



SOUTH ASIAN MidWeek NEWS WEEKLY

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2021

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MIDWEEK NEWSPAPER - RADIO Y (FM 91.9) - CHANNEL Y - SOUTHASIANDAILY.COM

TORONTO 'SUPERFAN' NAV BHATIA ACCEPTS, THEN TURNS DOWN GLOBAL INDIAN AWARD

Nav Bhatia, the official 'Superfan' of the Toronto Raptors and Canada's known Indo-Canadian face, has turned down the \$50,000 Global Indian Award a day after accepting it. The Canada-India Foundation had conferred the award on Bhatia at its virtual gala here on Sunday.

Accepting the award, Bhatia said in his pre-recorded speech that he was greatly honoured to join the company of previous awardees - Ratan Tata, Deepak Chopra, Narayana Murthy, and Montek Singh Ahluwalia. As each past honouree donated the award money to charities, Bhatia too pledged it to his 'Daughters of India Initiative' to build school washrooms for rural girls in Punjab and Rajasthan. But a day later, Bhatia refused to accept the award, ostensibly in support of the farmers' agitation in India. Bhatia said, "On Sunday evening I watched my pre-recorded acceptance speech and the show for the first time like many. The past 24 hours were supposed to be a celebration for all those little girls in Rajasthan but it has been far from that. I was made privy at this point to a lot of new information...I even visited the CIF (Canada India Foundation) offices to understand their exact stance on many issues." He said, "I stay away from politics to be honest. But I am a



proud Sikh. And that is first and foremost. As a result, my heart cannot accept this award at this time. Not while my brothers and sisters across India are in pain. I stand with all of the farmers of India. I pray for a safe and peaceful resolve."

The Canada-India Foundation, the Toronto-based Indo-Canadian advocacy group, has honoured an outstanding Indian face each year with its Global Indian Award since 2009. Bhatia said if the Canada India Foundation "would like to continue with their donation then great, if not then I will personally donate the \$50,000 needed to begin phase IV," of his project in Alwar.

CIF Issued a statement that it regrets the decision and circumstances under which Nav Bhatia chose to return the Global Indian of the Year Award. Canadians of all walks of life treasure his non-political enthusiasm for sport and for Canada & India. The true spirit of this Award is recognizing and celebrating the role, success and contribution of an outstanding global Indian every year. To be drawn into India's current politics or to pronounce on historical debates is not in the spirit of the Award. We will continue the hard and important work of pursuing genuine reconciliation between communities, and of strengthening ties between two great democracies.

INDIA TO BECOME 5TH LARGEST ECONOMY IN 2025, 3RD LARGEST BY 2030



India, which appears to have been pushed back to being the world's sixth biggest economy in 2020, will again overtake the UK to become the fifth largest in 2025 and race to the third spot by 2030, a think tank said on Saturday. India had overtaken the UK in 2019 to become the fifth largest economy in the world but has been relegated to 6th spot in 2020.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 3

2 SHOT DEAD IN SURREY IN LESS THAN 24 HRS



19 YEAR OLD HARNAM SINGH DHESE & 14 YEAR OLD SHOT DEAD IN SURREY SHOOTING.

ONTARIO OPENING SPECIALIZED CARE CENTRE IN GREATER TORONTO AREA

TORONTO — The Ontario government is opening a new Specialized Care Centre to provide care for long-term care residents in the Greater Toronto Area who must be temporarily relocated due to the challenging situation in their long-term care home.

The new Specialized Care Centre will operate as a temporary extension of Toronto Grace Health Centre to offer surge capacity for long-term care homes across the Greater Toronto Area that are managing a COVID-19 outbreak or experiencing other challenges in the home. These could include crowding, shortage of staff, lack of supplies, or other outbreaks in the long-term care home, such as influenza.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 5

MSP WILL CONTINUE, NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY LAND FROM FARMERS: RAJNATH SINGH



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday assured that farmers that the minimum support price (MSP) for their agricultural produce and mandis will continue and asserted that no one can take away land from farmers.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 10

CONTRAVENING MANDATORY QUARANTINE REQUIREMENTS CAN RESULT IN SEVERE PENALTIES

OTTAWA: The Government of Canada continues to advise against non-essential travel and reminds all travellers returning to Canada that contravening the mandatory quarantine can lead to severe penalties. Restrictions are changing quickly and may be imposed by countries with little warning. Those who choose to travel may be forced to remain outside of Canada longer than expected.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 4

UK PARLIAMENT APPROVES BREXIT TRADE DEAL WITH EU AS BOTH SIDES LOOK TO FUTURE

LONDON/BRUSSELS- British lawmakers approved Prime Minister Boris Johnson's post-Brexit trade deal with the European Union on Wednesday, as both sides looked to begin a new chapter of relations just days before their divorce becomes a reality.



I CONTD. ON PAGE 4



MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT ANITA ANAND WELCOMING COVID 19 VACCINES AT THE AIRPORT. CANADA HAS ADMINISTERED 71000+ COVID VACCINATIONS TILL DECEMBER 29TH. US HAS ADMINISTERED 2.6 MILLION COVID 19 VACCINATIONS.

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ARVIND KEJRIWAL AND AAP UNIT HAS TAKEN CARE OF EVERY NECESSITY OF PROTESTING FARMERS FROM FOOD TO WIFI: MEDIA PANELIST AAP RAJASTHAN (IMAGE SOURCE: TWITTER)

Delhi's AAP government to install free WiFi hotspots at Singhu Border for protesting farmers

On demands from the protesting farmers, Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party has decided to install Wifi hotspots at the Singhu border protesting site. This initiative is being taken to give internet access to the protesting farmers. Each Wifi hotspot will cover a radius of 100 metre and provide internet service in the area. After the farmers complained of limited internet availability in the Singhu border, the AAP government promised to install multiple internet hotspots there. Addressing a press conference, AAP leader Raghav Chadha said on Tuesday, that the decision has been taken by 'farmers' sevadar', Arvind Kejriwal. "We want the farmers to stay in touch with their family. We have identified a few spots to install the WiFi hotspots. This is an initiative of Arvind Kejriwal and the party," As of now, there is no estimate on the number of the free WiFi hotspots, Raghav Chadha said. "It will depend on the demand and feedback from farmers. Once a location is identified, it will take 24 to 48 hours for the WiFi

hotspot to be set up. The WiFi hotspots will have a radius of 100 km and will cover 31,000 square feet. There has been a demand from Singhu border. Farmers have contacted us and told us that there is no WiFi. Many journalists have told us that they are facing difficulty in uploading videos. We will set up at any place from where we receive a demand," he said. Raghav Chadha also appealed to farmers to reach out whenever there are issues of low connectivity and internet speed. Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party have come out strongly in support of protesting farmers. Earlier this month, he had visited Singhu border and reviewed arrangements made for farmers. Farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana have been protesting at Delhi's Singhu border for over a month, against the three agri laws passed by the Centre.

'SUICIDE BOMBER' WANTED POPULARITY, AMERICA UNDER THREAT OF NEW SPECIES OF TERRORISM



Federal, state and local law enforcement officers in the United States on Monday were searching for the motive behind a bombing that rocked Nashville on Christmas morning, with no concrete clues yet emerging as to why the 63-year-old suspect carried out his suicide mission. The FBI on Sunday identified the suspect as Anthony Q Warner and said he died in the blast, which damaged more than 40 businesses in downtown Nashville, Tennessee's largest city and the United States' country music capital. Warner's motor home exploded at dawn on Friday soon after police, who were responding to reports of gunfire,

heard music and an automated message emanating from the vehicle warning of a bomb. Police hurried to evacuate people in the area, and Warner is the only person known to have perished. David Rausch, director of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, said on Monday that Warner's mother was cooperating with the multiagency investigation but that motive remained elusive. The TBI released Warner's criminal history, showing a single marijuana charge more than four decades ago. As per a WION report citing The Associated Press, Warner's neighbour Rick Laude claimed that he had once claimed during a conversation that the world would never forget him. Little did Laude know about the sinister plans behind the fame. The report says that a week before the terror attack, he was speaking to Laude, and had asked Warner whether Santa was going to bring him "anything good" for Christmas. Laude, said he responded affirmatively while adding that the "world is never going to forget me". Laude further told AP that he did not read too much into the remark, and believed that "something good" was going to come his way financially. "Nothing about this guy raised any red flags," said Laude. The bombing took place in the early morning on Christmas when there was little activity in the city. In addition to the warning, the audio on Warner's recreational vehicle played a recording of Petula Clark's 1964 hit "Downtown" before the blast. Nashville Mayor John Cooper has said that local officials felt there had to be some connection between the bombing, which occurred near an AT&T Inc transmission building on the city's bustling Second Avenue, and the company. At the briefing on Monday, Rausch said Warner's father had worked for AT&T but that it was unclear if that was in any way connected.

US detects first known case of new UK coronavirus variant in Colorado

The first known US case of a highly infectious coronavirus variant was detected in Colorado on Tuesday as President-elect Joe Biden warned it could take years for most Americans to be vaccinated for the virus at current distribution rates. Biden's prediction of a grim winter appeared aimed at lowering public expectations that the pandemic will be over soon after he takes office on Jan. 20, while also sending a message to Congress that his administration will want to significantly increase spending to expedite vaccine distribution, expand testing and provide funding to states to help reopen schools. Biden, a Democrat, said about 2 million people have been vaccinated, well short of the 20 million that outgoing Republican President Donald Trump had promised by the end of the year. Biden defeated Trump in a November election. "The effort to distribute and administer the vaccine is not progressing as it should," Biden said in Wilmington, Delaware. At the current rate, "it's going to take years, not months, to vaccinate the American people." Shortly after Biden's remarks, Colorado's Governor Jared Polis said his state had discovered a case of the highly infectious coronavirus variant B.1.1.7 first detected in Britain. Scientists there believe the variant is more contagious than other previously identified strains of the SAR-CoV-2 variant. It has been detected in a number of European countries, as well as in Canada, Australia, India, South Korea and Japan, among others. Polis said in a statement the infected patient was a man in his 20s with no recent travel history who is currently in isolation in Denver. "Public health officials are doing a thorough investigation" and the individual has "no close contacts identified so far," he said, adding that the state has notified the federal government. Biden's goal of ensuring that 100 million vaccinations are administered by the end of his 100th day in office would mean "ramping up five to six times the current pace to 1 million shots a day," Biden said, noting that it would require Congress to approve additional funding. Even at such an ambitious rate, it would still take months for the majority of Americans to be vaccinated, he said, adding that the situation may not improve until "well into March." Biden also said he plans to invoke the Defense Production Act, which grants the president the power to expand industrial production of key materials or products for national security or other reasons, to accelerate production of vaccine materials.



