



**BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE
BANGALORE**

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CLIPPINGS**

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INDEX

1. THE HINDU
2. DECCAN HERALD
3. TIMES OF INDIA
4. BANGALORE MIRROR
5. THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
6. THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Covishield second dose eight weeks after first

Govt. has to take the final call: NTAGI

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) has recommended that the second dose of Covishield can be administered from eight to 16 weeks after the first dose.

Currently, the second dose is being given 12 to 16 weeks after the first.

Confirming the recommendation, a senior health official said the decision to reduce the time span between the two doses would lead to accelerated administration of the second shot of Covishield to the remaining

six or seven crore individuals.

“The latest recommendation of the NTAGI is based on recent global scientific evidence derived from programmatic data. Also when the second dose of Covishield is given eight weeks onwards, the antibody response generated is almost similar when administered at an interval of 12 to 16 weeks,” he said.

“This is a recommendation by NTAGI and the final decision has to be taken by the government,” an official said.



CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Covishield second dose eight weeks after first

The Union government, on May 13, 2021, extended the gap between the first and second doses of the Covishield vaccine from six to eight weeks to 12 to 16 weeks, based on the recommendations by NTAGI.

The advisory group has not yet suggested any change in the schedule of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, whose second dose is administered 28 days after the first dose.

To a question on the much-debated advantage of a fourth dose following a booster, Rajeev Jayadevan, vice-chairman, Research Cell, Indian Medical Association, Kerala, said the short answer would be "no". Studies have indicated that COVID re-infections

cannot be solved by simply adding more and more systemic doses of vaccine. It is obvious that if sufficient aerosol exposure occurs, infection can occur – regardless of the number of doses received. Masks – especially indoors – will reduce this risk," he said.

1,761 cases, 127 deaths

Meanwhile, India on Sunday recorded 1,761 fresh coronavirus infections, the lowest in around 688 days, taking the country's tally to 4,30,07,841, while the active cases declined further to 26,240, according to Health Ministry data.

The death toll climbed to 5,16,479 with 127 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 a.m. stated.

Protests at Nandi Hills over restricted entry during weekends

'To allow only those who have pre-booked rooms in the resorts is elitist'

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Protests broke out at Nandi Hills early on Sunday morning, as visitors eager to make the trek up the hill were not allowed entry.

When they approached the popular weekend destination on the outskirts of Bengaluru, they found that the road had been barricaded over two kilometres away from the hill. However, around 200 visitors ignored the barricades and defied the restrictions to trek up the hill to catch the sunrise.

Following a landslide and damage to the road last year, which was relaid and opened for visitors in December 2021, the Chickballapur district administration imposed restrictions.

On weekdays, visitors are allowed as per parking available on the hill. On weekends, however, entry is restricted to only those who have booked rooms in hotels and homestays. These rules may be relaxed soon.

Large turnout
However for the past three months, almost every weekend people turn up in large numbers to make a trek and return home disappointed, sources said.

Large turnout

This Sunday was no different. "I went to the hill to catch the sunrise at around 5 a.m. and saw the road barricaded. There were already around 200 others waiting,

I assumed they would give us permission. This got many of us agitated and demanded the rule be scrapped, but there was no response from the district administration. So around 200 of us defied the barricades and trekked the hill and caught the sunrise," said Gautam Mishra, a resident of Whitefield.

Protesters criticised the weekend restrictions especially as COVID-19 cases have dropped and the road was relaid a while back. "To allow only those who have pre-booked rooms in the resorts is elitist. The district administration has to promote tourism not mar it," said Mr. Mishra.

Over the last few weeks,

the number of visitors heading to Nandi Hills has been increasing rapidly. "To prevent overcrowding, we have restricted the visitors to the hills to the parking capacity during weekdays, where you can book slots both offline and online. This system has stabilised. Weekends see even more crowding," said Latha R., Deputy Commissioner, Chickballapur.

She added that the Tourism and the Horticulture Departments want more time to adjust to the new systems to handle excess crowding during the weekends. "We will probably allow visitors up to the parking capacity even during weekends soon," she added.

Vax body for reduced gap between Covishield doses

NTAGI says 2nd dose can be given 8-16 weeks after first

NEW DELHI, PTI

The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI), India's apex body on immunisation, has recommended administering the second dose of Covid-19 vaccine Covishield between eight and 16 weeks after the first dose, official sources said on Sunday. Presently, the second dose is given between 12 and 16 weeks after the first dose under the National Covid-19 Vaccination Strategy.

NTAGI has not yet suggested any change in the schedule of



Covaxin, whose second dose is administered 28 days after the first dose.

The recommendation for Covishield is yet to be imple-

mented in the national vaccination programme.

"The latest recommendation of NTAGI is based on recent global scientific evidence derived from programmatic data," said an official source. "According to it, when the second dose of Covishield is given eight weeks onwards, the antibody response generated is almost similar when administered at an interval of 12 to 16 weeks," the source explained.

The decision will lead to accelerated administration of the second dose of Covishield to the remaining six to seven crore individuals amid rising cases in several countries.

The government had on May 13, 2021, extended the gap between the first and second doses of Covishield from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks based on the recommendations by NTAGI.

NTAGI provides advice to

Centre seeks SC nod for scrutiny of Covid claims

The Centre has asked the Supreme Court to let a central agency undertake a sample scrutiny to verify the documents processed by the state governments for grant of ex gratia payment of Rs 50,000 to the families of Covid-19 victims. It has raised concerns over the flourishing fake certificate racket in connivance with local officers to make claims.

Details on Page 8

the Union Health Ministry on immunisation services for the effective control of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Centre seeks SC nod for sample scrutiny of Covid ex gratia claims

Raises concern over flourishing fake certificate rackets

ASHISH TRIPATHI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Union government has asked the Supreme Court to let a central agency undertake a sample scrutiny to verify the documents processed by the state

governments for grant of ex gratia payment of Rs 50,000 to the families of Covid-19 victims.

It has raised concern over flourishing illegal racket of preparing fake certificates in connivance with local officers to make claims.

The top court had earlier also taken a serious view of the matter and indicated to order a probe by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

In a formal application, the government also asked the top court to fix an outer limit of four weeks to make claims in case of any future death due to Covid-19.

Notably, the top court has been examining compliance of its judgement of June 30, 2021 for disbursement of ex gratia to kin of Covid-19 victims, passed in

a PIL filed by advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal. In a fresh plea, the Centre said, "Reports have been received by the central government as well as by the state governments regarding fake/forged claims being submitted by some unscrupulous persons."

Considering the pain and plight of the family members of persons who lost their lives due to Covid-19 infection, the court had on sympathetic, benevolent and humanitarian grounds, directed expeditious

payment of the ex-gratia payments to the next of kin of the victims, on production of documents.

