid surge in Omicron infections, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its monthly bulletin for January 2022.

"Overall economic activity in India remains strong, with upbeat consumer and business confidence and upticks in several incoming high frequency indicators," it said.

"On the vaccination front, India has made rapid strides. On the Omicron variant, the recent data from the UK and South Africa suggest that such infections are 66 to 80 per cent less severe, with a lower need for hospitalisation. This has brightened near-term prospects and financial markets reflect this optimism."

Alongside, monetary and credit conditions are improving with bank credit picking up in a gradual but sustained manner, it said.

"As the world stepped into the new year, the path of the recovery in India as in the rest of the global economy encountered headwinds from a rapid surge in infections due to Omicron," the bulletin said.

"Nonetheless, amidst upbeat consumer and business confidence and an uptick in bank credit, aggregate demand conditions stay resilient, while on the supply front, rabi sowing has exceeded last year's level and the normal acreage."

## Denied ticket, Punjab CM's brother to contest as Independent

**CHANDIGARH, (IANS)** Differences between Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and state Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu seem to be growing as Manohar Singh, the younger brother of the former, was denied nomination by the party for the February 14 assembly polls.

Manohar Singh on Sunday announced to be in the fray as an Independent candidate from BassiPathana in Fatehgarh Sahib district, where the Congress has retained its sitting legislator Gurpreet Singh GP.

In fact, the Chief Minister was lobbying to get the party ticket for his brother, who had resigned in December last year as senior medical officer from the Civil Hospital in Kharar to contest the polls.

His claim was denied apparently because of the party's 'one family, one ticket' rule.

Also it is learnt Sidhu was not in favour of allocating party's candidature to Channi's brother and held a rally in favour of the sitting legislator despite Manohar publicly claiming for the ticket.

Political observers told IANS that as the party high command tries to make peace between Channi and Sidhu ahead of the polls, the differences between the two leaders are growing and the denial of ticket to Channi's kin will widen it.

Adamant and upset over ticket denial, Manohar told the media that he met his brother (Channi) in the morning (Sunday) and told him that he would be contesting the polls as the public "desires that he should contest as an Independent".

"My decision to contest is as per public aspirations," he said.

## AVOID MOBILES, USE DESKTOP/LAPTOP FOR VIRTUAL HEARINGS, SC TO LAWYERS



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The Supreme Court on Monday issued a notice urging lawyers to avoid joining virtual hearing through a mobile phone, and instead use a laptop or desktop with a stable Internet connection.

The notice said: "All advocates and party-in-person are requested to join the cisco webex application for joining the court hearings through video conference (VC) via a desktop /laptop with a stable internet connectivity, preferably wired, to avoid any disruption in the court proceedings and inconvenience to the judges. Please avoid joining the VC hearings through a mobile phone."

The notice issued urged the lawyers to join the VC through a single device, laptop or desktop, and they should use a headset-enabled microphone and audio system.

Earlier during the day, a bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana had expressed unhappiness at lawyers appearing for virtual hearings through their mobile phones - where they were either barely audible or not visible. The bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and Hima Kohli, had to adjourn the hearings in as many as 10 cases listed due to disruptions from lawyers' end. The bench queried a lawyer: "Mr. counsel, you are now practising in the Supreme Court and appear regularly.... Can't you afford a desktop to argue." During the hearing in another matter, the bench expressed its discontent on poor internet connectivity at the lawyer's end. It remarked: "We have no energy to hear cases like this... Please devise a system by which we can hear you."

## AMID COVID THIRD WAVE, WINTERS, SC STRESSES ON STEPS TO REHABILITATE CHILDREN



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Against the backdrop of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court on Monday directed all District Magistrates to engage with District Legal Service Authority (DLSA), and voluntary organisations to rehabilitate children in street situations.

A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and B.V. Nagarathna said: "We direct all DMs to involve DLSA and voluntary organisations in the identification of children on streets without any further delay."

It added that immediate steps are required by the Central and state governments to provide shelter to children in street situations. It emphasised that children should be shifted to shelter homes and also directed the DMs to upload the information at all stages on the web portal of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). The bench further added that state governments and Union Territories should engage with authorities concerned to identify and rehabilitate children, without any further delay.

Additional Solicitor General K.M. Nataraj, representing the NCPCR, contended that several states have not uploaded the details of children in street situations on the Bal Swaraj Portal.

The amicus curiae pointed at the absence of information by states and UTs in connection with steps taken for rehabilitation of children who have not been identified.

Citing harsh winters, the bench said there are children who don't have anybody to take care of them and their condition would become worse in northern parts. "Just imagine how they are surviving on the streets. You have to immediately shift them to 'rain basera', shelter homes. This is your duty...Act immediately," said the bench.

## 'WHY ONLY 19 FEMALE CANDIDATES OUT OF 400 IN NDA': SC SEEKS CENTRE'S RESPONSE



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought a response from the Centre, asking why only 19 women candidates will be admitted in the National Defence Academy (NDA) out of 400 seats in 2023. A bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and M.M. Sundresh told Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre, that the government needs to clarify why 19 women candidates have been fixed for the year 2023, according to the notification issued by UPSC. The bench asked the Central government to bring on record the total number of women candidates, along with the over tally, who took the NDA examination in 2021.