INDIA TO BECOME 5TH LARGEST ECONOMY IN 2025, 3RD LARGEST BY 2030

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"India has been knocked off course somewhat through the impact of the pandemic. As a result, after overtaking the UK in 2019, the UK overtakes India again in this year's forecasts and stays ahead till 2024 before India takes over again," the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) said in an annual report published on Saturday. The UK appears to have overtaken India again during 2020 as a result of the weakness of the rupee, it said. The CEBR forecasts that the Indian economy will expand by 9 per cent in 2021 and by 7 per cent in 2022. "Growth will naturally slow as India becomes more economically developed, with the annual GDP growth expected to sink to 5.8 per cent in 2035." "This growth trajectory will see India become the world's third largest economy by 2030, overtaking the UK in 2025, Germany in 2027 and Japan in 2030," it said. The UK-based think tank forecast that China will in 2028 overtake the US to become the world's biggest economy, five years earlier than previously estimated due to the contrasting recoveries of the two countries from the Covid-19 pandemic. Japan would remain the world's third-biggest economy, in dollar terms, until the early 2030s when it would be overtaken by India, pushing Germany down from fourth to fifth. The CEBR said India's economy had been losing momentum even ahead of the shock delivered by the Covid-19 crisis. The rate of GDP growth sank to a more than ten-year low of 4.2 per cent in 2019, down from 6.1 per cent the previous year and around half the 8.3 per cent growth rate recorded in 2016. "Slowing growth has been a consequence of a confluence of factors including fragility in the banking system, adjustment to reforms and a deceleration of global trade," it said. The Covid-19 pandemic, the think tank said, has been a human and an economic catastrophe for India, with more than 140,000 deaths recorded as of the middle of December. While this is the highest death toll outside of the US in absolute terms, it equates to around 10 deaths per 100,000, which is a significantly lower figure than has been seen in much of Europe and the Americas. "GDP in Q2 (April-June) 2020 was 23.9 per cent below its 2019 level, indicating that nearly a quarter of the country's economic activity was wiped out by the drying up of global demand and the collapse of domestic demand that accompanied the series of strict national lockdowns," it said. As restrictions were gradually lifted, many parts of the economy were able to spring back into action, although output remains well below pre-pandemic levels. An important driver of India's economic recovery thus far has been the agricultural sector, which has been buoyed by a bountiful harvest. "The pace of the economic recovery will be inextricably linked to the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, both domestically and internationally," it said. As the manufacturer of the majority of the world's vaccines and with a 42-year-old vaccination programme that targets 55 million people each year, India is better placed than many other developing countries to roll out the vaccines successfully and efficiently next year. "In the medium to long term, reforms such as the 2016 demonetisation and more recently the controversial efforts to liberalise the agricultural sector can deliver economic benefits," the think tank said. However, with the majority of the Indian workforce employed in the agricultural sector, the reform process requires a delicate and gradual approach that balances the need for longer-term efficiency gains with the need to support incomes in the short-term. The government's stimulus spending in response to the Covid-19 crisis has been significantly more restrained than most other large economies, although the debt to GDP ratio did rise to 89 per cent in 2020. "The infrastructure bottlenecks that exist in India mean that investment in this area has the potential to unlock significant productivity gains. Therefore, the outlook for the economy going forwards will be closely related to the government's approach to infrastructure spending," it added.

Pakistan prohibits liberation activists, non-Sunnis from participating in political life in PoJK

The world very recently witnessed the rigging of elections in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) by Imran Khan's PTI with the support of Pakistani Army after the unilateral move of declaring G-B as the 'provisional province' of Pakistan. Turning eyes from ongoing protests in G-B, Pakistani government has now started to make preparations for rigging the elections in Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), to be held early next year. The first jolt to the electoral system of the region has been made at the institutional level. The government recently introduced The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Elections Act 2020 amidst intense protests by rights groups and activists working for liberation of PoJK from the Pakistani government. The Act imposes blanket restrictions on dissidents who wish to contest elections at multiple levels and allows only those who pledge to conform with dominant notions of Pakistani government and pledge allegiance to Pakistan and support its occupation of PoJK. The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Elections Act 2020 makes it mandatory for all the political parties of PoJK to declare that they believe in the ideology of Pakistan's accession of PoJK. Article 126 of the Act provides, "(1) No political party shall be formed with the object of propagating any opinion or acting in any manner prejudicial to the Islamic Ideology or Ideology of State's Accession to Pakistan or the sovereignty and Integrity of Pakistan or Security of Azad Jammu and Kashmir or Pakistan or morality, or the maintenance of public order." Any political party that pledges to work for autonomy or independence of PoJK are not at all allowed to form political parties in the first place.



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CONTRAVENING MANDATORY QUARANTINE REQUIREMENTS CAN RESULT IN SEVERE PENALTIES

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The travel restrictions and border measures in place in Canada since March 2020 are working – travel volumes are down 90% at airports compared to the previous year and only around 2% of all known COVID-19 cases in Canada have originated from travel outside the country. With a 14-day mandatory quarantine in place for most travellers coming into Canada, our border measures are some of the strongest in the world.

Since March 2020, more resources have been deployed at the borders. Today, more than 180 public health officers are present at points of entry across the country. Travellers' quarantine plans are verified upon their entry into Canada. Over 4,600 calls are made every day to verify travellers' compliance with these mandatory requirements and, when needed, cases are referred to law enforcement.

To date, 98.8% of the 41,103 interventions by law enforcement have resulted in compliance by travellers. However, in a minority of cases, verbal warnings (185), written warnings (20), tickets (130), and charges (8) have been issued.

The Government of Canada will continue to use science and evidence to inform any next steps on border measures. A study is ongoing in Alberta and similar ones are being developed in Ontario and Québec.

QUOTES

"COVID-19 continues to put pressure on health care workers across the country. We all need to avoid non-essential travel and follow mandatory quarantine requirements upon return - they keep you, your loved ones, and communities safe. With information provided upon entry in Canada and follow-ups done, there are no reasons not to respect this mandatory requirement."

The Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health

"Keeping Canadians healthy and safe is our number one priority. That's why we've implemented some of the strongest border measures in the world and why we continue to work together with our provincial, territorial, and local law enforcement partners to ensure travellers are following quarantine rules. We will continue to evaluate the measures that are in place and test new methods to keep Canadians safe as the global situation evolves."

The Honourable Bill Blair

Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

QUICK FACTS

All travellers entering Canada are subject to COVID-19 entry screening, regardless of their country of origin or mode of entry.

Anyone arriving at the border must isolate for 14 days if they have symptoms of COVID-19 and they must quarantine for 14 days if they do not have symptoms, unless they are exempt (there are exemptions in place on mandatory quarantine to ensure that critical infrastructure, essential services and economic supply chains continue to function).

Travellers arriving in Canada must submit their information (i.e., travel and contact information, quarantine plan, COVID-19 symptom self-assessments) electronically through the ArriveCAN app before they board their flight to Canada. They are required to confirm arrival at their quarantine or isolation location within 48 hours. Travellers are also required to complete daily COVID-19 symptom self-assessments during their 14-day quarantine or isolation period. Contact information is also shared with provinces and territories for quarantine enforcement.

UK PARLIAMENT APPROVES BREXIT TRADE DEAL WITH EU AS BOTH SIDES LOOK TO FUTURE



CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Britain and the European Union signed the deal on Wednesday and the British parliament will finalise its implementation, ending over four years of negotiation and safeguarding nearly a \$1 trillion of annual trade. Both sides said it was a chance to begin a new chapter in a relationship forged as Europe rebuilt after World War Two, but which has often seen Britain as a reluctant participant in ever-tighter political and economic integration.

Johnson, in a specially convened sitting of parliament, said he hoped to work "hand in glove" with the EU when its interests aligned, using Britain's new-found sovereignty to reshape the British economy. "Brexit is not an end but a beginning," Johnson said. "The responsibility now rests with all of us to make the best use of the powers that we regain, the tools that we've taken back into our hands."

Parliament's lower house voted 521 to 73 in favour of the deal.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth gave final approval to the legislation which enabled the government to implement and ratify the UK's trade deal with the European Union. The so-called Royal Assent was effectively a rubber-stamp for the law which passed through parliament.

"House of Lords is notified of Royal Assent to the European Union (Future Relationship) Act," the House of Lords said in a tweet after midnight.

The deal has been criticised on several fronts since it was agreed on Dec. 24. The opposition Labour Party say it is too thin and doesn't protect trade in services, fishermen rage that Johnson has sold out their interests, and Northern Ireland's status remains subject to much uncertainty.

Nevertheless, Johnson has won the support of his party's hardline Brexiteers - delivering a break with the EU far more radical than many imagined when Britain shocked the world in 2016 by voting to leave. Long-time eurosceptic lawmaker Bill Cash said Johnson had saved Britain's democracy from four decades of "subjugation" to Brussels: "Like Alexander the Great, Boris has cut the Gordian knot." Johnson said he hoped to end the "old, tired, vexed question of Britain's political relations with Europe" and instead become "the best friend and ally the EU could have."

