



December 31, 2021 – Friday

Key Developments

States demand extension of GST compensation for another 5 years

Many states have demanded that the GST compensation cess regime be extended for another five years and the share of the Union government in the centrally-sponsored schemes be raised as the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their revenues. The GST compensation to states for revenue shortfall resulting from subsuming of local taxes such as VAT in the uniform national tax Goods and Services Tax (GST) will end in June next year. There has been a loss of revenue to the states due to the GST tax system, the Centre has not made arrangements to compensate the loss of revenue of about Rs 5,000 crore to the state in the coming year, so the GST compensation grant should be continued for the next five years after June 2022, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said.

"Many states have asked for this. We have also asked to extend GST compensation. If it is not extended, the finances of many states will be in a bad shape," Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said after pre-Budget consultation of finance ministers of states with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman here.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/states-demand-extension-of-gst-compensation-for-another-5-years-121123000959_1.html

GST Council to discuss duty structure amid demands for rate hikes' rollback

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will chair the 46th meeting of the Goods and Service Tax Council meeting in New Delhi on Friday, December 31. The agenda of the meeting will be to discuss the inverted duty structure of certain sectors and deliberate on the reports of the two Groups of Ministers that were set up during the last Council meeting in September. As reported earlier, after rectifying the inverted duty structures in footwear and textiles, the all-powerful GST Council may take up the issue for some other sectors, including a few pharmaceutical products. The problem of inverted duty structure arises when the finished product is at a lower tax bracket compared to the input raw materials. However, this usually leads to the rise in rates of the finished products, and the rate increase in textiles and footwear has led to criticism from the central government's political opposition. So, it is likely that these matters could also be discussed.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/gst-council-to-discuss-inverted-duty-structure-amid-demands-of-rollback-121123000550_1.html

Govt extends FY21 GST annual return filing deadline till February 28

The government has extended by two months till February 28 the deadline for businesses to file GST annual returns for 2020-21 fiscal ended March 2021. "The due date for furnishing annual return in FORM GSTR-9 & self-certified reconciliation statement in FORM GSTR-9C for the financial year 2020-21 has been extended from 31.12.2021 to 28.02.2022," the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) said in a late-night tweet on Wednesday. GSTR 9 is an annual return to be filed yearly by taxpayers registered under the Goods and Services Tax (GST). It consists of details regarding the outward and inward supplies made or received under different tax heads. GSTR-9C is a statement of reconciliation between GSTR-9 and the audited annual financial statement.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-extends-fy21-gst-annual-return-filing-deadline-till-february-28-121123000274_1.html

Benefit of reduced performance security extended till March 2023

The centre on Thursday extended till March 2023 the benefit of reduced performance security in government contracts. According to the rules, a successful bidder awarded a government contract has to deposit a performance security of 5-10 % of the value of the contract with the government. To help commercial entities and contractors tide over the liquidity crunch post the first wave of the COVID pandemic, the finance ministry had in November 2020 reduced this performance security to 3% for all tenders or contracts issued or concluded till December 31, 2021. The finance ministry on Thursday said that the government of India has decided to extend the benefit of reduced performance security of 3 % up to March 31, 2023, for all central government tenders/contracts issued/concluded till March 31, 2023.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/benefit-of-reduced-performance-security-extended-till-march-2023/articleshow/88600011.cms>

Centre notifies new rules for consumer commissions

The Centre has notified the Consumer Protection (Jurisdiction of the District Commission, the State Commission and the National Commission) Rules, 2021, revising the pecuniary jurisdiction of the district, State and national commissions. According to the notification, district commissions will have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of the goods or services paid does not exceed ₹50 lakh. State commissions can handle complaints in the range of ₹50 lakh-₹2 crore. "The National Commission shall have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of the goods or services paid as consideration exceeds ₹2 crore," it added.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/centre-notifies-new-rules-for-consumer-commissions/article38073826.ece>

Decision on which vaccine to be given as precautionary dose expected soon: Govt

There have been extensive deliberations on whether the precautionary (third) dose of Covid vaccine for healthcare and frontline workers and citizens above 60 years with comorbidities should be the same as the first two doses and a decision is expected soon, the government said on Thursday. Addressing a press conference, ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava said the government will issue clear cut recommendations on this before January 10, when administering of the precautionary dose to healthcare and frontline workers and those above 60 years with comorbidities will begin. "We are having an extensive debate (on which vaccine to be given as a precautionary dose). We've had a series of meetings in NTAGI (National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation) yesterday, the day before and today.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/decision-on-which-vaccine-to-be-given-as-precautionary-dose-expected-soon-govt/articleshow/88594277.cms>