However, in absence of any verification and scrutiny of the claim forms, some unscrupulous persons in the society started realising such ex-gratia payments on the basis of forged and fake claim documents. Further the reports received also do not rule out connivance of the local level officers appointed to clear the claims and existence of illegal

rackets being flourishing to obtain ex-gratia payment granted by this court on forged and fake documents, it pointed out.

The government also said the courts should now fix an outer limit of four weeks for making claims for the ex gratia.

Since the pandemic has subsided over the period of time and by now all genuine claimants must have approached the authorities, it may not be desirable to continue this process without any outer limit, it said.

BBMP turns footpath encroacher

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS

Days after the CAG report revealed that nearly 43% of the 1,400 kilometres of road network does not have a proper footpath, the BBMP itself was found to be an encroacher in Indiranagar.

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) officials at Jogupalya ward 89 took up construction activities by invading the footpath. Indiranagar residents are accusing them of building an 'arali katte' on the footpath at



The construction of the 'arali katte' at Jogupalya ward No 89, Indiranagar. DH PHOTO/S K DINESH

6th Main Road adjacent to 100 Feet Road.

"The BBMP has already set up a Reverse Osmosis (RO)

water dispensing unit on the same stretch, which also encroaches upon the footpath. Now, they are constructing the 'arali katte', forcing pedestrians to walk on the road," said a resident of the area who has also raised a complaint with the BBMP.

The resident pointed out that the stretch is a busy one and the BBMP's action could jeopardise citizens' safety. "The road witnesses heavy traffic movement and is unsafe for citizens, especially the elders and children, to walk on particularly during the peak hours."

BBMP officials, on the contrary, argued that it was becoming a yellow spot, which made them act to safeguard it.

"The spot had turned dirty and it was impossible to keep it clean unless we constructed a religious structure there. Since there was a peepal tree already, we decided to construct an 'arali katte'," the BBMP engineer-in-charge of the ward told *DH*.

"We may need only a part of the footpath. We will make sure there is enough space for the pedestrians to walk," the engineer added.

Reconsider bus lanes, firms on ORR urge Palike

BENGALURU, DHNS: As bus priority lanes on the Outer Ring Road constrict space for other vehicles, concerns have been raised about traffic jams as companies are calling back their employees post-Covid.

At a meeting held by the Outer Ring Road Companies Association (ORRCA) to thank the BBMP for improving conditions of the arterial roads and fixing streetlights, many raised questions about the need to continue bus priority lanes currently in a state of neglect.

Since no solutions could be found immediately at the meeting, a separate meeting has been called between agencies like the Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT) and Bangalore Traffic Police (BTP) with ORRCA representatives.

Though the bus lanes were



A file photo of a BRTC bus plying on the Outer Ring Road.

introduced to wean commuters away from personal vehicles, authorities have done little to ensure its success after laying the basic infrastructure.

During the meeting, ORRCA vice-president Archana Tayade, treasurer Gangadhar, and managing committee member Bibhu Singh thanked

BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta for asphaltting around 73 km of arterial roads, while also offering to work closely with the civic body.

Mahadevapura Joint Commissioner Venkatachalapathy, and chief engineers Parameshwaraiah and BS Prahalad were present at the meeting.



Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMT) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column.

The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems@deccanherald.co.in

BWSSB, ensure drinking water is clean

On the morning of March 17, some residents of Jeevan Bima Nagar Main Road were shocked to find the drinking water supplied by the BWSSB highly contaminated and stinking. This is the third such incident in the last four months. I have cleaned my sump and overhead tank five times since December. I have to pay Rs 5,000 each time. Despite alerting the engineers concerned, we have not got a response. I request the authorities to find a permanent solution to this issue.



A sample of the contaminated water received by some residents of Jeevan Bima Nagar Main Road earlier this week.

We need streetlights for interior roads as well

Padmanabhanagar is a fully developed residential layout. The main road has streetlights and LED lamps installed. But unfortunately, Bescom and BBMP authorities have neglected the cross roads in the area. As LED lamps are brighter than the existing yellow lights, senior citizens can comfortably and safely walk during the night. The authorities are requested to immediately replace yellow bulbs at all cross roads in Padmanabhanagar Layout.

SG Prabhakar
Padmanabhanagar



The footpath at the junction of 5th Main and 6th Cross Malleswaram was repaired in a hurry. And the shoddy work is there for all to see.

Repair faulty footpath

Malleswaram is undergoing major road and footpath works even in places where it is not required. Recently, the footpath at the junction of 5th Main and 6th Cross were repaired in a hurry. The shoddy work has only resulted in wastage of taxpayers' money and poses a risk to pedestrians. Despite bringing it to the contractor's notice, it remains unrectified. Authorities concerned should take immediate action.

Deepak, Malleswaram

Where do pedestrians walk?

The footpath near the 100 Feet Road signal near KFC and Pai International in Indiranagar was dug up about six months ago and is still not fixed. We were told the work was taken up under the Bengaluru Smart City programme.

This junction sees intense traffic, not to mention a large number of pedestrians who are forced to walk on

the road. It is dangerous, especially during the evening as motorists drive/ride towards the signal in a rush not seeing the pedestrians on the road. Accidents occur primarily due to the absolute lack of responsibility on the part of authorities. Officials need to fix the footpath before a tragedy occurs.

Concerned citizen



This footpath near the KFC and Pai International signal in Indiranagar was dug up about six months ago and is still not fixed.



Several unlicensed food vendors illegally occupy the footpath from 9.30 am till 5 pm on General Thimmaiah Road.

BBMP must act against illegal roadside shops

The BBMP and Bangalore Traffic Police must take note of the mess on General Thimmaiah Road (Richmond Road) between Hosmat Hospital junction and Trinity Circle junction and opposite the DIG's office, Internal Security Division.

Several unlicensed roadside food and tea vendors illegally occupy the footpath space from 9.30 am until 5 pm. They block and litter the footpaths. Pedestrians are not able to use these walkways. Due to the constant littering and lack of care, the saplings

planted by the horticulture department, using taxpayers' money, have died. Further, several cabs, two-wheelers and autorickshaws park along the roadside when the riders stop to eat there in spite of this being a no-parking zone, creating traffic blocks. We have repeatedly complained to the BBMP, but no action has been taken.

Further, nobody regularly sweeps and maintains this stretch of the road and so garbage piles around. Authorities need to act.

Navin



A badly maintained and unmotorable road at Sharada Colony, Basaveshwaranagar.

Officials turn a blind eye to our grievances

A road that was cut a year ago now resembles a trench cutting into the Eastern Park Road of Sharada Colony, Basaveshwaranagar, forcing vehicles to halt at this spot. Ironically, this trench runs opposite the BBMP ward office and the officials can see the pothole from their desks. But no action has been taken.