NEW CHAPTER

Earlier, against a backdrop of EU flags, top EU officials signed the treaties struck on Dec. 24 to preserve Britain's tariff- and quota-free access to the bloc's 450 million consumers.

"It is of the utmost importance for the European Union and the United Kingdom to look forward, in view of opening a new chapter in their relations," the EU said in a statement.

A British Royal Air Force brought the documents, which bear the EU's golden stars on a blue leather folder, to Johnson who signed them sitting at a desk in front of his own backdrop of British flags.

"Have I read it? The answer is yes," Johnson quipped, holding a copy of the full 2,000-page document aloft.

Britain formally left the EU nearly a year ago and the new partnership agreement will regulate ties from Jan. 1 on everything from trade to transport, energy links and fishing.

After both sides have signed, the deal will be in place until the end of February, pending final approval by the European Parliament to make it permanent.

CHINA: COVID-19 CASES IN WUHAN MAY HAVE BEEN 10 TIMES HIGHER THAN REPORTED, STUDY SHOWS

Nearly 5,00,000 residents in the Chinese city Wuhan, where the novel coronavirus first emerged, may have been infected with COVID-19 -- nearly 10 times its official number of confirmed cases, according to a study by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The study by the agency used a sample of 34,000 people in the general population in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei province, as well as Beijing, Shanghai, and the provinces of Guangdong, Jiangsu, Sichuan and Liaoning to estimate COVID-19 infection rates, CNN reported. It aimed to estimate the scale of past infections in a population by testing blood serum samples from a pool of people for coronavirus antibodies.

The study was conducted in April - a month after China "contained the first wave of the COVID-19 epidemic" - and the results were released Monday, according to CNN.

About 4.4% of those tested in Wuhan were found to have specific antibodies that are capable of fighting the virus.

The prevalence rate outside of Wuhan is significantly lower, the study showed. In other cities in Hubei, the province that includes the capital city, only 0.44% of residents studied were found to have the antibodies.

Outside Hubei, antibodies were only detected in two people among the more than 12,000 residents surveyed.

The study comes ahead of a visit by a team of international scientists to Wuhan to investigate the origins of the virus.

China had earlier this year been criticized internationally for its initial handling of the outbreak, which has spread around the world in a global pandemic. A number of revisions of the case and deaths data added to suspicions China was messing with the numbers.

The results for Wuhan mean even China's worst-hit city is still vulnerable to Covid-19. Epidemiologists say at least half a population needs to have come into contact with the virus for even the minimum threshold for herd immunity.

But the city's rate of infection is generally in line with those found in other countries after the first wave of coronavirus infections, the China CDC said in a press release published on its website, reported Indian Express.



Pregnant Anushka Sharma recalls getting nauseous during virtual promotions of 'Bulbbul'



Anushka Sharma dropped a huge surprise for everyone with her beautiful maternity shoot for Vogue India magazine. The fashion icon donned stylish clothes and flaunted her baby bump like a boss for the photos. In no time, Anushka once again became a topic of discussion on the Internet and people still can't stop gushing over her maternity look. During the interaction with the magazine, Anushka dished out several details about her pregnancy as she is nearing to welcome Virat Kohli and her first baby.

Talking about hiding her pregnancy during initial days, Anushka stated, "The pandemic has been a weird blessing in a way. Virat was around and I could keep it a secret. We only left to go to the doctor's clinic. No one was on the streets so we couldn't be spotted." Sharma shared an incident about getting nauseous while giving an interview during Bulbbul promotions. She shared, "I quickly turned off my video and messaged my brother, who was also on the call, to stall them for ten minutes. If I had been on set or in a studio, everyone would have known."

When asked about her pregnancy cravings, Anushka went on to say, "I was eating only toast and crackers for the first three months. So when it ended I wanted to eat vada pao and bhel puri, but that didn't last long either. So no real cravings."

Virat and Anushka are set to welcome their first child in January 2021 and the actor-producer also shared about the animal-themed nursery for the baby.

AJINKYA RAHANE'S NAME CARVED ON MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND HONOURS BOARD



Ajinkya Rahane led from the front with a magnificent exhibition of captaincy and batting in the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. With India missing key players in Virat Kohli and Mohammed Shami as well as having low morale on the back of being bowled out for their lowest Test total of 36 in Adelaide, the Ajinkya Rahane led Indian cricket team showed tremendous mental strength and fortitude as they won the match by eight wickets to level the series 1-1. For Ajinkya Rahane, it was a match to remember as he impressed fans and analysts with his pro-active captaincy, innovative field changes and bowling plans. With the bat, Ajinkya Rahane smashed his 12th century and helped India establish a big lead from which Australia never recovered. Following his knock and win, Ajinkya Rahane's name was carved on the Honours Board of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. This was the second time that Ajinkya Rahane's name was included in the Honours Board at the MCG, having hit a century in the 2014 Melbourne Test. In that Test, Ajinkya Rahane smashed 147 and shared a 262-run stand with Virat Kohli who smashed 169. The partnership helped India draw the match but they lost the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. This was the last Test match for MS Dhoni.

US nurse tests positive week after receiving COVID-19 vaccine

A US nurse has tested positive for COVID-19, eight days after having received a vaccine shot. Matthew W, who works as an ER nurse at two hospitals in San Diego, received the jab on December 18. Speaking to ABC10 News, he said that after receiving the vaccine, his arm was sore for a day but he suffered no other side effects.

However, six days later, the 45-year-old became sick while working in shift in the COVID-19 unit. He got the chills and later came down with muscle aches and fatigue, ABC reported. The next day, he tested positive for COVID-19. As per the report, Matthew's condition has improved since his symptoms peaked on Christmas Day but still feels fatigued.

Dr Christian Ramers, an infectious disease specialist with Family Health Centers of San Diego, said that such cases were not unexpected because it was "exactly what we would expect to happen if someone was exposed."



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ONTARIO PROVIDES UPDATE ON ONTARIO CASES OF COVID-19 UK VARIANT

TORONTO — Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Ontario's Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, provided an update on confirmed cases in Ontario of the COVID-19 variant first identified in the UK. This variant has now been detected in multiple countries beyond the UK, and with inbound international travel it is not unexpected to have identified the new variant in Ontario.

A third case of the COVID-19 UK Variant has been reported in an individual in Ottawa with recent travel from the UK. The Ottawa Public Health Department has informed the individual who is now in self-isolation. Case and contact management investigation is underway. In addition, since the initial reporting of the first two cases of the variant on December 26, 2020, additional investigation and follow-up case and contact management has revealed that the couple had indeed been in contact with a recent traveller from the UK, which is new information not provided in earlier interviews. The cases and contacts have been informed and are now in self-isolation as per public health protocols.

It is critically important that individuals with confirmed cases of COVID-19 provide all history of contacts and contact information to their public health unit. This is crucial to the prevention and control of this infection.

"This further reinforces the need for Ontarians to stay home as much as possible and continue to follow all public health advice, including the provincewide shutdown measures," said Dr. Yaffe. "This is also an important reminder about the need for arriving international travellers to maintain quarantine for 14 days."

With the confirmation of three cases stemming from inbound international travel, the province continues to call on the federal government to urgently partner with Ontario to implement testing at Toronto Pearson International Airport and strengthen oversight of quarantine. Regardless of whether federal support is forthcoming, the Ontario government is prepared to act on its own to implement an airport testing program.

The Ministry of Health continues to be in constant contact with the Public Health Agency of Canada and other jurisdictions to monitor the developing situation and ensure coordinated, effective and shared efforts to protect and safeguard the public.

QUICK FACTS

Canada has posted a travel ban on all flights arriving from the UK until January 6, 2021.

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health strongly advises that travel out of the province should be limited to essential purposes only.

Ontario has imposed a provincewide shutdown which started December 26, 2020 at 12:01 a.m. to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Ontario has launched a new government web page detailing the province's three-phase immunization program, information on COVID-19 vaccines, safety measures and approval standards, as well as regular updates on the number of Ontarians vaccinated.

To help everyone stay safe, download the COVID Alert app. It is free to use and is available from the Apple and Google Play app stores. This app lets users know if they may have been exposed to the others who are infected with the virus.

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON CHRISTMAS



OTTAWA: The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today issued the following statement on Christmas:

"Merry Christmas, Canada! Today, our family joins Christians across the country and around the world to celebrate the birth of Christ.

"This time of year is full of joy, light, and traditions. As a family, we usually get together to eat too much food, share laughs and stories, watch cheesy holiday movies, give each other gifts, and most importantly, spend quality time together.

"This year, as we continue to deal with the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Christmas traditions will be different. Families aren't getting together for big dinners and friends aren't stopping by for cookies and eggnog, but we can, and should, give thanks for everything that unites us. Today is a time to recognize all the good that we have in our lives. It's a time to celebrate Christ's message of compassion and show people we love them - and right now, that message is more important than ever before.

"2020 has been a difficult year for all of us, but through it we've seen Canadians meet these challenging times with generosity, kindness, and hope. Neighbours are helping neighbours, kids are giving up play dates and birthday parties, and businesses are retooling their operations, all to help in the fight against COVID-19. We've seen this leadership and dedication from our frontline workers, who have put themselves at risk to keep all of us safe and healthy and our families fed. And we also recognize the work of our Canadian Armed Forces members, both at home and abroad, and thank them for their sacrifice and service to our country.

"This year everyone has done their part, because as Canadians we show up for one another. And today, as many spend this holiday away from the ones they love, we need to continue to support and reach out to friends, neighbours, and those in need in our communities. As a country, we will come out of this challenging year stronger and more united, and we will continue to stand together - both today and into the New Year.

"From our family to yours, Hadrien, Ella-Grace, Xavier, Sophie, and I wish you joy, health, and love this holiday season. Merry Christmas, everyone."