Economy

India's R naught value is 1.22, COVID-19 cases are increasing: Government

India's R naught value, which indicates spread of COVID-19, is 1.22, the government said on Thursday, warning that cases are increasing, not shrinking, as it highlighted that Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Karnataka and Gujarat were emerging as states and UTs of concern on the basis of weekly infections and positivity rate. Addressing a press conference, NITI Aayog Member (Health) Dr V K Paul said there has been an uptick in coronavirus cases since the last few days and some states are showing a trend which is going up.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/indias-r-naught-value-is-1-22-covid-19-cases-are-increasing-government/articleshow/88597921.cms>

90% of adult population in India vaccinated with first dose: Govt

Approximately 90 per cent of the adult population in India has been vaccinated against COVID-19 with the first dose, said The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on Thursday. Briefing media persons, Luv Aggarwal, Joint Secretary, Union Health Ministry said, "Approximately 90 per cent of the adult population in India has been vaccinated against COVID-19 with the first dose. On average, India reported more than 8,000 cases per day last week. Overall case positivity rate stands at 0.92 per cent. From December 26 onwards, the country has been reporting 10,000 daily cases." "The weekly positivity rate of more than 10 per cent is being noted in eight districts including six districts of Mizoram, one from Arunachal Pradesh and Kolkata in West Bengal. The weekly case positivity rate is between 5-10

per cent in 14 districts of the country. There are 961 cases of Omicron variant of coronavirus in India, out of which 320 patients have recovered," he added.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/90-of-adult-population-in-india-vaccinated-with-first-dose-govt-121123000915_1.html

Food subsidy to be little less than Rs 4 trn in FY22: Food secretary

The government's food subsidy is expected to be a little less than Rs 4 lakh crore in the financial year 2021-22 as against Rs 5.29 lakh crore in the previous fiscal, Food Secretary Sudhansu Pandey said on Thursday. "We are expecting little less than Rs 4 lakh crore food subsidy this year," Pandey said during a virtual press briefing.

About Rs 2.25 lakh crore food subsidy is estimated for procurement and distribution of foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and an additional Rs 1.47 lakh crore has been incurred for implementing the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), he said. Under NFSA, the central government currently gives highly subsidised foodgrains at Rs 1-3 per kg to over 81 crore people through the public distribution system (PDS).

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/food-subsidy-to-be-little-less-than-rs-4-trn-in-fy22-food-secretary-121123000849_1.html

Robust tax mop-up, under-spending set to bring fiscal deficit down to 6.6%: India Ratings Report

Despite an additional expenditure of ₹3.73-lakh crore announced earlier this month, the government is set to undershoot the fiscal deficit target by 20 bps at 6.6 per cent on the back of overall robust revenue collections and under-spending by many ministries, according to a report. Rising revenue will take care of the additional expenditure planned, it added. The India Ratings report came a day after the Reserve Bank, in its second financial stability report for the current fiscal, said the government would miss the 6.8 per cent budgeted fiscal deficit target for the current year and most analysts also feel the same. The RBI did not offer a number as to by how much the target will be missed.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/robust-tax-mop-up-under-spending-set-to-bring-fiscal-deficit-down-to-66-india-ratings-report/article38070112.ece>

Banking and Finance

NSE sees 100th firm migration from SME platform to main-board

Leading stock exchange NSE on Thursday witnessed the 100th migration from the SME (small and medium enterprise) platform to the main-board. The exchange's SME Platform — EMERGE — was launched in 2012 and has been providing a viable and sustainable option for SMEs to raise funds from the capital markets.

The platform has witnessed 235 companies getting listed, aggregating to total issuances of more than Rs 3,611 crore, the National Stock Exchange of India Ltd (NSE) said in a statement. Understanding the importance of the role played by SMEs in the Indian Economy, NSE said, it has always been at the forefront of handholding, facilitating, and assisting the SMEs in this endeavour. The regulatory framework offers the companies an option to migrate from the SME platform to the main-board platform upon fulfilment of specified criteria, as provided by the exchanges.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/market/nse-sees-100th-firm-migration-from-sme-patform-to-main-board/2394202/>

RBI extends deadline for periodic KYC update to March 31, 2022

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday extended the last date for KYC updation for bank accounts by three months to March 31 next year. In a notification on its website, the central bank said it was extending the deadline in view of the "prevalent uncertainty due to new variant of Covid-19". The central bank had relaxed the rules first in May last year due to the pandemic and had said banking services should not be restricted just because the KYC documents have not been updated by the customer.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/rbi-extends-deadline-for-periodic-kyc-update-till-march-31-2022-121123000634_1.html

Exchange members want time limit on Sebi's show-cause notices

The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMI) has urged the Government to limit the timeframe for issue of show cause by market regulator Sebi. In a letter to the Department of Economic Affairs, the association suggested that the Limitation Act should be incorporated into the SEBI Act through amendments.