Similarly, the BEML Layout Road behind the ward office had also been cut open in many places and was filled with crushed stones due to lack of asphalt. This fell through within days. No action has been taken to restore the road either.

K Raman
Sharada Colony,
Basaveshwaranagar

Stop burning dry grass, weeds

Dried grass and weeds on either side of NICE Road, right from Electronics City to Tumaluru Road (NH), has been burnt to spruce up the area. This has burnt down some trees and branches, besides polluting the air. It is an earnest appeal to the NICE

authorities to adopt a novel and eco-friendly method to trim the weeds and grass instead of setting it on fire, which may be cost effective, but certainly hazardous.

Rajiv Magal
Kammanahalli
Link Road

Tangled cable wires lying dangerously on roads

Cable wires are mindlessly thrown around 24th Main Road in Srinivasa Nagar, Nandini Layout, by various service providers. This causes a lot of inconvenience for residents, especially pedestrians. Granted that such dumping is rampant across Bengaluru, one wonders why the BBMP is not taking action against the culprits.

B Krishna Moorthy



Cable wires thrown around the roads are a cause for concern. This is from 24th Main Road in Srinivasa Nagar, Nandini Layout.



Nearly 10 years on, the work on the Jakkur railway flyover is still incomplete.

Never-ending work

It has been nearly 10 years since the work on the Jakkur railway flyover began and it is still incomplete. None of the four chief ministers who led the state since have shown concern to complete the project, but only kept making

false promises. If the BBMP is not competent enough to complete the work in the stipulated time, the flyover work can be handed over to other authorities.

Vijay
Yelahanka

Clear up our roads

The 23rd Main, 11th Cross in HSR Layout Sector 1 has turned into an eyesore since it has not been cleaned for several days. Cables are strewn around. Huge trees line the road and dry leaves falling on the roadside clog the stormwater drains, thanks to the

BBMP's negligence. Officials are allowing an unhealthy situation to develop, which will affect the residents since the area can turn into an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes and other insects when it rains.

Anna



Dry leaves falling on the roadside clog the stormwater drains at 23rd Main, HSR Layout Sector 1.

Uniformity in water supply

It has been quite a while since the BWSSB introduced the system of supplying water on alternate days. Summer has begun and citizens are facing water shortage and are forced to buy water from private tankers. Meanwhile, we hear that a valve has been kept open in Banashankari 2nd Stage from 11 pm to 8 am on alternate days, while the valve is closed for three hours in Gavipuram Extension and surrounding areas. This disparity and step-motherly treatment must end, especially when the tariff is the same for all residents. What is the logic behind this? The authorities must change their system and maintain uniformity in supplying water.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to mention that residents have to go to MNK Park office and pay cash in case a tanker is required from the BWSSB. This is another anomaly. Why don't they introduce an online payment mode for the tanker service just like monthly bill payment? Can we expect a positive response from the authority concerned?

KN Subba Rao
Gavipuram Extension

Road maintenance an absolute must

The road behind Minerva Mills in Gopalapura ward is in a pathetic condition. It also lacks a proper footpath. Motorists find it very difficult to use the stretch while autorickshaws and taxis refuse to ply there due to the potholes. This road provides key connectivity to the city centre. Considering it is a very old ward, BBMP officials have to visit the area and do the needful at the earliest.

G Chandrashekar
Ramachandrapura

Up to the courts to tame BBMP

Bengaluru's notorious potholes have snuffed out one more life, this time of a 27-year-old techie Ashwin who succumbed to injuries sustained when the two-wheeler he was riding fell into a pothole in Yelahanka limits. The police have registered a complaint against BWSSB which dug up the road and BBMP which failed to asphalt it, but going by past experience, it is unlikely that any action will be initiated against the guilty officers. In January this year, a 46-year-old woman was killed when a truck ran over her after she fell off a two-wheeler while her husband was trying to avoid a pothole on Magadi road. In 2021, a teenager and an excise inspector were killed in the same area under similar circumstances. Ironically, in a bizarre turn of events, when a techie died after being



Year after year, deadlines are set and then forgotten

thrown off a two-wheeler that hit a pothole in 2015, the police had booked her husband for rash and negligent driving!

Year after year, it has become a practice for the government and BBMP to set a 100-day deadline to fill potholes, and conveniently forget about it. Civic bodies not only work in silos but at cross purposes, with agencies like BWSSB and BESCOM digging up even newly laid roads. The long-pending demand to bring all civic bodies under one umbrella

to ensure better coordination, is yet to materialise. Instead of passing the buck, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai who is the Bengaluru in-charge minister, and BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta should take personal responsibility for the pathetic state of roads and the frequent accidents that they cause. Ironically, funds do not appear to be an issue — Bommai had recently announced in the legislature that a whopping Rs 20,000 crore was spent on merely repairing roads in the past five years.

As the Karnataka High Court has rightly observed that BBMP has emerged as a law unto itself. While the court has been seized of the potholes issue for about three years now, BBMP officers have been literally getting away with murder, often even filing false affidavits. Some time ago, the court was informed that there were no potholes in Bengaluru. What seems to have emboldened the civic body is that the judiciary has been rather soft on its officers some of whom should have been sent to jail by now for misleading the court and willfully disobeying its orders. The court is the only ray of hope for citizens and unless it comes down heavily on callous officers, innocent people will continue to lose their lives on roads due to the sheer negligence and irresponsibility of BBMP.



Rain brings relief from sizzling heat

BENGALURU, DHNS

Overcast skies coupled with moderate rains in some areas rescued Bengalureans from the sizzling summer heat on Sunday. Though the day began sunny, light to moderate showers were reported in some places in the afternoon and evening with many expecting heavy rains.

Weather officials said there could be more rain. "The low-pressure area persisting over South East Bay of Bengal and South Andaman Sea might transform into deep depression in the next 24 hours or might become a cyclonic

storm in the next 12 hours," said a senior meteorologist in the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Bengaluru.

Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre's (KSNDMC) Varuna Mitra dashboard showed East, Yelahanka, RR Nagar, and Dasarahalli zones received the highest rainfall during the day.

After soaring temperatures, rain came as a relief to the people of Bengaluru and this climatic condition is expected to continue for two days. "Cloudy skies, light rains and gusty winds are very likely for the next two days," the weatherman said.

Traffic jams and pile-ups

The rain slowed traffic to a crawl in many places, including Tumakuru Road, Nagawara main road, Central Business District (CBD), and Hebbal.

There was a mini pile-up involving three cars and a lorry on the Outer Ring Road (Yogeshwara Cross between Hebbal and Manyata).