Ontario Opening Specialized Care Centre in Greater Toronto Area

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

"We are grateful to the Specialized Care Centre Steering Committee for its work to quickly establish these new surge capacity spaces for our long-term care residents," said Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care. "By working closely with all of our partners, we are committed to finding innovative solutions to help protect our loved ones as we continue our fight against the second wave of the virus."

When fully complete, the climate/HVAC-controlled Specialized Care Centre will provide up to 90 fully furnished spaces for residents, with access to therapy rooms. Initially, the Specialized Care Centre will open with 30 spaces. The length of stay will vary for each resident, depending upon individual needs, and the situation in the resident's long-term care home.

"Today's announcement will support further prevention and containment efforts to protect our most vulnerable," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "This Specialized Care Centre being announced today will support health system capacity to ensure that our loved ones have access to the quality care they need."

"The Salvation Army Toronto Grace Health Centre is pleased to set up the Specialized Care Centre to assist long-term care homes in Toronto and the GTA to manage the challenges of COVID-19 in partnership with the University Health Network," said Jake Tran, President and CEO, Toronto Grace Health Centre. "The Grace's physicians, nurses, PSWs, therapists and staff have much experience and expertise in the care of seniors and are at the ready, to provide care to long-term care home residents who may need to be transferred temporarily to the Specialized Care Centre. Our role in helping establish the Specialized Care Centre for long-term care residents comes from the Salvation Army's experience and deep

mission of service to Ontarians in times of need." Ontario has invested nearly \$540 million announced earlier this fall to ramp up surveillance, increase infection prevention and control personnel, increase PPE supplies, and build a strong health care workforce at long-term care homes across the province.

QUICK FACTS

The Specialized Care Centre Steering Committee is comprised of partner representatives from the University Health Network, Toronto Grace Health Centre, Chester Village, Emergency Medical Assistance Team (EMAT), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Infrastructure Ontario, and the Ministry of Long-Term Care. A Better Place to Live; A Better Place to Work: Ontario's Long-Term Care Staffing Plan is part of the government's modernization agenda to create a long-term care sector that is resident-centred and provides the highest quality of care for our loved ones, when and where they need it. The province's vaccine strategy prioritizes the most vulnerable populations first, including health care workers and residents of long-term care homes, who are at higher risk of contracting the virus.

Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover sets out a total of \$45 billion in support over three years to make available the necessary health resources to continue protecting people, deliver critical programs and tax measures to support individuals, families and job creators impacted by the virus, and lay the groundwork for a robust long-term economic recovery for the province.

In total, the government has made \$15.2 billion available to support Ontario's frontline health care heroes and protect people from COVID-19. This includes supporting 141 hospitals and health care facilities, and 626 long-term care homes since the beginning of the pandemic.

Mississauga Council Votes to Ratify New Region of Peel Council Composition

Mississauga City Council held a Special Council Meeting this morning and voted unanimously in support of changing the composition of the Region of Peel Council. The Council of the Regional Municipality of Peel is composed of 25 members, including a chair. The changes would see City of Brampton's representation increase to nine members (from seven), Town of Caledon's representation decrease to three members (from five) and City of Mississauga to remain the same with 12 members. "This is a step in the right direction to achieve a more balanced approach based on population," said Mayor Bonnie Crombie. "We have reviewed many scenarios and reallocating seats was the only way to achieve greater fairness." On November 26, 2020, Region of Peel Council passed a resolution to change its composition. Mississauga Council supported the proposed changes with a motion at its meeting on December 9. The Region of Peel held a public meeting on the topic on December 17, 2020 and passed a by-law the same day. In order to be valid, the by-law must have the majority of the three local municipal Councils pass resolutions consenting to the by-law.



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Happy New Year 2021: History, importance & why do we celebrate New Year's on January 1?

Happy New Year 2021: New Year's Day or January 1 marks the beginning of a new calendar year. It is the first day of the year according to the modern Gregorian calendar and the Julian calendar.

New Year's Day was celebrated on January 1 for the first time in 45 BC under the Julian calendar. Later, Pope Gregory acknowledged January 1 as the beginning of the new year as per his reform of the Catholic Liturgical Calendar.

In pre-Christian Rome, the day was dedicated to Janus, the god of gateways and beginnings. The month of January is also named after this god. Liturgically, it also signified the Feast of the Naming and Circumcision of Jesus, which continues to be observed in the Anglican and Lutheran Church. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, celebrates the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, on this day.

People across the world celebrate this day with fireworks at the stroke of midnight, grand feasts, and other fun activities. People also exchange greeting cards to mark the occasion. Among other traditions is making New Year's resolutions. Parades are held in some countries including London's New Year's Day Parade, Pasadena's Tournament of Roses Parade, and Philadelphia's Mummers Parade. Prominent sporting events are also held on this day in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Many of you may have also come across a traditional editorial cartoon—an incarnation of Father Time wearing a sash with the previous year printed on it, passing on the duties to the Baby New Year, also wearing a sash with the new year printed on it. Babies born on this day are generally called New Year babies. Some hospitals in the US also give out prizes to the first baby born in the new year.

How are you celebrating New Year's Day this time?



Ontario Cancelling Passenger Road Tests Across Ontario

TORONTO - As a result of the Provincewide Shutdown, on December 26, the Ontario government will cancel all in-vehicle passenger tests across Northern Ontario until January 9 and for all 27 public health unit regions in Southern Ontario until January 23. This action is being taken to stop the spread of COVID-19.

"We know that these measures may be a serious inconvenience for people waiting for a road test," said Caroline Mulrone, Minister of Transportation. "However, these are unprecedented times and our number one priority remains protecting the health and safety of individuals, families and workers."

Road test cancellations are without penalty. DriveTest clients will receive a credit in the system in order to rebook their test when the Provincewide Shutdown period ends and the region is at a lower-risk COVID-19 level.

On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, all Ontarians are advised to stay home as much as possible with trips outside the home limited to necessities such as food, medication, medical appointments, or supporting vulnerable community members.

DriveTest centres will remain open for essential indoor services, such as knowledge tests, with capacity limits and COVID-19 preventative

measures in place. The ministry will also continue to offer commercial road testing and other commercial vehicle services during the shutdown to ensure the continued safe movement of essential goods and services.

QUICK FACTS

The current COVID-19 Response Framework will be paused when the Provincewide Shutdown comes into effect. The impacts of these time-limited measures will be evaluated throughout the 14 days in Northern Ontario and 28 days in Southern Ontario to determine if it is safe to lift any restrictions or if they need to be extended. Visit [DriveTest.ca](https://www.drive-test.ca) for more information about DriveTest services in your area.

PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCES THE UPCOMING APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced the upcoming appointment of Vice-Admiral Art McDonald, currently Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy, as Chief of the Defence Staff. Vice-Admiral McDonald will be promoted to the rank of Admiral and replace the current Chief of the Defence Staff, General Jonathan Vance, who will be retiring from the Canadian Armed Forces. "Vice-Admiral McDonald became Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy in June 2019. Before his appointment, he commanded HMCS Halifax, the Fifth Maritime Operations Group, and Joint Task Force Pacific. Through these and other naval roles, he circumnavigated the globe, led sea-based humanitarian and disaster relief operations, and commanded a multinational task group in the High Arctic. "In his new role, Vice-Admiral McDonald will oversee the Canadian Armed Forces' ongoing operations in Canada and around the world, and their contributions to the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including support for Canada's vaccine rollout through Operation VECTOR. "The Prime Minister thanked General Jonathan Vance for his years of distinguished service leading the Canadian Armed Forces. General Vance will continue to serve in his role until the appointment of the new Chief of Defence Staff takes effect at a Change of Command ceremony to be held the week of January 11, 2021. "Quotes "At home and abroad, Canadian Armed Forces members have always answered the call of duty, working day in and day out to keep us and our loved ones safe. Vice-Admiral Art McDonald brings decades of experience in a variety of command and staff roles, and I am confident that he will provide dedicated leadership to the Canadian Armed Forces as they continue to respond wherever is needed to protect Canadians and our values. "The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada "I thank General Jonathan Vance for his four decades of service to Canada and his immense contribution to the Canadian Armed Forces, as Canada's longest serving Chief of the Defence Staff. Whether helping develop and implement a new defence policy, supporting our allies overseas, or responding to disasters and a pandemic, he has

served with distinction and a strong sense of duty. "The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada "I want to extend my congratulations to Vice-Admiral Art McDonald on his upcoming appointment as Chief of the Defence Staff at this important time. Vice-Admiral McDonald will continue the work to transform the culture of the Canadian Armed Forces to ensure zero tolerance for sexual misconduct and harassment while eliminating hateful conduct and systemic racism from the organization. He will also continue the implementation of our unprecedented military investments as outlined in Strong, Secure, Engaged. This fully funded 20-year road map makes sure that our military can meet the challenges of the evolving security environment. "The Hon. Harjit Sajjan, Minister of National Defence "I would like to take this opportunity to thank General Vance for his dedication and service to Canada throughout his career. Over the past five years, General Vance has served with distinction as the Chief of the Defence Staff. His sense of duty has always been driven towards looking after the members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families. "The Hon. Harjit Sajjan, Minister of National Defence "Quick Facts "The Chief of the Defence Staff is responsible for the command, control, and administration of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as military strategy, plans, and requirements. "The Chief of the Defence Staff is appointed by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Governor in Council. As commander-in-chief of Canada, the Governor General plays a major role in recognizing the importance of Canada's military at home and abroad. "As part of the national pandemic response, Canadian Armed Forces personnel have: "deployed to long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario. "directly supported northern and remote communities. "assisted with managing and distributing personal protective equipment. "helped with contact-tracing efforts in Ontario. "Operation VECTOR is the Canadian Armed Forces' logistical planning and operations support to the federal, provincial, and territorial governments for the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Employees working at St. Lawrence Market test positive for COVID-19

