

ED seizes Rs 4 cr from premises of Channi's kin

NEW DELHI, Jan 18:

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) today seized Rs 6 crore in cash, including Rs 4 crore from the premises linked to a nephew of Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, during raids against illegal sand mining operatives in the border State, officials said.

The search operations at a dozen locations in Mohali, Chandigarh, Ludhiana and Pathankot began early morning with an armed CRPF escort and were underway.

Sources said out of the total seizure of about Rs 6 crore in cash, about Rs 4 crore has been seized from the Ludhiana premises of Channi's nephew

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Sanjeev Gupta new Registrar General of HC

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 18: District Judge Sanjeev Gupta has been appointed as new Registrar General of High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

According to the order issued with the approval of the Chief Justice, Sanjeev Gupta, District Judge has been appointed as the Registrar General of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh and Jeema Bashir, District Judge as the Registrar Inspection in Srinagar wing of the High Court.

IED blast in Kulgam, no damage

Excelsior Correspondent

SRINAGAR, Jan 18: Militants today triggered off a low-intensity Improvised Explosive Device at Ziyarat Qomoh-Kader Road, in South Kashmir district of Kulgam.

There was no casualty reported in the incident which created panic in the area. He said that soon a contingent of police and Army reached the spot and cordoned off the area, he said.

There was a bomb scare in Srinagar's Qamarwari area this morning that created panic and a Bomb Disposal Squad was rushed to the spot.

The traffic was halted and suspicious bag was checked by the Bomb Disposal Squad and it was found empty. The traffic was later restored.

Major reshuffle of top bureaucrats

NEW DELHI, Jan 18:

Senior bureaucrat Vikram Dev Dutt has been appointed as the Chairman & Managing Director of Air India Ltd as part of a senior-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected by the Centre today.

Dutt, a 1993-batch IAS officer of AGMUT (Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territory) cadre, is at present Principal Secretary (Tourism) in Delhi Government.

He has been appointed as the Air India chief in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary, an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said.

The Centre had in October last year accepted Tata Sons bid of Rs 18,000 crore to acquire

(Contd on page 4 Col 3)

MP man among 3 die in Jammu, 1546 fresh positives

As cases spike, Govt orders engagement of MBBS, Nursing students across J&K for 3 months

Pr Secy with wife, kin; 21 in Civil Sectt infected

10 each at BGSBU, Sainik School; 4 each in BOSE, Aadhar office test +ve

Sanjeev Pargal

JAMMU, Jan 18: Three persons including a middle-aged man from Madhya Pradesh died of COVID-19 in Jammu division today while 1546 persons tested positive for the virus as Jammu district headed close to record four-digit daily cases while spike continued in the Union Territory of Ladakh also where 152 fresh cases were registered.

A senior IAS officer in the rank of Principal Secretary, his wife and kin, residents of Sidhra,

*Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com

tested positive for COVID-19 today. A total of 21 persons were found infected at the entrance of the Civil Secretariat, the seat of the Government, during the day.

Ten staffers and students at Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University (BGSBU) Rajouri and 10 at Sainik School Nagrota

were also found positive for the viral infection. DC Rajouri Vikas Kundal has declared the BGSBU as micro-containment zone.

After 40 villagers were found positive for the virus at



A boy being subjected to COVID test in Mendhar in Poonch district on Tuesday. — Excelsior/Rahi Kapoor

Bassi Kalan in Samba a day before, 27 villagers tested positive at village Bainglar in the same district.

Four each at Board of School Education (BOSE), Aadhar Card Office and Sabzi Mandi Narwal

and two at LIC office in Panjtirth were detected positive for Coronavirus.

Jammu and Kashmir Bank branch at Mandi in Poonch district was closed after four employees tested positive.

Eleven more pilgrims of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji shrine were also found positive for the virus during testing on their arrival at Katra Railway Station.

A 42-year-old man hailing from Aasmani Mohalla in Amanganj area

of Madhya Pradesh, who was putting up at Panj Peer area in Rajouri district, died of COVID-19 and other ailments.

A 30-year-old fully vaccinated man but co-morbid, a resident of Ramban, succumbed to the

pathogen in the Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu. A 63-year-old woman from village Kalyana in RS Pura tehsil of Jammu, who was also fully vaccinated, died of co-morbidities and virus at Fortis Escorts Hospital Amritsar.