"The driver of the first car applied the brakes as a pedestrian suddenly appeared. The other cars and the lorry were behind him. No injuries or casualties reported (in the incident)," a traffic police officer confirmed.



Karnataka reports 109 new Covid cases

BENGALURU, DHNS: Karnataka on Sunday reported 109 new Covid cases and two deaths, including that of a 4-month-old baby.

The day also saw the discharge of 143 per-

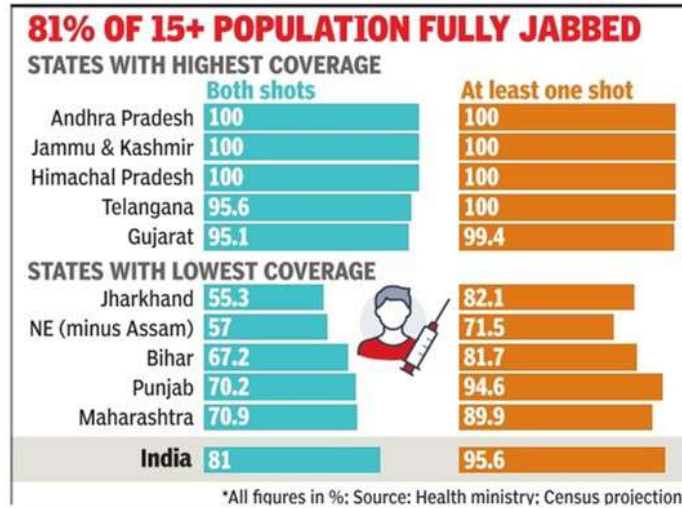
sons, bringing down the total number of active cases to 1,995. Bengaluru accounted for 91 of the day's cases with the second highest number being 4 cases from Mysuru.

As cases rise elsewhere, govt set to cut Covishield shots gap

Centre Studying Expansion Of Booster Drive

Sushmi.Dey@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The government's top vaccination advisory panel, National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI), has recommended reducing the interval between the two primary doses of Covishield to 8-16 weeks, while the Centre is evaluating the need for expanding the booster programme as emerging evidence suggests that a third shot can significantly enhance protection against the highly-transmissible Omicron, official sources said.



"In the wake of the Omicron spread in other countries and to make sure that people who have not taken the second dose can take it quickly, we have suggested redu-

cing the interval between first two doses of Covishield to 8-16 weeks from 12-16 weeks," an official said.

► **Lower eligible age, P 8**

Govt mulling need to lower eligible age to get boosters

► **Continued from P 1**

Currently, around 83% of India's adult population of 18 years and above is fully vaccinated with two doses, whereas over 92% has received at least the first dose. Besides, in the 15-17 age bracket, 47% are fully vaccinated with Covaxin and 76% have initiated vaccination with at least the first dose. After the government recently opened vaccination for those aged between 12 and 14 years, nearly 18 lakh doses have been administered to adolescents in this group.

What's concerning the government at the moment is that many people are not coming to take the second dose after being infected with Omicron after their first jab. Meanwhile, the government and its scientific panels are also deliberating on the need to consider lowering of eligible age to receive the third/booster shot of Covid vaccines, particularly in the wake of a surge now in Omicron cases in many countries.

"We are evaluating the emerging evidence. In the face of Omicron, it appears there is a need for third dose to ensure protection against infection. We have ample vaccines available. The WHO is also recommending boosters now. We are deliberating on it and will work out a mechanism to take this forward," a senior government official told TOI.

Recently, WHO's technical advisory group on Covid-19 vaccine composition pushed for "broad" access to both initial vaccines and booster shots, particularly for groups at higher risk of severe illness, noting that the shots "continue to provide high levels of protection against severe disease and death" against the Omicron strain.

In India, healthcare workers, frontline workers and the elderly above 60 years are eligible for receiving a third or 'precaution dose'. So far, more than two crore 'precaution doses' have been administered since January 10. The recommendation of NTAGI on reducing gap between the two shots of Covishield is expected to be implemented within the next week as it'll require changes in CoWin app.

Wkly deaths below 170, a 2-year low

India saw less than 170 Covid deaths in the week ending Sunday, the lowest toll since the week after India went into total lockdown in late March 2020. Weekly cases fell by 40% to less than 16,000, the lowest since late April 2020. TNN

Hundreds sent back from Nandi Hills as weekend ban over Covid still in place

Ranganath K | TNN

Hundreds of people on Sunday showed up at Nandi Hills — among the favourite haunts of Bengaluru, Chikkaballapur and Kolar residents — oblivious to the fact that the district administration's weekend ban on visitors imposed in the run-up to Covid third wave still remains in place.

The authorities, however, beefed up security at the foothills and sent back the visitors, ignoring repeated pleas that they be allowed to go up. Tempers soared at one point of time as the visitors, who were in large numbers, tried to stage a demonstration saying the deputy commissioner should arrive at the spot and address their demand to be allowed to go up.

However, police personnel and tourism department authorities convinced the visitors to give up



SUNDAY SPOILER: Some visitors tried to protest demanding entry to the hills

their protest plans and disperse. Gautham Misra, IT professional and Whitefield resident, said he and some of his friends reached the foothills around 6am, but the authorities stopped them at the entry point. "Despite requests, they did not allow us go forward citing restrictions on the entry of visitors during weekends," he said. Misra said there is no clarity on rules regard-

ing online registration for entry.

He said since the pandemic situation has eased all over the country, the authorities can now think of relaxing the rules. It is only during weekends that people would want to relax after a hectic week and Nandi Hills is the best place for Bengalureans to unwind, Misra added. Banning entry during weekends makes no sense as people are

congregating in large numbers in other places like malls, marketplaces and cinema halls, the IT professional said.

Lakshman, a mechanic from Kolar, said he visited the spot to view sunrise but was stopped at the entry point and had to return.

Nandi Hills was shut for the general public on August 24, 2021 after a stretch of the main access road was washed away owing to heavy rain. The road was relaid, making provision for safe passage of water. The hill station was opened on December 1, 2021 but remained closed during weekends as part of the crowd-management strategy.

District officials had said the decision was taken as thousands of people congregate at the hill station on Saturdays and Sundays as against its capacity of 1,500 to 2,000 people, and enforcing Covid-appropriate behaviour was a challenge.

India sequences 20% of intl travellers' samples

Umesh.Isalkar@timesgroup.com

Pune: India is sequencing 20% of all Covid-positive samples collected from international passengers, an official from the department of biotechnology told TOI on Sunday. He said currently, there are no specific countries India has listed for priority genome sequencing, which is done to track circulating and emergent variants of SARS-CoV-2.