This week the City of Toronto was made aware of six employees who work at three merchant stores at St. Lawrence Market who have tested positive for COVID-19. "Toronto Public Health is conducting an investigation related to these cases including contact tracing. The employees last worked at the Market on December 19, December 21 and December 24. All close contacts have been notified and are self-isolating and monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days from the last possible date of exposure. "To protect the privacy of the individuals the Market cannot disclose the identity of the people who have tested positive. "Employee A was determined to have contracted COVID-19 from a family member in their household. "Employee B and C work together. "Employee D works in another store but commuted to work with Employee B. "Employee E has a family member in their household with COVID-19. "Employee F commuted to work with Employee E. "The COVID-19 cases of Employees A, B, C & D have not been determined to be related to the cases of COVID-19 from Employees E & F. "The risk to the general public is low, as the interactions with employees with infections would have been brief (lasting 1-2 minutes), while employees and patrons were wearing masks and maintaining physical distance as much as possible. "There are currently high levels of community transmission of COVID-19 in Toronto. Transmission can be related to living in the same household, commuting to work in the same car, or working in close contact with a person who is infected with COVID-19. This is why employees and patrons must take appropriate preventive measures at all times. "St. Lawrence Market works closely with Toronto Public Health to ensure the safety of all customers, employees, merchants, vendors, farmers and everyone inside the St. Lawrence Market. St. Lawrence Market will remain open to provide food access to Toronto residents and the community. The provision of fresh food also has positive health benefits, especially during the circumstances of a Province-wide Shutdown. "During the COVID-19 health emergency the St. Lawrence Market Complex has implemented extensive precautions to keep all customers, merchants, farmers and vendors safe and help stop the spread of COVID-19. Precautions include strict line management, including while outdoors in lines, mandatory use of masks in all areas of the St. Lawrence Market Complex, enhanced sanitization, appropriate physical distancing, entrance management and continuously monitored capacity management at all times in all Market buildings. "

MidWeek

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* ALLOWS QUICK CONTACTLESS PAYMENTS AT POS MACHINES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

TORONTO: ICICI Bank Canada today announced the launch of a debit card. Named, 'ICICI Bank Canada Visa Debit Card', it offers customers an unparalleled benefit of online shopping, purchasing at millions of retail outlets across the world and making quick contactless payments at Point of Sale (PoS) machines across Canada. This card also empowers customers to withdraw cash from thousands of Automated Banking Machines (ABMs) in the country without surcharge#.

Further, the Bank offers customers the ease of activating the card and blocking/unblocking it with a few simple clicks on its mobile banking app, 'ICICI Bank Canada iMobile app' and online banking platform. It is the first card in Canada that enjoys the combined strength of Visa*, Interact and THE EXCHANGE@Network as it is powered by these three large networks.

Commenting on the launch, Mr. Sandeep Goel, President and CEO, ICICI Bank Canada, said, "At ICICI Bank Canada, it is our constant endeavor to bring forth innovative banking solutions for our customers. We are delighted to join hands with our long standing partner Visa for the launch of this unique debit card. During the ongoing pandemic, we are witnessing an accelerated shift of consumers towards the digital world, resulting in record growth in online sales. We believe that this card will act as an enabler to provide our customers with a frictionless payment experience across channels."

ICICI Bank Canada and Everlink Payment Services Inc. are jointly spearheading the Visa debit card adoption for other financial institutions to drive digital payments growth in Canada.

"We are pleased to work with ICICI Bank Canada to offer its customers increased choice, flexibility and security through access to Visa's leading debit capabilities," said Ms. Stacey Madge, President & Country Manager, Visa Canada. "As spending habits continue to show a preference for online shopping, customers of ICICI Bank Canada will



now have more ways to shop online with 'ICICI Bank Canada Visa Debit Card', accepted by millions of merchants worldwide."

"It has been a pleasure to work with ICICI Bank Canada to bring 'ICICI Bank Canada Visa Debit Card' to market and we're very excited about the benefits this program will bring," said Mr. Mark Ripplinger, President and CEO of Everlink. "We feel the delivery of this program is apt in time amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, over the last few years we have witnessed the rapid shift in card payments from brick and mortar stores to online. This has only been accelerated over the last eight months as cardholders seek safer ways to shop."

"We are excited to see ICICI Bank Canada take the lead in offering this first-to-market service to their customers. THE EXCHANGE Networksaves Canadian cardholders millions of dollars each year in ABM surcharge fees and we are thrilled that our longstanding member, ICICI Bank Canada, is extending our unique network value to its ICICI Bank Canada Visa Debit Card cardholders," said Mr. Andrew Obee, President & CEO of FICANEX.

Key benefits of the card:

Worldwide acceptance: Customers can use the card to shop online at more than 1.5 million merchants and at 55 million international retailers worldwide, wherever Visa is accepted.

Robust security: Robust Visa security measures and 24x7 fraud monitoring make the online transactions even more safe and secure.

Manage cards feature: This feature enables customers to activate the card or block/unblock it digitally, using ICICI Bank Canada iMobile app and online banking platform.

PoS and ABMs: The card can be used at more than 450,000 PoS locations in Canada and offers surcharge-free access to thousands of ABM machines in the country#.

An existing customer of the Bank can apply for this card by visiting any ICICI Bank Canada branch or contacting the customer contact center.

20 South Asian American Pageant Queens Share A United Message in Solidarity With Farmers in India

Over the weekend, 20 pageant winners across the country joined forces to produce a strong message of solidarity with #WeStandWithFarmers through video .

Each of these women who represent prestigious systems like Miss India USA, National American Miss, Miss USA, Miss America, among many others, are united together in their shared mission to fight the ongoing injustices against farmers in India.

The women in the video range in ages with a 21+ year gap between the youngest and oldest woman. Additionally, the women represent many states in the United States from California, Texas, Oregon, New York, Indiana, and many others.

"In a country with over 70% of the population in the agricultural and its allied sectors, the past few weeks have been increasingly difficult with farmer suicide rates on the rise and violence in the face of peaceful protests. Pageant women have a unique ability to bring attention to

issues and also, gain widespread support - financially and otherwise - within their communities. We know we have this unique platform and we are passionate about using it for what we believe in strongly," says Serene Singh, the project's founder.

In the video are the following women in order of when they appear in the video: Serene Singh, Suhane Patel, Esha Kode, Kim Kumari, Isha Jog, Jaanu Patel, Anjali Nair, Suhani Jani, Simarn Kholi, Nekita Regula, Vani Sharma, Shivali Patel, Alyssa Dass, Shivali Kadam, Manya Saaraswat, Afroza Nishi, Selene Ferdinand, Sanjana Yendluri, and Abirami Krishnan. Although most of these women have never met one another in person, it is their hope to continue working together in the future to address issues South Asians experience in their home of the United States as well as in South Asia. The women ask to be reached out to on their social media accounts for any questions about donating. They will be donating all proceeds to KhalsaAid.Org.

Ontario Releases Ethical Framework for COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

TORONTO — The Ontario government has released an Ethical Framework for COVID-19 vaccine distribution which was developed in partnership with the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force to guide further vaccine prioritization and distribution across the province. The province continues to vaccinate vulnerable populations and those who care for them through Phase One of its three-phase implementation plan as additional vaccines become available.

Details were provided today by COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force members Dr. Dirk Huyer, Ontario's Chief Coroner and Coordinator, Provincial Outbreak Response, and Dr. Maxwell Smith, bioethicist and assistant professor at Western University.

"This ethical framework is a clear demonstration of our commitment to Ontarians to be transparent," said General Rick Hillier (retired), Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force. "We know that people are eager to get vaccinated and this framework helps ensure that we do it in an ethical, effective and compassionate way."

Phase One of Ontario's three-phase vaccine implementation plan began on December 15, 2020 at two hospital sites, and increased to 17 additional sites the following week, with the delivery of 90,000 Pfizer-BioNTech doses. With Health Canada's recent approval of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, the province can expect about 50,000 additional doses before the end of the month.

ONTARIO CONFIRMS FIRST CASES OF COVID-19 UK VARIANT IN ONTARIO

TORONTO — Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Ontario's Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, announced the first two confirmed cases in Ontario of the COVID-19 variant first identified in the UK. This variant has now been detected in multiple countries beyond the UK, including Denmark, Belgium, Australia and the Netherlands. With inbound international travel, it is not unexpected to have identified the new variant in Ontario. Ontario is the first province to identify this variant thanks to the proactive work of the Public Health Ontario Laboratory.

The cases are a couple from Durham with no known travel history, exposure or high-risk contacts. Both individuals have been informed and are now in self-isolation as per public health protocols.

"This further reinforces the need for Ontarians to stay home as much as possible and continue to follow all public health advice, including the provincewide shutdown measures beginning today," said Dr. Yaffe. "Durham Region Health Department has conducted case and contact investigation and Ontario is working in collaboration with our federal counterparts at the Public Health Agency of Canada." Modelling and epidemiological studies suggest that the COVID-19 variant first identified in the UK can spread easier and faster, but there is no evidence that it is more likely to cause severe illness. There is no evidence to suggest that the Health Canada-approved vaccines will be any less effective against the new variant.

Recognizing the potential increased risk that inbound international travelers may pose with this new variant, the province continues to call on the federal government to urgently partner with Ontario to implement testing at Toronto Pearson International Airport. Regardless of whether federal support is forthcoming, the Ontario government is prepared to act on its own to implement an airport testing program.

Effective December 26 at 12:01 a.m. Ontario has entered a provincewide shutdown. These time-limited measures will help slow the transmission of COVID-19, limit mobility, preserve health system capacity, and save lives.

The Ministry of Health continues to be in constant contact with the Public Health Agency of Canada and other jurisdictions to monitor the developing situation and ensure coordinated, effective and shared efforts to protect and safeguard the public.