Jammu district today reported 919 COVID positive cases. This was the first time in all three COVID waves that Jammu district inched close to four-digit single-day cases. On May 12, 2020 during second COVID wave, Jammu district had recorded highest 658 cases.

Meanwhile, the Health and Education Department today asked the Director SKIMS Soura and Principals of Government Medical Colleges (GMCs) Jammu, Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramulla, Doda, Rajouri and Kathua to engage Medical and Para Medical students for duties due to sudden spike of COVID-19 positive cases.

(Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Bank branch, Block office shut after employees' test positive

3105 including 83 medics in GMC Srinagar test +ve for COVID in Kashmir

Fayaz Bukhari

SRINAGAR, Jan 18: There has been a spike in the COVID-19 positive cases in Kashmir with 3,105 fresh cases reported in the Valley including 83 medics in Government Medical College Srinagar and its Associated Hospitals taking the number of active cases in Jammu and Kashmir to 21,677.

One person died here today taking the death toll in J&K to 4,575 and 4,651 and fresh COVID cases has pushed the tally of positive cases in J&K to 366,851.

Dr Mohammad Saleem Khan, HoD Community Medicine and Nodal Officer of

Government Medical College Srinagar said that 46 doctors, 22 MBBS students and 15 paramedics tested COVID positive in GMC Srinagar and Associated Hospitals today.

He said that the number of medics who tested positive since January this year went up to 546. He said that Omicron seems predominant circulating but Delta variant could also be affecting people leading to moderate to severe illness and asked people to wear masks and maintain social distance.

In the meantime, around 71 medics including 54 doctors in Health Services Kashmir also tested positive in the first two weeks of this year.

Authorities in Chadoora area

of Budgam ordered closure of J&K Bank's main branch Chadoora for at least three days after five of its staff members tested positive for COVID-19.

The branch has been closed for at least three days after five of its employees tested COVID-19 positive. A mass sampling has been done at the bank branch and all contacts of the affected employees, tested negative.

However, all the primary and secondary contacts of the affected employees have been advised to self-isolate and quarantine themselves.

Authorities closed Block Office Uri today after two employees tested positive for COVID-19.

"In order to check the spread of infection in office, the office of BDO Uri shall remain closed for two days (January 19 and 20)," read an order by BDO Uri.

"Meanwhile all the employees of block Uri are hereby directed to go for COVID-19 test," the order read, adding, "Furthermore the official work of block shall be carried from home via Online mode for these two days." The employees have been asked to remain available to public on phone call.

Those who tested positive in Kashmir include 957 from Srinagar, 633 from Baramulla, 411 from Budgam, 96 from Pulwama, 209 from Kupwara, 253 from Anantnag, 139 from

(Contd on page 4 Col 5)

New rules for deputation of IAS officers

NEW DELHI, Jan 18:

The Personnel Ministry has decided to amend existing service rules to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of IAS officers for central deputation, officials said today.

The proposal which will give greater say to the Centre came as various State/joint cadres were found to be not sponsoring an adequate number of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers as part of the Central deputation reserve even though the Ministry had flagged the issue several times.

"As a result of this, the number of officers available for Central deputation is not sufficient to meet the requirement at Centre," the Personnel Ministry said in the proposal seeking

(Contd on page 4 Col 3)



A man waits for customers as he sells cotton candies at Old City in Jammu. — Excelsior/Rakesh

MeT predicts rain, snowfall from Jan 22-25

Army rescues 30 from avalanche, searches continue for missing UP family in Ramban

Gopal Sharma

JAMMU, Jan 18: The Army rescued around 30 civilians after their vehicles came under an avalanche triggered by recent snowfall in border district of Kupwara in Kashmir and searches continued for three missing members of a family hailing from UP in Ramban sector on the second consecutive day today while IMD has predicted rain and snowfall from January 22 to 25 across J&K.

Entire Kashmir region today received light rains while higher reaches had overnight light to moderate snowfall as amid cloud cover, the night temperatures increased in Valley.

Official sources said that a vehicle carrying civilians got stuck on the Tangdhar-

*Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com

Chowkibal axis on Monday, following which the nearest Army unit was alerted and a rescue operation launched.

"The civilians, including a child, were evacuated to safety by the Army rescue team," the



Army and General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) rescuing 30 stranded civilians who were stuck on the Kupwara-Tangdhar road on Tuesday. (UNI)

officials said. One of the civilians told the rescuers that they had a narrow escape as they managed to jump out of the vehicle before it was buried under snow, the officials added.