Confirming this, Samiran Panda, additional DG of ICMR said, "Currently, there are no country-specific instructions for prioritising genome sequencing of international travellers arriving from particular countries. But a fixed number of positive samples, from all international travellers, is being sent to the INSACOG lab network."

Some countries in Europe and Asia are seeing surges in

Centenarians fight off Covid better than 80-, 90-year-olds; med fraternity baffled

One of the few established facts about Covid is that it hits old people the hardest. Yet, centenarians seem to have done much better in fighting off the pandemic than the 80 and 90-year-olds, leaving the medical fraternity baffled.

Out of 1.4 lakh total Covid deaths in Maharashtra, only 91 (0.06%) fatalities have been recorded among 100-year-olds; 134 centenarians caught the infection since the start of the pandemic in 2020, of which the highest cases and deaths were in the second wave last year. Ongoing studies have hinted at a combination of genetic, immunological and social factors that may have protected them. The case fatality rate of those above 100 is 2.9% in the state. In comparison, nonagenarians have registered more than double the fatality rate at 7%. A total of 16,854 90-year-olds have got infected with virus in the past two years, of which 710 have succumbed. TNN

involving the BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron. A scientist from the ICMR-NIV said, "Among the samples being sequenced, we get to mainly see the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron. The BA.1 is also in co-circulation in some states in India."

He added, "Among the

samples being analysed for emerging variants, 20% are drawn from international arrivals who have tested positive for Covid."

Analysis of data from sickened international arrivals is key as there has been an overall drop in samples being

collected for sequencing, due to the fall in Covid cases.

For samples drawn from the community (of individuals without travel history), only those with a cycle threshold (CT) value of less than 25 are prioritised. There is no such requirement for samples drawn from international travellers or their close contacts. But samples that fit this CT value rule have become scarce due to decline in cases.

Experts, meanwhile, have said a new surge involving Omicron's BA.2 is unlikely to happen in India as it has already reported the subvariant in January-February.

"The only concern now is there should not be a new variant. So sequencing of samples should not stop," said microbiologist Dr Rajesh Karyakarte, one of the microbiologists involved in INSACOG lab network.

Fake docs being used to get Covid death compensation: Govt

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New Delhi: The Centre has told the Supreme Court that some unscrupulous persons are using fake documents to get Covid death compensation and sought direction from the court to allow its agency to undertake sample scrutiny of the documents filed along with claim applications to catch the culprits.

The Centre said that the connivance of the local level officers appointed to clear the claims could not be ruled out in the illegal rackets to obtain ex-gratia payment on forged documents, which needed to be probed.

“Reports have been received by the central government as well as by the state governments regarding fake/forged claims being submitted by some unscrupulous persons. It is submitted that though this court, considering the pain and plight of the family members of persons who lost their lives due to Covid-19 infection, on sympathetic, benevolent and humanitarian grounds had directed expeditious payment of the ex-gratia payments to

VACCINE TRACKER

State/UT	% of 15+ population covered	
	Both shots	At least one shot
India	81	95.6
Andhra Pradesh	100	100
Jammu & Kashmir	100	100
Himachal Pradesh	100	100
Telangana	95.6	99.3
Gujarat	95.1	100
Karnataka	93.9	100
Madhya Pradesh	92.9	97.1
Uttarakhand	92.1	98.9
Delhi	87.5	100
Kerala	84.9	99.6
Haryana	82.8	103.6
Chhattisgarh	81.9	92.7
Odisha	81.7	94.5
Rajasthan	80	96.2
Uttar Pradesh	79.4	100
West Bengal	78.4	90.6
Assam	77.8	91.2
Tamil Nadu	72.2	91.8
Maharashtra	70.9	89.9
Punjab	70.2	94.6
Bihar	67.2	81.7
NE minus Assam	57	71.5
Jharkhand	55.3	82.1

Source: Health ministry for vaccination, Census projections for popn. Data as of 7am on March 20

the next of kin of the Covid-19 victims, on production of documents mentioned in court's order.

However, in absence of any verification and scrutiny of the claim forms, some unscrupulous persons in the society started realising such ex-gratia payments on the basis of forged and fake claim documents,” the application said.

It pleaded the court to modify its order passed last year for “permitting any central agency to undertake a sample scrutiny to verify the claimed documents processed by respective State Governments”.

The Centre also submitted that a time limit of four weeks be set for the existing eligible claimants to lodge their claims with the authorities for grant of ex-gratia payment and a time of four weeks be also fixed for claimants who might become eligible in the future.

The court on the last hearing had indicated that it may press the comptroller and auditor general into service to catch those who used fake certificates for getting Covid death compensation after it was pointed out by the Centre that its order was being misused to claim the benefit.

AROUND THE WORLD



S KOREA'S PREZ-ELECT TO ABANDON BLUE HOUSE: South Korea's incoming president Yoon Suk Yeol said on Sunday that he will abandon the mountainside presidential palace of Blue House (above) and establish his office at the defence ministry compound in central Seoul to better communicate with the public. The plan drew an immediate backlash from critics, who warned that a hasty movement would undermine national security, require excessive spending and violate property rights of residents in the new presidential office area

China locks down millions more as Covid-19 spreads

China on Sunday imposed stay-at-home orders on millions more people in the country's northeast as it battles its biggest Covid outbreak in two years. The country has largely kept Covid at bay since it brought to heel its initial outbreak in 2020 using targeted lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions. But the Omicron strain has broken

through its defences in recent months. Jilin, the second-biggest city in Jilin province, will lock down about 4.5 million inhabitants for three days from Monday, authorities said. Over 4,000 new infections were reported across China on Sunday – with two-thirds in Jilin province, which borders Russia and North Korea. Provincial capital Changchun said on Saturday it would also tighten curbs for three days. Since March 11, Changchun's nine million people have only been allowed out once every two days to buy food.

How mounting garbage woes, uncertain investments, power cost hiccups, and at times, BBMP's inability to secure contractors, are spoiling Bengaluru's waste-to-energy plan

NO ENERGY OFF WASTE

In 2020, BBMP had announced six units

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The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's (BBMP) ambitious waste-to-energy plants are still a distant dream as garbage management issues continue to plague Bengaluru.

In 2020, Palike had announced the establishment of six waste-to-energy units in and around the city. None of the units have seen the light of day.

A 14.5 MW plant in Kannahalli was expected to process 1,000 MT of mixed waste per day. In Doddabidarakallu, a 2 MW unit was to convert 100 MT of mixed waste into energy every day.

Back then, the BBMP had also proposed to partner with Firmgreen Enterprises and NEG to establish two different plants at Mavallipura to process 1,600 MT of mixed waste. One was expected to process 1,000 MT to produce

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 >>



“ Kannahalli plant started functioning in June 2021; it has been converting waste to compost. It could never reach the waste-to-energy stage... ”

— Harish Kumar K, special commissioner, SWM, BBMP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

compressed natural gas (CNG) and another 9 MW plant was to convert 600 MT of waste to energy. Two more waste-to-energy units were expected to come up in Sigehalli and Lingenhalli.