It called for prescribing a maximum period for issuance of show-cause notice and proceedings, while all pending matters that do not fall under the Limitation Act should be closed.

Sebi does not prescribe any period for initiation of proceedings, leading to delays for years after the alleged violation, and needless hardship and grave prejudice to market participants, besides affecting their ability to respond effectively to the notices.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/markets/exchange-members-want-time-limit-on-sebis-show-cause-notice/article38070363.ece?homepage=true>

Bank deposit growth continues to display contrarian trend

Bank deposit growth continued to display contrarian trend, declining by ₹93,627 crore in the reporting fortnight ended December 17, against an accretion of ₹ 1,73,248 crore in the preceding fortnight ended December 3. Aggregate deposits had slumped by ₹2,69,612 crore during the fortnight ended November 19, after a record ₹3,40,496 crore fortnightly increase during the fortnight ended November 5. The latest Financial Stability Report (FSR) noted that the run-off profile of deposits since September 2019 shows that the growth in stable deposits (that is deposits with low run-off profile) has lagged that of volatile deposits.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/money-and-banking/bank-deposit-growth-continues-to-display-contrarian-trend/article38073639.ece>

Industry

Year 2021: Inflection Point of Indian Nutraceutical Industry

Indian Nutraceutical Industry has undergone an ocean of evolution since 2016 and the sector has consistently grown since then. Thanks to regulatory evolution, India has seen the evolution of good quality contract manufacturers, growth of the pharmaceutical industry adopting nutraceuticals in their portfolio, a rise of the start-up world with strong innovations. India surely is progressing to evolve as a strong responsible nutrition hub.

The year 2020 turned out to be a catalyst of change. An industry that was growing steadily in predictable trends took a quantum jump in the entire ecosystem right from strong demand of clinical trials, to the government's insistence of clinical backing, an impetus to clinically studied Ayurveda, to market expansion due to demanding health situation induced by pandemic resulting in consumer awareness.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/healthcare/wellness/year-2021-inflection-point-of-indian-nutraceutical-industry/2394311/>

Govt to receive proposals for semiconductor fabs, display units from January 1

The government will start receiving applications from companies for setting up of semiconductor fabs, display units and for other related schemes from January 1, 2022. Earlier this month, the government approved a Rs 76,000-crore scheme to boost semiconductor and display manufacturing in the country, in a bid to position India as a global hub for hi-tech production, and attract large chip makers. Announcing that companies can begin applying under the scheme from January 1, 2022, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday exhorted players to leverage this "good opportunity" and "right time" to set up their manufacturing operations in the country.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/electronics/govt-to-receive-proposals-for-semiconductor-fabs-display-units-from-january-1/articleshow/88595011.cms>

Vehicle recalls hit a five-year high in 2021

Vehicle recalls in India soared to a five-year high in 2021 with more than seven lakh units recalled, which was more than the total number of recalls during the previous three years. According to data given out by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), four-wheeler and two-wheeler recalls during 2021 stood at 7,07,318 units. The industry had seen 3,80,615 recalls in 2020, 1,59,992 in 2019 and 1,38,755 in 2018.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/vehicle-recalls-hit-a-five-year-high-in-2021/article38073798.ece?homepage=true>

Smartphone market: Foldable phones will turn a corner in 2022 as new models flood market

India's smartphone market is set to be flooded with foldable phones in 2022 with all top brands such as Xiaomi, Apple, Samsung, Oppo and Vivo likely betting on such devices. The segment is likely to touch 300,000 unit sales in 2022 from 1,75,150 units in 2021, a whopping 600 plus percent on year jump, albeit on a smaller base, sector watchers said. "In terms of sales volumes, the market is likely to cross 300,000 units in 2022, which will be close to 7% of the luxe segment of smartphones," said Faisal Kawoosa, founder of research firm, Techarc. Today, about 4.2% of the luxury segment - defined as phones priced more than Rs 50,000 - is in the foldable category.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/electronics/smartphone-market-foldable-phones-will-turn-a-corner-in-2022-as-new-models-flood-market/articleshow/88603866.cms>

Consumers opt for advanced tech items in 2021; large-screen TVs, soundbars most sought-after: Report

Consumers in 2021 opted for premium and technologically advanced products, and digital channels grew four times faster than the offline ones, according to a trend report. Large-screen TVs, big-size side-by-side refrigerators were the most sought-after products and the Indian consumers bought more party machines, such as soundbars and speakers for house parties, according to a consumer electronics shopping trends report released by leading retailer Croma. While the digital channels "grew four times faster than offline channels", indicating acceleration in digital adoption by the consumer, it added. In 2021, 55-inch screen size TVs clocked the highest growth, as home became the primary entertainment hub for families, said Croma's '2021 Unboxed' report.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/electronics/consumers-opt-for-advanced-tech-items-in-2021-large-screen-tvs-soundbars-most-sought-after-report/articleshow/88589866.cms>