They said the Army team also recovered the vehicle from the mounds of snow.

Another group of 16 civilians, who were stuck at some

distance away on the same road, were also rescued by the Army personnel to Sadhna Pass, a Defence spokesman said.

He said the rescued persons were provided food, medical care and shelter for the night.

"Twelve vehicles were retrieved during the day today after the avalanche and snow slides clearance from the road." (Contd on page 4 Col 3)

Sinha reviews progress of restoration work

Renovated Mubarak Mandi complex will boost tourism in Jammu: LG

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 18: Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha today chaired the meeting of governing body of the Mubarak Mandi Jammu Heritage Society and reviewed the to-date progress of restoration and renovation works of the Mubarak Mandi complex, here at the Raj Bhavan.

During the meeting, the Lt Governor, who is the Chairman of the Mubarak Mandi Jammu Heritage Society, took a com-

*Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com

prehensive review of different works under execution for transforming the Mubarak Mandi

complex as a major tourist attraction in Jammu.

He was briefed about the completion stages of restoration



works of different buildings of the complex, financial progress achieved under different schemes and measures to improve connectivity and access

to Mubarak Mandi complex.

Sinha also issued directions to expedite the restoration and conservation works for early completion of the projects for restoring the Dogra heritage palaces as per the desire of the people.

While enquiring about the tourist footfall in the heritage complex, the Lt Governor observed that the renovated Mubarak Mandi complex will boost the tourism sector in Jammu.

Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta, Chief Secretary; Sarmad Hafeez, Administrative Secretary, Tourism Department; Achal Sethi, Law Secretary, J&K; Raghav Langer, Divisional (Contd on page 4 Col 5)

Omicron tally reaches 8891

2.38 lakh new cases, 310 deaths

NEW DELHI, Jan 18:

With 2,38,018 new Coronavirus infections being reported in a day, India's total tally of COVID-19 cases rose to 3,76,18,271, which includes 8,891 cases of the Omicron variant, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated today.

The active cases have increased to 17,36,628, the highest in 230 days, while the death toll has climbed to 4,86,761 with 310 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 am stated.

There has been an 8.31 per cent increase in Omicron cases since Monday, the Ministry said.

Experts said it is not possible to undertake genome sequencing of each and every sample but stressed that the current wave is largely being driven by the

Omicron variant. The active cases comprise 4.62 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has decreased to 94.09 per cent, the Ministry said. An increase of 80,287 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 14.43 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 14.92 per cent, according to the Ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,53,94,882, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.29 per cent.

The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 158.04 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

The 310 new fatalities include 72 from Kerala and 33 from West Bengal.

A total of 4,86,761 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,41,832 from Maharashtra, 50,904 from Kerala, 38,445 from Karnataka, 37,009 from Tamil Nadu, 25,387 from Delhi, 22,972 from Uttar (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Centre flags decline in Corona testing, asks States to enhance

NEW DELHI, Jan 18:

Flagging a decline in the number of COVID-19 tests in many States and Union Territories, the Centre has asked them to enhance testing so that an effective track of the spread of the pandemic can be kept and immediate citizen-centric action can be initiated.

In a letter to States and UTs on Monday, Additional Secretary in the Union Health Ministry Arti Ahuja advised them to pay attention to this aspect immediately and increase the testing in a strategic manner keeping in view the trend of case positivity in specific areas.

She highlighted that Omicron, which has been designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a vari-

ant of concern, is currently spreading across the country.

Referring to the Ministry's earlier letters and the Home Ministry advisory of December 27 last year laying out the broad framework of pandemic management in the context of Omicron, Ahuja said testing remains a key and crucial component.

"However, it is seen from the data available on the ICMR portal that testing has declined in many States and Union Territories," she wrote.

She said in all advisories on testing issued by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), including the latest on January 10, the basic objective remains early detection of cases for quick isolation and care.

In addition, testing remains a key strategy for pandemic man-

agement as it helps in identification of new clusters and new hotspots of infection which can in turn facilitate immediate action for containment such as setting up of containment zones, contact tracing, quarantining, isolation and follow-up.

This can enable the State and district administrations to curb the spread of infection. Also this will ensure reduction in mortality and morbidity.

"Progression of disease to a severe category can be averted by strategic testing of those who are at high risk and more vulnerable, as well as in areas where the spread is likely to be higher," Ahuja said.

Reiterating the advisory on purposive testing strategy issued by the ICMR on January 10, she (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

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