Most projects — public-private partnerships (PPP model) — are still at early stages of planning and agreements-signing. Sadly, some are not even in the pipeline.

According to the BBMP, the power purchasing agreement is the bone of contention in some of the projects. Moreover, a few companies are still looking for investors for the proposed waste-to-energy plants.

For instance, although the Kannahalli plant is up and functioning since July 2021, currently, it is just composting 150 tonnes of segregated waste. The plant is being managed by Satarem Enterprises Private Limited (SEPL) and was expected to supply 40 MW of power to the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation (KPTCL), soon after starting operations. SEPL was to process 350 tonnes of segregated waste and 150 tonnes of mixed waste.

"While the plant started functioning in June 2021, it has been converting waste into compost. It could never reach the waste-to-energy stage. The owner of the enterprise is in bad health, and they are still looking for investors. I visited SEPL recently and

Bundles of wasted energy



Although the Kannahalli plant is functioning since July 2021, currently, it is just composting 150 tonnes of segregated waste. The plant managed by SEPL was expected to supply 40 MW of power to KPTCL soon after starting off

have clarified that as sufficient time has been provided on humanitarian grounds, the BBMP will now have to take legal recourse. However, they have requested for some more time,"

said Harish Kumar K, special commissioner, solid waste management, BBMP.

In case of the plant in Doddabidarakallu, officials said

though an agreement was executed for generation of 2 MW, the company now is demanding for revision of the proposal to generate 6 MW, stalling the process. According to the BBMP, even though the plant is in the pipeline, the matter is complex.

"The manager of the enterprise is asking for a change in the clauses of the original agreement. Initially, BBMP allotted 10,000 square metres of land to the company to set up the waste-to-energy plant, but they are now interested in a different kind of agreement. The incongruity is delaying the process at Doddabidarakallu," informed Kumar.

Palike is yet to secure a contractor for the waste-to-energy plant at Sigehalli. The unit at Lingenhalli is in limbo too. "To establish a waste-to-energy plant under the PPP model, we need to enter into a power purchasing agreement with the companies. The agreement includes per unit cost of the power generated. However, despite a signed agreement in place, the companies end up demanding higher cost per unit. Some of them also came up with exorbitant tipping fees," said a BBMP official.

Complex concept

According to the BBMP, the concept of generating energy from waste

using conventional technology is an idea difficult to sell.

"None of these waste-to-energy plants have started functioning yet and it will be difficult even if they commence operations. Most of the companies that have agreed to set up these plants do not have investors yet. They go on an investor hunt after signing the agreement, which often fails to pan out," added another BBMP official.

The plants are also facing stiff resistance from the civil society members and activists that are working in the solid waste management sector. They are of the view that the conventional way of generating energy from waste is nothing but burning the garbage to ash.

"This model has been successful in western countries. Meanwhile, there is a lot of resistance in India, including Bengaluru. Although different stakeholders have adopted different technologies for generating energy from waste, all these plants ultimately will be using mixed waste to generate the energy. In Kannahalli, the owner was influenced by a technology used in Russia; it was approved by the Technical Guidance Committee as well. But, civil society members believe waste-to-energy is nothing but burning of waste in a closed atmosphere, leading to ash. There is a demand to move to waste-to-manure through bio-mechanisation process," said Kumar.

Nandi Hills shuts shop to tourists' dismay

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Visitors started an impromptu protest at Nandi Hills as they were not allowed to enter the tourist spot after the authorities concerned banned the entry of visitors to stop overcrowding and reduce pollution.

Gautam Misra, a visitor who went to Nandi Hills for a short trip with his family, was among those stuck at the gate. Along with him, several other tourists were waiting. As the hours passed by, their agitation grew and ultimately, they decided to raise their voices against the authorities.

"As many as 1,000 people joined and raised their voices. They (the authorities concerned) had installed barricades and sealed the entry for tourists who had come from far off places as early as 4.30



The authorities barred visitors from entering the spot with barricades, which resulted in many lining up against them in protest

am," Misra said.

Another visitor said, "There are as many as 50 small shops here. What

about their livelihood (that depends on tourists)? The authorities must encourage tourism as the revenue

can help boost the economy. Instead, they are turning people away."

Visitors decided to roam around the hills since they were not allowed entry inside the tourist spot. However, the police stopped them from doing that too.

Visitors said, if the authorities had been following a proper system of registration or an online system which notified them once the reservations were full, the visitors would have been saved the hassle of coming all the way.

The tourist spot was closed in August last year due to landslides which affected the roads leading to the tourist spot. The roads were restored but the restrictions persisted due to Covid. The government lifted the restrictions recently but the place was still closed for tourists. Visitors tried to take the matter to deputy commissioner R Latha. However, no response was received from her end.

A dark cause for concern

Streetlights are integral to women's safety, yet 23 per cent audited public spaces in Malleswaram, 50 per cent in Mahadevapura lack proper lighting

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Streetlights play a vital role in preventing incidences of gender-related violence. According to a public safety audit, 23 per cent of the audited public spaces in Malleswaram need streetlights and only 50 per cent of the audited public spaces in Mahadevapura were found to be well-lit.

Constituency Public Place Safety Audit Report was conducted in two constituencies, Mahadevapura and Malleswaram. Between 2021 and 2022, 260 public spaces and 109 streets were audited. The focus was on eight public places frequented by women, including Anganwadi Kendra, bus stops, markets, parks, PHCs, police stations, and public toilets.

The analysis of the data collected from eight wards in Mahadevapura and seven wards of Malleswaram showed both constituencies require immediate improvements in areas like street lighting and making bus stops more passenger-friendly. Both constituencies possess significant undeveloped potential to develop parks, first mile and last mile connectivity and anganwadis.

While Malleswaram is an old-established area, Mahadevapura is still a rapidly developing constituency. As per the report, 35 public spaces were audited in Mahadevapura. Fifteen parks were audited and eight of them needed streetlights.

"In an audit conducted about cycle lanes, we noticed that females answered differently than men. While men asked for more road infrastructure, females demanded street lighting. Street lighting is a



The joint commissioner of police (traffic) said streetlights are integral to women's safety and prevention of accidents

fundamental pillar of women's safety," said Revathy Ashok, CEO of B PAC.