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ONTARIO WELCOMES HEALTH CANADA APPROVAL OF MODERNA COVID-19 VACCINE

TORONTO: Premier Doug Ford issued the following statement following Health Canada's approval of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine: "This is phenomenal news for Ontarians and Canadians - yet another life-saving COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for safe and effective use in the province and in the country. We are taking another step towards ending this terrible pandemic. The federal government has allocated approximately 53,000 doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for Ontario in December 2020, and they will be delivered before the end of the month. These are the first of 40 million doses Canada will be receiving through its agreement with Moderna. The Moderna vaccine is a real gamechanger as it does not need to be stored at extremely cold temperatures and is more mobile. This means health staff can administer this vaccine onsite in our long-term care homes, retirement homes, congregate care settings, rural and remote locations, and other places where our most vulnerable populations live. For the first time, we can take the vaccine directly to our priority groups. As we move forward in the first phase of our three-phase vaccine implementation plan to keep Ontarians safe, the Moderna vaccine will support our ability to

protect frontline health care workers and residents in long-term care homes and retirement homes, as well as adults in Indigenous populations. Moderna and Pfizer doses will continue to be delivered and administered in January and we expect increasing numbers of doses through to March and beyond. Phase Two is expected to begin this spring when Ontario receives more of the ordered doses of vaccine from both Pfizer and Moderna, and potentially other vaccines, as they go through clinical trials and approvals. General Rick Hillier and the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force are ready to distribute these vaccines as soon as the province receives them. As we await the arrival of more vaccines, I continue to ask all Ontarians to remain vigilant and keep following the public health measures, including wearing a mask when required, maintaining physical distancing, and avoiding social gatherings, especially during the holiday season. These measures remain our best and only defence against fighting this virus until the vaccine is more widely available."

POSITIVE COVID-19 CASES IN MISSISSAUGA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Today, the City of Mississauga is confirming Mississauga Fire and Emergency Services (MFES) has 11 positive cases of COVID-19 with an additional 36 staff self-isolating, impacting four fire stations. "My thoughts go first to the health of the affected fire personnel and to their successful recovery. I want to thank all our MFES firefighters and staff for the commitment, dedication and sacrifices they have shown and continue to demonstrate during this unprecedented pandemic," said Nancy Macdonald-Duncan, Acting Fire Chief. "Public safety is our top priority. With a team of more than 630 firefighters at 21 stations, we are able to adjust our crews and ensure public safety is never compromised. We remain ready to respond and provide fire safety across Mississauga." The City's fire stations are not open to the public and firefighters who respond to calls are in full personal protective equipment for their own protection and the safety of the public. "Mississauga's world-class first responders, including our firefighters, fire staff and front-line health care workers, have been working around the clock to keep all of us healthy and safe," said Mayor Bonnie Crombie. "We continue to battle hard against this virus. And as we enter the holidays, and then the Province-wide shutdown, it's more important than ever to follow the advice of public health to ensure everyone's safety and to protect our first responders." The City of Mississauga has been coordinating with Peel Public Health to notify impacted personnel and ensure isolation and testing protocols are being followed. "The City of Mississauga and Peel Public Health are working closely together to ensure all necessary guidelines and protocols are followed," said Dr. Lawrence Loh, Medical Officer of Health, Region of Peel. "With cases high in our region and as we move into the holiday season, please continue to do your part for your family and our community by staying home and celebrating with your own household. By following all Grey-Lockdown measures, together we can help stop the spread of COVID-19."

Suspect Arrested in Violent Jewellery Store Robbery

Region of Peel – Investigators from the Central Robbery Bureau have made an arrest in connection to a violent robbery and shooting that occurred in the City of Mississauga. On Monday, November 9, 2020, at approximately 2:00 p.m., suspects entered a jewellery store in the area of Airport Road and Derry Road in Mississauga. The suspects forcibly confined customers and an employee at gunpoint. They were zip-tied to prevent their escape, and then the suspects stole over 1.5 million dollars worth of jewellery and gold. One suspect was wearing a dark suit, black dress shoes, black gloves, and a realistic mask that appeared as a white male with a long black beard and black sunglasses. That suspect was armed with a black and silver handgun. A second suspect was wearing a black top with a white-collar, black pants, black dress shoes, black gloves, and a realistic mask that appeared as a white male with a long black beard. An employee of the store followed the suspects to the parking lot area, where he attempted to retrieve one of the stolen jewellery bags, and a violent confrontation ensued. At this time, the victim was shot twice at close range by the armed suspect during the struggle. Both suspects then left in a white BMW X4 SUV, fleeing the scene. The victim sustained serious physical injury, including two gunshot wounds but luckily survived the deadly encounter. Through an extensive and thorough criminal investigation, police determined the identity of one of the suspects as Olakunle Banjoko, a 30-year-old man from Toronto. On Monday, December 21, 2020, members of the Central Robbery Bureau executed a search warrant in Toronto. Olakunle Banjoko was arrested and charged with Attempt Murder, Robbery with a Firearm, Disguise with Intent, and two counts of Failing to Comply with a Weapons Prohibition Order. He attended the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton for a Bail Hearing on Tuesday, December 22, 2020. The Central Robbery Bureau continues to investigate this matter as there is still one suspect outstanding. Investigators ask anyone with cellphone, dash cam video, other video footage or anyone with information in relation to this robbery to contact them at 905-453-2121 ext. 3410. Information may also be left anonymously by calling Peel Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or by visiting www.peelcrimestoppers.ca.



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PM MODI FLAGS OFF 100TH KISAN RAIL, SAYS IT HAS EMPOWERED SMALL, MARGINAL FARMERS



THE PM SAID RECENT REFORMS IN AGRICULTURE WILL LEAD TO THE EXPANSION OF AGRIBUSINESS AND FPOS, AND COOPERATIVE GROUPS WILL BE BIGGEST BENEFICIARIES.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday flagged off the 100th Kisan Rail from Sangola in Maharashtra to Shalimar in West Bengal today via video conferencing and said that more than 80 per cent small and marginal farmers in the country have been empowered with Kisan Rail as the minimum quantity to be sent has not been fixed and a farmer can send even 50-100 kg parcel.

The Prime Minister said recent reforms in agriculture will lead to the expansion of agribusiness and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and cooperative groups will be the biggest beneficiaries. He said private investment in agriculture will support the government's effort to help these groups. The Prime Minister recalled that he had read somewhere that the smallest railway consignment that has been delivered by Kisan Rail is a three kg packet of pomegranates and a farmer had also sent 17 dozen eggs through Kisan Rail.

"The country's 80 per cent or more small and marginal farmers have got a lot of strength due to Kisan Rail. This is because there is no minimum cap on loading the farm produce through these trains. If a

small farmer also wants to send 50-100 kg of farm produce, he can do so through Kisan Rail," PM Modi.

He said the first Farm Rail started in August and farmers in all parts of the country are being connected through it.

The PM said that the Kisan Rail that was flagged off will provide access to the markets of Maharashtra to the produce of farmers of West Bengal. "In the face of the corona challenge, the Kisan Rail network has reached the figure of 100 today. Today the 100th Kisan Rail began its journey from Maharashtra's Sangola to West Bengal's Shalimar. In one way, the reach of West Bengal's farmers, fishermen and animal keepers will be extended to Maharashtra's big markets like Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur. The people of Maharashtra have got a cheap way to connect with the markets of West Bengal," he said.

"The railways which connected the entire country is also connecting the agricultural markets. The Kisan Rail service is a big step towards raising the income of farmers of the country. The farming system will see a change. The cold supply chain will also be boosted," he added.

'EXTERNAL PRESSURE' STOPPED EX-PM MANMOHAN SINGH, SHARAD PAWAR FROM IMPLEMENTING FARM LAWS: TOMAR

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Monday said that even former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Nationalist Congress Party supremo Sharad Pawar -- who served as the Agriculture Minister during the UPA government -- wanted to implement reforms in the farm sector but could not due to 'external forces'.

Tomar stated that many Chief Ministers had tried to implement the same farm laws that the Narendra Modi government has formulated for agriculture sector reforms in the country but could not implement them due to these external pressures.

While addressing farmer unions on Monday, Tomar said, "Many commissions, ministers, chief minister's and governments have made an effort to work in the direction of farm sector reform. During the UPA regime, Dr Manmohan Singh and Sharad Pawar wanted to implement these reforms. However, due to some pressure, they couldn't implement these laws." The statement came a day before the government is set to resume talks with farmers' unions protesting against three Central farm laws. A joint committee of various farmers' unions also met Narendra Singh Tomar to extend support to the farm laws on Monday. "Now our Prime Minister is Narendra Modi. His only mission is development. His only mission is the well being of people. Any kind of force or pressure can not pressurise our Prime Minister. When these forces fail, they get frustrated," the Union Agriculture Minister added. Tomar cited examples of demonetisation, GST, abrogation of article 370 and article 35A and Citizenship Amendment Bill while explaining how various forces and some elements tried to use these to attack and criticise PM Modi.

On the issue of farm laws, Tomar said, in Punjab, these 'forces' tried to use the shoulders of farmers for their motive. "Prime Minister Modi got 303 seats in Lok Sabha because of your blessings. Can PM Modi make such a decision that will adversely impact



farmers and villagers?" the Minister asked.

"The Prime Minister implemented demonetisation. There were elements who used to stand in queue and criticise the government. On GST, late Pranab Mukherjee praised the PM. Those forces again came in to being and started saying bad things about Modiji that his days were numbered. People said the BJP would lose Gujarat, which is a state dominated by industrialists. In Surat, GST had the most impact and by this logic we should have lost, people voted for Modi on every seat and for GST," said Tomar.