During the hearing, the bench told Centre's counsel: "Last year, you said it was due to infrastructure problems (the intake of women will be less)...Now, again for the year 2022, you have proposed to take the same number of women candidates..." The candidates who will take the NDA exam in 2022, will be admitted in 2023. The Centre's counsel contended before the bench that intake of women candidates in NDA is based on requirement of the force. The petitioner Kush Kalra, in an additional affidavit, said, "To continue to keep the number of intake of female candidates at only 19 even for the next year, i.e., 2023 and only allowing male candidates in naval entry as per the examination Notice dated December 22, 2021 is arbitrary and violative of Article 14, 15, 16 and 19 of Constitution." Senior advocate Chinmoy Pradip Sharma, representing the petitioner, argued that the current stand of the Centre is contrary to its stand reflected in the top court orders passed on August 18 and September 22 last year.





## SIDHU INVITES MUSK TO SET UP TESLA'S UNIT IN LUDHIANA

**CHANDIGARH, (IANS)** In the run-up to the state assembly polls, Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee chief Navjot Singh Sidhu on Sunday invited industry tycoon Elon Musk to set up Tesla's unit in state's industrial hub Ludhiana. "I invite @elonmusk, Punjab Model will create Ludhiana as a hub for Electric Vehicles & Battery industry with time-bound single-window clearance for investment that brings new technology to Punjab, create green jobs, walking path of environment preservation & sustainable development," Sidhu tweeted. Sidhu's invite comes in the wake of Musk's assertion that the company is facing a "lot of challenges" in bringing the company to India. Earlier, Telangana and Maharashtra also invited Elon Musk to set up business there.

## FOR 2ND YEAR IN A ROW, NO CHIEF GUEST AT REPUBLIC DAY PARADE

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** There will be no chief guest at the Republic Day parade this year also as the plan to host state heads of five Central Asian countries -- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan -- seems to have been cancelled due to the Covid situation in India as well as in the respective nations. Though the Ministry of External Affairs is yet to confirm this officially. If the guests arrive, then this would be the second time when India hosts a group of state heads as the chief guests on the Republic Day. In 2018, state heads of ASEAN countries graced the occasion with their presence. Apart from Kazakhstan, none of these countries' state heads had been invited as the chief guests on the Republic Day. In 2009, Kazakhstan's then president Nursultan Nazarbayev was the Chief Guest. As per sources, due to the corona situation, the Government of India is in no mood to take any risk to invite any foreign guest, so the plan seems to have been cancelled. Last year, British Prime minister Boris Johnson was invited for the same, but later cancelled due to rising corona cases in the UK. In the past, there have been occasions when the Republic Day ceremony was celebrated without any foreign guest. In 1966, there was no foreign chief guest in the Republic Day parade ceremony as the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had passed away in Tashkent in January, and Indira Gandhi took oath as Prime Minister on January 24.

## BIHAR: RJD THREATENS NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION AGAINST NITISH KUMAR GOVERNMENT

The RJD has threatened to bring a no-confidence motion against the Nitish Kumar government in the upcoming Budget session of the Bihar Assembly if the liquor prohibition law is not amended. RJD chief spokesperson Bhai Virendra said that his party preparing for a no-confidence motion amid a buzz that Nitish Kumar is likely to amend the liquor ban law. "We will first take a look at the amendment bill. If it is not in favour of the common people of the state, the RJD will bring a no-confidence motion in the Budget session. Our leader Lalu Prasad had already said that liquor prohibition law should not affect the common people of Bihar. It should not turn into a headache for people, still Nitish Kumar implemented the law without realising its consequences and side effects," Virendra said.

## INDIA TO HOST FIVE BRICS S&T EVENTS THROUGH 2022



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Even as India has successfully handed over the BRICS Chair to China from January 2022, it will be hosting five international events through the year, it was decided at the 15th meeting of the BRICS Science Technology Innovation (STI) Steering Committee. BRICS STI is a forum for the scientific community from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to discuss and deliberate on topics of common interest in the field of science and technology. The calendar of BRICS STI activities and expected deliverables were discussed at the meeting organised virtually on Monday, a release from the Ministry of Science & Technology said on Tuesday. The five high-level events that India will host are: BRICS Startups Forum's Working Groups meeting on Energy; Biotechnology & Bio-medicine; ICT & High-Performance Computing and the STIEP (Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Partnership) Working Group Meeting, which will also witness the launch of BRICS innovation launchpad as a microsite (Knowledge Hub).