Mahadevapura MLA Arvind Limbavali said, "In the past 13 years, not a single incident of gender-based



Many crimes happen in dark spots... So, areas with streetlight-related issues will be brought to BBMP's notice with geotagged pictures

— BR Ravi Kanthegowda,
joint commissioner of police (traffic)

violence has been reported from my constituency. As a developing constituency, traffic is a major problem. Around 5,84,000 people are living here, assuming a floating population of 15 lakh. While working towards a solution for both traffic and women's safety, we are building roads. If there are no roads, where will we put the streetlights?"

Noting the failure in implementation, Deepak RL, IRS special commissioner, BBMP West Zone, said the problem lies with the centralisation of contracts. "We have one engineer per ward to oversee the functionality of streetlights. However, the problem is with the centralisation of the task. We will be moving towards a decentralised model and soon funds will be allocated ward-wise for this purpose."

BR Ravi Kanthegowda, joint commissioner of police (traffic), said "Streetlights play a vital role in women's safety and in averting accidents. Up to 35 per cent accident-associated deaths involve pedestrians. Many crimes happen in dark spots. So, areas with streetlight-related issues will be sent to BBMP with geotagged pictures. The task will be carried out during the night rounds and will be sent to a joint Whatsapp group with BBMP and BTP."

Future waves may not be as severe: Experts

Vaccination, natural immunity may help India, says doctors

#NEW DELHI

Amid a resurgence of covid-19 cases in Southeast Asia and parts of Europe, experts in India feel that given the high vaccination coverage and immunity due to natural infection, any future waves are unlikely to have a major impact in the country. Some of them even said that the government should consider relaxing the mask mandate as the daily covid-19 cases and deaths have remained low for a while.

India on Sunday recorded 1,761 fresh covid-19 cases, the lowest in around 688 days, and 127 deaths. The active cases also declined further to 26,240, according to government data.

Dr Sanjay Rai, senior epidemiologist at AIIMS and the principal investigator of Covaxin trials for both adults and children at the institute, said that SARS-CoV-2 is an RNA virus and mutations are bound to occur. Already more than 1,000 mutations have occurred, although there are only five variants of concern.

"India experienced a very devastating second wave last year, which was very unfortunate, but currently this is our main strength as natural infection provides better and longer duration of protection. Also, there is high vaccination coverage. Hence, severe impact of any future wave is unlikely," Rai, professor at the Centre for Community Medicine at AIIMS, said.

"It is also time that the Indian government may consider relaxing the mask mandate," he said, adding that senior citizens and those at a higher risk of contracting the infection should continue wearing masks. Rai emphasised, the government should continue with the SARS-CoV-2 surveillance, including genomic sequencing, to monitor the emergence of any future variant.

According to Dr Chandrakant Lahariya, an epidemiologist, the possibility of a fresh surge in India is low even



A healthcare worker administers the covid vaccine to a student in Bikaner

Reduction of gap between Covishield doses

The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI) on Sunday recommended the Union Ministry of Health to reduce the covid-19 vaccine Covishield's duration of the second dose to somewhere between 8 to 16 weeks after the first dose in view of the ongoing Omicron variant of the coronavirus infection, according to official sources.

According to the present guidelines, the second dose of the Serum Institute of India (SII) Covishield vaccine

is given after a time period of 12-16 weeks of the first dose.

"This is just a recommendation but no decision has been taken so far. The purpose behind the recommendations is to ramp up the vaccination and vaccinate beneficiaries for the second dose," sources told ANI. The Government of India on the basis of NTAGI recommendations in the month of May last year extended the gap between the two doses of the Covishield from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks.

with a new variant.

"If we analyse data on seroprevalence, vaccination coverage and evidence on the spread of Omicron, it is logical to conclude that the covid-19 epidemic in India is over. For India, the possibility of a fresh surge for many months and even with a

new variant is low," he said.

The reason is that because of the hybrid immunity after three waves of natural infection and a large proportion of adults receiving both doses of COVID-19 vaccine, the susceptible pool has come down drastically, Lahariya said. **-PTI**

Cut dosage gap to 8-16 weeks: Expert group

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

THE National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) on Sunday recommended reducing the gap between the first two doses of Covishield vaccine to 8-16 weeks from the current 12-16 weeks after new data showed similar antibody responses in both cases.

“The latest recommendation of NTAGI is based on recent global scientific evidence derived from programmatic data,” an official of the country’s apex body on immunisation said. “According to it, when the second dose of Covishield is given

eight weeks onwards, the antibody response generated is almost similar when administered at an interval of 12 to 16 weeks,” the official added.



	NATIONWIDE		KARNATAKA	
	MAR 19	MAR 20	MAR 19	MAR 20
Fresh cases	2,075	1,761	173	109
Recoveries	3,383	3,196	153	143
Deaths	71	127	2	2

A reduction of the gap between the two doses will speed up the vaccination drive, allowing the remaining six to seven crore people to get their second doses of Covishield faster at a time when Covid cases are surging in parts of Asia.

The government had extended the gap between the first two doses of Covishield vaccine from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks last May on NTAGI’s recommendation.

The NTAGI has not yet suggested any change in the dosage gap of Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin, whose second dose is administered 28 days after the first.



Algae bloom in Vibhutipura lake at LB Shastri Nagar due to poor maintenance

Residents rue dying, filthy Vibhutipura lake

Encroachments have shrunk 43-acre water body

S LALITHA @Bengaluru

THE Vibhutipura Lake at Lal Bahadur Shastri Nagar (off Old Airport Road), which once had water till the brim, and was home to migratory birds and beautiful flowers, is languishing at present. Barring a stretch of water at one end, it is no sight for sore eyes.

Walkers who have seen the lake in its days of glory are infuriated over its present state. Weeds and other plants have mushroomed all over the lake. A park on one end of the lake is in a decrepit condition with broken and unsafe equipments for children. The lake once extended to 43 acres but encroachments have shrunk its size now. "Deposition of silt and dumping of untreated sewage water by houses around the lake have ruined it," laments a resident requesting anonymity.