If 370 abrogation was an election issue, our government would have done it in 2023 and not in 2019, argued the Union Agriculture Minister. He added that during the passage of Triple talaq and Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), the country stood in support and anti-India forces remained ineffective.

In a clear indication that laws will stay, Tomar said that talks are going on with protesting farmers. "We want to resolve this by discussion. We respect our Annadatas. We will become self-reliant only when farmers become self-reliant," he added.

BJP WIN IN BIHAR POLL SHOWS PEOPLE'S FAITH IN PM: IRANI

NEW DELHI: The BJP's victory in Bihar poll, bypoll and local body elections in various states since September 27, when the farm Bills got the President's assent, shows people in rural areas have full faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Union Minister Smriti Irani said on Monday.

Addressing a press conference at the party office, she claimed the Congress was attempting to "create an illusion that people in rural parts of the country were against the BJP".

The BJP leader said between September 27, when President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to the farm Bills, and December 22, the BJP won the Assembly elections in Bihar, bypoll in 11 states and got higher seats in the local body elections in eight states. "The Congress is spreading misinformation that people of rural India do not support the BJP," Irani said.

INDIA MAINTAINS HECTIC WEST ASIAN DIPLOMACY

NEW DELHI: India has maintained its hectic diplomacy with West Asia aimed at attracting petro dollars for infra projects and ensuring that the huge expatriate community does not get rough treatment at a time when jobs are scarce and crude prices are ruling low.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Qatar, which ended on Monday, will be followed by a visit to Kuwait, said sources. He has already travelled to the UAE and Bahrain.

This was Jaishankar's first visit to Qatar after taking over as External Affairs Minister. Hosting over seven lakh Indians, New Delhi had tried to maintain frequent contacts with Qatar.

PM Narendra Modi thrice spoke to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani over telephone in the past few months while Jaishankar and his Cabinet colleagues have been in touch with their Qatari counterparts.

Significantly, Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane has just returned from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain – host nearly 90 lakh Indians. South Bock, concerned about their wellbeing during the pandemic, has maintained frequent high level contacts with the leadership. This has not only ensured that the GCC countries pay special attention to Indian expatriates but brought in investment from their deep-pocketed sovereign funds. As a result, Kuwait and UAE did not immediately send back Indians after the Covid struck early this year. The breathing space allowed state governments to arrange for the infrastructure to deal with returning Indians.

Jaishankar had last month addressed GCC leaders at their annual political dialogue last month during which he had urged them to allow the return of Indian workers and professionals through travel bubble arrangements.

RAHUL GANDHI FLIES TO ITALY, CONGRESS DEFENDS ABSENCE ON FOUNDATION DAY



The farmers' agitation of the borders of the national capital Delhi has entered 33rd day. On Tuesday, the government and farmers set to conduct the next round of talks to resolve the issue. However, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who has been attacking the Narendra Modi-led government over the issue and supporting the farmers, has left for abroad on a holiday.

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala has given information by tweeting that Rahul Gandhi has left for a brief personal visit abroad and he will be out for a few days. According to sources quoted by Zee News, Rahul Gandhi has gone to Italy.

Surjewala also clarified on the timings of Rahul Gandhi's foreign tour amid the farmers' protest. "Rahul Gandhi is not the president of the Congress, Sonia Gandhi is. He goes wherever the party sends him. Rahul Gandhi has gone to meet his family member i.e. his grandmother. He has not gone on a holiday. Can't a person visit a family member to enquire about their health?" he asked.

Before leaving, Rahul Gandhi had supported the farmers' protest and in a tweet said "Annadata tum badhe chalo, main tumhare sath hu (Food provider you keep going, I am with you). Ironically, just after a day of tweeting, Gandhi left for a holiday. The impact of Rahul Gandhi's abroad visit and Sonia Gandhi falling ill also affected the Congress' 136th Foundation Day celebrations. Senior leader AK Antony hoisted the Congress flag at the party headquarters due to non-attendance of both the top leaders of the Gandhi family. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the younger sister of Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary also attended this program.

When Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was asked about Rahul Gandhi's foreign tour, she did not answer ZEE NEWS questions. However, on the issue of farmers, she gave advice to the government that it should listen to the farmers. Priyanka Gandhi said that these allegations are completely wrong that this movement is happening due to political instigation. Vadra, avoiding questions asked on Rahul Gandhi, said that if he had been the party president, he would definitely have stayed here. She said that Rahul has to decide where he wants to be. The party has no problem with Rahul Gandhi not being here, she added.

CONGRESS' SONIA GANDHI HITS OUT AT 'BLACK' FARM LAWS



The Congress celebrated its 136th foundation day on Monday, with interim president Sonia Gandhi and general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra using the occasion to extend their support to the farmers' protest against a set of contentious agricultural laws, but Rahul Gandhi's decision to skip it for a quick overseas visit cast its shadow on the event. Party veteran A.K.Antony hoisted the party flag at the Congress headquarters in New Delhi to commemorate its 28 December, 1885 foundation. Sonia Gandhi and former party president Rahul Gandhi, who left on Sunday on a visit abroad, weren't present on the occasion.

Sonia Gandhi, who has been avoiding public functions in recent weeks, extended her warm wishes to party workers and backed the farmers' protest in a 3-minute, 45-second video message. She asserted that "black laws" were being imposed on the farmers.

"We have to strengthen the Congress party at the ground level. ... let us take a vow today that we will uphold the constitution and democratic values that our country represents," she said.

The Congress celebrated its foundation day against the backdrop of a protest by thousands of farmers, mainly from northern India, who have massed on Delhi's borders in the winter cold since November 26 to protest against the three farm laws enacted in September by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA government. The protestors are demanding that the Centre revoke the three laws, which essentially change the way India's farmers do business by creating free markets, as opposed to a network of decades-old, government marketplaces, allowing traders to stockpile essential commodities for future sales and laying down a national framework for contract farming.

Together, the laws will allow big corporations and global supermarket chains to buy directly from farmers, bypassing decades-old regulations. Farmers say the reforms will make them vulnerable to exploitation by big corporations, erode their bargaining power and weaken the government's procurement system, whereby the government buys staples, such as wheat and rice, at guaranteed rates known as minimum support prices (MSPs). Priyanka Gandhi, who was present at the flag hoisting ceremony at the party headquarters, said the government, which has accused the opposition parties of misleading the farmers, should listen to the protestors.

SIX UK RETURNEES FOUND INFECTED WITH NEW MUTATED CORONAVIRUS STRAIN IN INDIA



ALL THESE PERSONS HAVE BEEN KEPT IN SINGLE ROOM ISOLATION IN DESIGNATED HEALTH CARE FACILITIES BY RESPECTIVE STATE GOVERNMENTS.

At least six travellers, who returned from abroad, the new mutated coronavirus that was found in the UK has been found. On the instructions of the Union Health Ministry, all these passengers have been admitted to different hospitals for treatment. According to the Union Health Ministry, from November 25 to December 23, about 33 thousand passengers from different cities in Britain reached India. All these passengers were tracked and their RT-PCR test was conducted. 114 of them were confirmed to be coronavirus positive. All these samples were sent to 10 indigenous labs of INSACOG for advance testing. These labs are present in Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Delhi. According to the ministry, in this advance testing, it was found that out of these 114 infected, six people have the mutated corona strain from the UK. Of these, 3 were reported from Delhi's NIMHANS, 2 from Bangalore's CCMB and one from Pune's NIV. The ministry said that the six passengers in which the 'British' COVID-19 strain has been found, have been kept in single room isolation in different states. People coming in close contact with those passengers are being quarantined. Along with this, fellow travellers, family members and other acquaintances who have travelled with them are

also being looked out for. The new Genome of COVID-19 found in these passengers is under continuous investigation. The government has said that it has started work on several levels to stop the mutated coronavirus strain. Under this, the movement of flights from the UK has been banned from December 23 till December 31. RT-PCR tests have been made mandatory for all travellers returning from the UK. If they are found infected, their samples are being sent to 10 Advanced Labs of INSACOG. The National Task Force (NTF) held a meeting on December 26 to discuss prevention of the new coronavirus strain from spreading into the country. Along with this, the emphasis was laid on creating testing, treatment, surveillance and containment zones to identify such passengers. All states and union territories have been directed to strictly follow the COVID-19 protocol. It was also decided in the NTF meeting that at present there is no need to change the National Treatment Protocol in the country. It may be noted that so far, the new coronavirus strain of has been confirmed in Denmark, Netherlands, Australia, Italy, Sweden, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Japan, Lebanon and Singapore. Since its discovery, many of these countries have banned the movement of flights from the UK.

MSP WILL CONTINUE, NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY LAND FROM FARMERS: RAJNATH SINGH



CONTD. FROM PAGE 1
"It's unfortunate that those who don't even know about farming, are misleading innocent farmers. This government never intended to stop MSP, neither it will in the future. Mandis will also be maintained. No 'Mai Ka Lal' (mother's son) can take away land from farmers," Singh said. His remarks came while he was addressing the people of Himachal Pradesh via video-conference on the completion of three years of Jai Ram Thakur-led BJP government in the state. "Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has successfully run the government for 3 years. I congratulate people of Himachal," he said. "When UPA was in power at Centre, Himachal Pradesh received only Rs 22,000 crores. When the Modi government came to power, we

gave 3 times more, considering the economy of Himachal Pradesh, not its size," he added. Farmers have been protesting since last month at the Singhu border against the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. Farmer unions have held several rounds of talks with the government and attended a meeting called by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Meanwhile, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, a joint front of almost 40 farmer organisations, wrote a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare accepting the Centre's offer for dialogue and proposed December 29 as the next date for the meeting.