## ENSURE ONLY COVAXIN IS GIVEN TO 15-18 GROUP: BHARAT BIOTECH

**HYDERABAD, (IANS)** Bharat Biotech has urged healthcare workers to ensure that only Covaxin is administered to individuals in the 15-18 years age group. The Hyderabad-based vaccine maker on Tuesday said that it "received several additional reports of individuals in the 15-18 year age group being administered unapproved Covid-19 vaccines". "We humbly request healthcare workers to be highly vigilant and ensure that only Covaxin is administered to individuals in the 15-18 year age group," it said. The company pointed out that Covaxin received approval based on thorough clinical trials evaluation for safety and immunogenicity in the 2-18 years age group. Currently, it is the only Covid-19 vaccine in India approved for children. Bharat Biotech also thanked healthcare workers for their great service to the nation during the pandemic. Nationwide vaccination for children in the age group of 15-18 years was rolled out on January 3. Over 3.71 crore children in the age group have so far received the jab.



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**Wind Exhaust:** 250-680 CFM  
**White or Stainless Steel**

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US BATTLES COVID-19 WITH NEW GUIDANCE, FREE TESTS

**NEW YORK, (IANS)** The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its guidance on masks for the general public, saying that people can choose to wear N95 and KN95 masks because they offer the best protection against Covid-19. However, the agency stopped short of saying that people should opt for certain masks instead of others, noting that the "CDC continues to recommend that you wear the most protective mask you can that fits well and that you will wear consistently." Previously, the US health agency did not recommend that the general population wear N95 masks or KN95s, fearing that a run on those higher-quality masks would impact the supply in healthcare settings. The CDC now says shortages are no longer a concern, according to an NBC News report. "When worn consistently and properly," the agency wrote on its website, N95 respirators approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health "provide the highest level of protection from particles, including the virus that causes Covid-19." Americans will be able to request free rapid coronavirus tests from the federal government beginning on Wednesday, but the tests will take seven to 12 days to arrive, senior Joe Biden administration officials have said. The administration's website to process the requests, covidtests.gov, was up and running on Friday, the latest sign of its efforts to ramp up access to testing since the fast-spreading Omicron variant sent coronavirus case counts soaring, Xinhua news agency reported. "But the delay in accepting orders and the lag in shipping mean that people are unlikely to receive the free tests until the end of January at the earliest," reported The New York Times. In some parts of the country, that may be after the peak of the current surge of cases. US President Joe Biden said in December 2021 that his administration would purchase 500 million rapid at-home coronavirus tests and distribute them to Americans free of charge. On Thursday, he announced plans to buy an additional 500 million tests, bringing the total to one billion. The nightmare cruises of spring 2020 are back as Omicron sends passenger case rates soaring. Yet the CDC is poised to loosen the industry's Covid-19 leash, saying cruise lines are now positioned to police themselves, reported major US news portal Politico. On Saturday, despite a 30-fold increase in on-board Covid-19 cases, with cruise ships being turned away at ports and passengers getting sick, the CDC plans to lift all of its Covid-19 restrictions on the cruise industry.



PUTIN'S POLITICAL CHESS

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

in areas outside of its national airspace and national territorial waters, including within the framework of NATO respectively, such deployment could be perceived by Russia as a threat to its national security. It asks the US to remove all its nuclear weapons from Europe, and halt deploying ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles outside of its territory. The draft focussing on NATO "Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" put forward additional demands, such as; NATO member states are prohibited from deploying military forces to any country that became a member of the alliance after May 27, 1997, when NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations. NATO is also prohibited from deploying land-based intermediate- and short-range missiles to a location from where such missiles can reach Russia, NATO is prohibited from any further enlargement including military cooperation with Ukraine as well as other states in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and in Central Asia. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov declared that both texts are part of a whole and are not to be understood as being "a menu, where you can choose one or the other". While Russia expects NATO and the US to comply with its demands, Moscow, in return, has offered only a vague commitment to "not create conditions or situations that threaten the national security of the other parties". The draft treaty imposes no requirements for Moscow to redeploy Russian forces. On December 23, 2021, Putin, during a four-hour press conference, repeated his stance that "any further NATO movement to the east is unacceptable". A few days later, the Kremlin described NATO expansion as "a matter of life and death" for Russia. On December 26, Russia warned Finland and Sweden against joining NATO.

The Western response

Initially there was no response from either the US or NATO, as both said that they have scheduled meetings with Russian leaders in the second week of January, and it would give them a chance to parley before making their stand clear. The Geneva talks between Russia and the US were followed by other sessions in Brussels with NATO and Vienna with Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) delegates, aimed at averting a crisis. But at all three meetings there were no sign of progress from either side. While both sides dug in on their positions with Ukraine's future hanging in the balance, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said "no progress" was made on the central demand on NATO expansion. Meanwhile, Michael Carpenter, the US ambassador to the OSCE, has said that Washington and its allies are supporting on-going dialogue to temper down tensions with Russia. He further said, we're facing a crisis in European security. The drumbeat of war is sounding loud, and the rhetoric has gotten rather shrill. This came as Russia said that the talks with the West over the situation in Ukraine have hit a "dead end".

The Ukrainian question

Recently, Moscow has been especially unsettled by the prospect of Ukraine being admitted to NATO and has warned of serious measures to counteract that scenario. It seems that Putin's obsession with Ukraine is due to both strategic and historical factors. The Russian-Ukrainian ties date back to even before the emergence of Soviet Union — and even before the days of the Russian empire beginning in the 18th century, which was the birthplace of the first Russian state in the 9th Century.



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