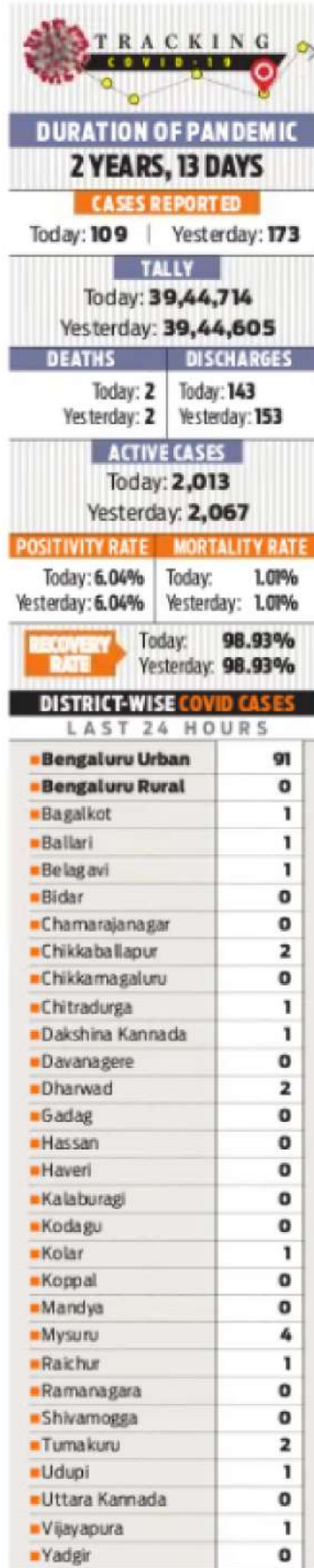
Despite its many flaws, an average of 500 people, particularly from numerous apartments here, walk or run on the joggers track around the lake daily with the numbers shooting up

during the weekend.

Four years ago, Rs 3 crore was spent to rejuvenate the lake but it is in a terrible shape now. The foundation stone to construct a Sewage Treatment Plant for the lake and steps to build the track in missing spaces around it were done by the corporator some months ago.

Nirmal Lalwani, a senior citizen and regular walker, said, "If so much is invested on building infrastructure in the city, then why can't it be done here? It will make a big difference to so many residents here."

Prahlad Majumdar, a retired CEO of a private firm said, "If Ganga can be cleaned, why not Vibhutipura lake? Will power is what is lacking here." Srinivas Kulkarni, a Hubballi resident, who frequents the lake, remembers the space being wonderful. "What prevents the government from maintaining it? It could be a wonderful spot for senior citizens like me," he said. BBMP Lakes department officials were unable to provide inputs about the lake despite repeated attempts to contact them.



Advisory Body for Covishield 2nd Dose After 8-16 Weeks

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New Delhi: Government's advisory body on vaccination — National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) — recommended reducing the duration of the second dose of Covishield vaccine to 8-16 weeks after the first dose, in a bid to speed up administering both jabs.

At present, the second dose of Covishield is given between 12-16 weeks of the first dose.

People in the know told ET that NTAGI has sent its suggestions to the government regarding the reduction of duration of Covid-19 vaccine-Covishield.

The duration of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, remains unchanged, they said. At present the second dose of Covaxin is being given 28 days after the first dose.

"This has been done in the face of Omicron spread in other countries and to make sure that people who have not taken the second dose can take it quickly," added a person.

The recommendation of NTAGI is expected to be implemented within next week as it will require changes in Co-WIN app.

The dose gap for Serum In-



stitute of India's Covishield, the Indian version of the Oxford-AstraZenca shot, was increased to 12-16 weeks from 6-8 weeks, NTAGI recommended the extension of the dose gap in May last year.

It was 4-6 weeks when the vaccination drive started in January last year. In March the government decided to stretch the gap from 4 weeks to 6-8 weeks citing better results.

The decision to increase the gap in May had raised several questions, with public health experts linking it to the shortage of vaccines. However, the government had said that the decision to extend it further was taken considering real life evidence from the UK.

CORONA METER

CASES ON SUNDAY **1,033^o**

ACTIVE CASES **25,822 (-651^o)**

Recovered **42.47 M (+1,658)**

Deaths **516,504 (+26^o)**

TOTAL CASES **43.01M**

Source: State bulletins, PFI; *S states/UTs as of 7:25 PM; ^oNet of recoveries/deaths; Change since 12am, 20 Mar; ^oIncludes Kerala 24 previous or reclassified deaths.

Daily Infections

5 worst-hit states	CASES ON SUN	DEATHS
Kerala	640	0*
Mizoram	234	1
Karnataka*	173	2
Maharashtra	113	1
Odisha	45	0

Source: State bulletins; *Sst; ^oincl. 24 previous or reclassified deaths.

4 Main Metros*	CASES ON SAT	ACTIVE CASES
B'luuru Urban	138	1741
Delhi	61	482
Mumbai*	27	298
Chennai	24	229

Source: State bulletins; *Sm

VACCINE DOSES ADMINISTERED IN INDIA

1812.79M (+0.25M)

1st dose... **971.46m (95.90%)**
2nd dose **819.59m (80.91%)**
56.20m^o | **35.48m^o**

12-14 yr 1st dose **1,790,879**

*15-18yr; M=Male/F=Female; 15yr+ specialists

BOOSTER DOSES

HCV/FLW | 60+
11.03m | **10.72m**

TOTAL **21.75m**

DOSES ADMINISTERED

Top 10 States/UTs	SUN	Total, Day 429
UP	47,023	296.13 m
AP	34,329	89.16 m
Odisha	32,656	62.42 m
Maharashtra	21,898	158.48 m
Bihar	16,988	122.66 m
Rajasthan	14,978	100.50 m
Telangana	11,057	59.93 m
Gujarat	11,001	104.71 m
Karnataka	10,537	102.58 m
Tamil Nadu	10,361	101.34 m

Source: dashboard.covin.gov.in; 07:22 PM

Samples Tested so Far*

782.66 MILLION | **431,973** in last 24 hours*

POSITIVE TESTS* **5.50%**

Source: ICMR; 19 Mar; *Cumulative; 3-day average

GLOBAL COUNT

Total Cases **470.22 M** | Vaccine Doses Administered **11112.29 Million**
Deaths **6,099,046** | Recovered **400.79 M** (294 countries/areas)

Source: worldometers.info; 07:25 PM

NEW INFECTIONS IN 5 WORST-HIT COUNTRIES*

S. Korea	381,329
Germany	168,187
Vietnam	150,618
France	98,104
Italy	74,024

*as of Sat

China Locks Down Millions More as Covid-19 Spreads

Beijing: China on Sunday imposed stay-at-home orders on millions more people in the country's northeast as it battles its biggest Covid-19 outbreak in two years.

The country has largely kept Covid at bay since it brought to heel its initial outbreak in 2020 using targeted lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions.

But the Omicron strain has broken through its defences in recent months and taken hold in multiple cities. Jilin, the second-biggest city in Jilin province, will lock down about 4.5 million inhabitants for three days from Monday night, local authorities announced.

More than 4,000 new infections were reported across China on Sunday -- with two-thirds in Jilin province, which borders Russia and North Korea.

Provincial capital Changchun



Residents of Jilin province get tested for Covid

said Saturday it would also tighten restrictions for three days.

Since March 11, Changchun's nine million people have only been allowed out once every two days to buy food. The new measures mean only medical personnel and other anti-epidemic workers will be authorised to leave their homes.

It comes after China recorded its first two deaths from Covid in more than a year on Saturday. **AFP**