HARYANA FARMERS' UNIONS EXTEND TOLL-FREE MOVEMENT OF VEHICLES ON HIGHWAY TILL CENTRE MEETS DEMANDS

Intensifying the agitation against the Central government over the new farm laws, the farmer Unions in Haryana on Sunday announced that they will continue to let vehicles pass on highways toll free. The farmers said that the movement of vehicles without paying toll taxes will continue until the Centre agrees to their demands. As a mark of protest, the farmers had initially said that the toll-free movement will continue for three days from December 25 to December 27. However, as a large number of people taking to the highways daily to stage protests at toll plazas, the farmers decided to let commuters have a toll-free commute until their demands are accepted. Haryana Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) president Gurnam Singh Chaduni said it was an opinion of the common man that these toll plazas be made free. He also assured that to smooth functioning of agitation at toll plazas will be guaranteed and committees will be formed at every toll plaza. "Today, we went to many toll plazas. There was an opinion of the common man that these toll plazas be made free permanently. In our national executive too, we have decided to make the toll plaza free for the movement of vehicles till the government doesn't accept our demands. To ensure smooth functioning of agitation at toll plazas, the committees should be formed. The committees consisting of five to 15 members at every toll plaza will talk to the officers, if needed," The Indian Express quoted him as saying. On Saturday, the protesting farmers announced their decision to resume dialogue with the Centre, and proposed December 29 (Tuesday) for the next round of talks to end the impasse. However, the farmer union leaders made it amply clear that the modalities for the repeal and guarantee for MSP will be a part of the agenda. Meanwhile, two Independent MLAs of the Haryana Assembly -- Sombir Sangwan and Balraj Kundu -- withdrew their support from the ruling state government led by the BJP. The farmers have been protesting against the three agricultural laws that were enacted in September. Several farmers' unions, as well as organizations, have been camping on the outskirts of national capital Delhi since November 26 demanding a complete rollback of the three farm laws passed in Parliament.



HEALTH MINISTER LAUNCHES INDIA'S FIRST FULLY INDIGENOUS PNEUMOCOCCAL VACCINE



Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan Monday inaugurated India's first Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) in a bid to prevent about 67,800 child mortality under 5 years of age in India from pneumococcal diseases every year. The vaccine is developed by the Serum Institute of India (SII) in collaboration with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Pneumococcal disease is a significant contributor to the under-five mortality rate worldwide. Calling it as a step towards Atmanirbhar Bharat, Vardhan said that so far, India was fully dependent on PCV manufactured by foreign manufacturers which are available at very high prices. "It is a matter of great pride for us that the pharma major developed the first indigenous vaccine and got a license for the same from Central government during COVID-19 pandemic lock-down period. Pneumonia is the single largest infectious cause of death among children under five years of age worldwide, accounting for nearly 10 lakhs deaths globally," he said. The government said that the PVC will be available in the market under the brand name "Pneumosil" at an affordable price in a single dose (vial and pre-filled syringe) and multidose (vial) presentations. "Pneumosil has been extensively evaluated in 5 randomised controlled clinical trials and has demonstrated comparable safety and immunogenicity against licensed pneumococcal vaccines across diverse populations of India and Africa, where Pneumosil was administered to adults, toddlers and infants using different vaccination schedules." During clinical trials, Pneumosil was found to be safe and effective in the prevention of pneumonia disease and based on which Pneumosil has been licensed by Drugs Controller General (India) in July 2020 after approval from Subject Expert Committee (SEC), the Union Minister said. Adar Poonawalla, CEO of SII, said: "Over the years, we have been constantly working to provide high-quality vaccines to ensure excellent immunisation coverage to children and families worldwide. Now, we have developed this PCV with a unique composition based on the serotype prevalence in India. This makes our PCV an ideal choice for protecting our children from pneumococcal disease. While the vaccine itself is of the highest quality and grade available, vaccine accessibility is of utmost importance as well, and to ensure ease of access by making it available at an affordable price. We hope to bring down the mortality rate significantly while also making our country self-sufficient with a robust public health care system." In 2018, recognising the disease widespread fatality, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended the inclusion of PCV in routine childhood immunisation programs in all countries.

INDIA RECORDS 16,432 NEW CASES OF COVID-19, RECOVERIES CROSS 9.8 MILLION



India recorded 16,432 new cases of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) cases, according to Union health ministry update on Tuesday morning. With this, the nationwide tally reached 10,224,303. The number of active cases dropped to 2,68,581, according to health ministry's update at 8 am, while 98,07,569 patients were cured/discharged from hospitals. The country also recorded 252 new fatalities due to the infection, which took the overall death toll to 1,48,153. The government is carrying out vaccination dry run to prepare the infrastructure before the expected rollout of Covid-19 vaccine in January. The dry run will also help health authorities identify the shortcomings and sort out the issues before vaccines are administered to people. The two-day dry run is being held in four states. The health ministry, meanwhile, said on Monday that India's recovery rate has increased to 95.83 per cent. It also said that India's Covid-19 cases per million population are among the lowest in the world (7,397) and the global average is 10,149. Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla on Monday wrote a letter to chief secretaries of all states to instruct the concerned authorities for their active support to the health ministry in identification, preparation of database, vaccine delivery, storage, security, shipment and vaccination of beneficiaries. The Centre on Monday maintained the Covid-19 restrictions on various activities, noting that while there has been a continuous decline in active cases in India, there is a need for surveillance, containment and caution due to a surge globally and the emergence of a new variant of the virus in the UK. In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said that it has issued fresh guidelines for surveillance with regard to Covid-19 that will remain in force till January 31, as it asked the states and union territories to keep a strict vigil to prevent any rise in cases during the New Year celebrations and the winter season.

Russia admits its COVID death toll three times higher than official figure, making it world's third-worst



FOR MONTHS, EXPERTS HAVE QUESTIONED THE OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND HAVE ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF PLAYING DOWN THE COUNTRY'S OUTBREAK.

Russia on Monday admitted that its coronavirus death toll was more than three times higher than it had previously reported, making it the country with the third-largest number of fatalities in the world. Russian health officials have registered more than three million infections since the start of the pandemic, putting the country's caseload at fourth-highest in the world. However, they have only reported 55,265 deaths -- a much lower fatality rate than in other badly hit countries. This admission is contrary to claims made by President Vladimir Putin about Russia's low fatality rate from the virus. Earlier this month, Putin had said that Moscow had done a "better" job at managing the pandemic than western countries. For months, experts, including

medical professionals and data scientists, have questioned the official statistics and have accused the government of playing down the country's outbreak. On Monday Russian officials admitted that was true. The Rosstat statistics agency said that the number of deaths from all causes recorded between January and November had risen by 229,700 compared to the previous year. "More than 81 per cent of this increase in mortality over this period is due to Covid," Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said, meaning that over 186,000 Russians have died from Covid-19. Russia recorded 27,787 more Covid-19 cases over the past 24 hours, down from 28,284 a day earlier, the country's coronavirus response centre said on Monday.

AFGHANISTHAN OBJECTS TO PAKISTAN PROVIDING TALIBAN A SAFE HAVEN

Afghanistan has strongly objected to Pakistan providing safe haven to the Taliban with new evidence emerging on how the group has itself openly acknowledged its presence in the country. Afghan foreign ministry in a strongly worded statement said, "The overt presence and activities of Afghan insurgent elements and their leaders in Pakistani territory clearly violate Afghanistan's national sovereignty and continue to cause crisis and instability in the region" which poses a "serious challenge to achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan." Kabil called on the "Pakistani government not to allow its territory to be used by insurgents and elements who insist on continuing the war and bloodshed." Earlier this month, the top Taliban delegation was in Pakistan for talks with Pakistani foreign minister SM Qureshi and PM Imran Khan but what came as a shocker was videos of them visiting followers and extending support to them. Terming the development regretful and concerning, the Afghan ministry pointed out the videos in which "Taliban appeared among their followers, disclosing the existence of all Taliban leaders in Pakistan and acknowledging their continued activities in Pakistani territory." The videos, which went viral showed Taliban Abdul Ghani Baradar engaging with followers in Karachi and confessing to the group's leadership in the country. The Afghan statement highlighted that, Kabul "considers the closure of insurgent and terrorist sanctuaries and the cessation of their activities vital for the peaceful resolution of the Afghan crisis and ensuring regional peace and stability" and called for "continuation of sincere cooperation and genuine fight against terrorism and common threats."

US: HOUSE REPUBLICANS JOIN DEMOCRATS TO OVERRIDE TRUMP'S VETO OF USD 740 BILLION DEFENCE BILL



The Democratic-led US House of Representatives voted on Monday to override President Donald Trump's veto of a USD 740 billion defense policy bill, a rebuke that underscored divisions in the Republican Party during Trump's final weeks in office. The 322-87 House vote, in which 109 Republicans joined Democrats to override Trump's veto, leaves the bill's fate to the Republican-led Senate, where a final vote is expected this week. If the Senate seconds the House action, the bill becomes law. It would be the first veto override of Trump's presidency. Trump, who is angry that some Republicans have acknowledged his loss to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden in the November 3 election, vetoed the defense bill last Wednesday.

ITALY KICKS OFF VACCINATIONS AGAINST COVID-19 IN ROME



A 38-year-old anesthetist at Codogno hospital, Annalisa Malara, was horrified on February 20 when she saw the image of the lungs of Mattia Maestri, a 38-year-old Italian citizen who later became known as Italy's COVID-19 'patient 1'. Maestri became the first Italian to be diagnosed with the virus, and from then on an outbreak ripped through the country, Europe and the rest of the world. Since Malara's discovery, more than 70,000 Italians have died in the ongoing worldwide pandemic. But on Sunday (December 27), as Italy kicked off vaccinations with health workers lining up to take the first shots of the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine, Malara saw a light of 'bottled' hope for Italy and also for Lombardy, Italy's hardest-hit region. "On February 20 a nightmare started for me and for everyone," she told media. "Today represents the beginning of the end of this terrible pandemic so I'm very happy that I can be here and see people receiving the vaccine."

Happy New Year

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