Agriculture

Edible oil prices falling consistently; better mustard seed crop to soften rates: Food Secretary

Amid high global prices, edible oil prices in India are consistently coming down after the government intervention, and further drop is expected with the arrival of a better mustard crop from the rabi season, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said on Thursday. In case of other essential food commodities, he said retail prices of rice and wheat are "very stable", while prices of pulses have stabilized. Retail prices of vegetables, especially onion, potato and tomato have also come down. "The prospective predictions of the crop of all the major essential vegetables which are consumed in every household indicates that the situation is going to be stable. And we don't expect any major hike in prices of these vegetables," Pandey said in a media briefing.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/food/edible-oil-prices-falling-consistently-better-mustard-seed-crop-to-soften-rates-food-secretary/articleshow/88588138.cms>

Infrastructure

Driving into 2022, road sector set for 'better' days with new projects

'All weather terrain' might well be a befitting description for the country's road sector. Weathering the pandemic-induced twists and turns, the sector will see more stretches of national highways, completion as well as awarding of multiple projects and fund raises in 2022, making it a "better" year than the passing one. Connectivity with remote and tough terrains, decongesting major points in the road network, an integrated multi-modal national network of transportation and logistics, and steering ahead with the ambitious voluntary vehicle scrappage policy are also on the 2022 radar. "Next calendar year is going to be better (in terms of national highways construction) than the current year... next year, we are hoping that many of the projects which are being bid out, awarded this year and which have come to a certain stage, will be completed," Union Road Transport Secretary Giridhar Aramane told PTI.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/driving-into-2022-road-sector-set-for-better-days-with-new-projects-121123000369_1.html

Indian real estate to fortify institutional investors' confidence in 2022

Institutional investors including global funds, private equity firms and domestic entities are expected to continue investing in Indian real estate with more funds flowing into the sector in 2022. These investments are likely to be driven by broad-based growth on the back of a low-interest environment, continued monetary stimulus, improving

revenue visibility across asset classes, and inclusive growth policy. Fund managers are seeing newer financing avenues opening up in the backdrop of revived business confidence led by recovery of demand across segments.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/property/-/cstruction/indian-real-estate-to-fortify-institutional-investors-confidence-in-2022/articleshow/88598441.cms>

Telecom

India may deploy 'street furniture' for 5G

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is considering using 'street furniture' to densely deploy next generation, or 5G, telecom infrastructure to overcome right-of-way (RoW) challenges following a proposal from a state electricity board. "The department has formed a committee to review the availability of street furniture, particularly the strength of electricity poles and air speed so as to see if they are capable of being leveraged for seamless 5G network," a person aware of the matter told ETTelecom. On December 20, 2021, the committee convened its first meeting to see the viability, and is reviewing the quantum of state-owned infrastructure for making it available for 5G small cells deployment.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-news/india-may-deploy-street-furniture-for-5g/articleshow/88603726.cms>

ICRA upgrades telecom services industry outlook to 'stable' amid tariff hike, relief measures

The telecom tariff hike along with the recent relief package offers sufficient headroom for the industry to undertake deleveraging as well as fund capex for 5G tech upgrade, ICRA% said on Wednesday revising outlook on telecom services sector to 'stable' from 'negative'. The hike coupled with consistent upgradation of subscribers to 4G from 2G and increase in usage of telephony services is expected to result in improvement in industry ARPU (average revenue per user) to around Rs 170 by the end of FY2023, it said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-news/icra-upgrades-telecom-services-industry-outlook-to-stable-amid-tariff-hike-relief-measures/articleshow/88572452.cms>

Energy

Panel formed to prepare energy transition roadmap for India

The government is planning to draw up an energy transition roadmap for the oil and gas sector that could prove to be a key step on India's path to net-zero emissions by 2070. The oil ministry has set up the Energy Transition Advisory Committee headed by former petroleum secretary Tarun Kapoor, who demitted office in November, to draft the strategy. The panel will include representatives of all public-sector oil and gas companies and will reach out to other stakeholders in the sector. The committee has until the middle of 2022 to recommend a roadmap for the sector's transition.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/renewables/panel-formed-to-prepare-energy-transition-roadmap-for-india/articleshow/88603190.cms>

Govt planning to blend 15 per cent green hydrogen with piped natural gas

The government is planning to blend 15 per cent green hydrogen with piped natural gas (PNG) for domestic, commercial and industrial consumption. The move is in line with India's ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and becoming carbon neutral by 2070. This initiative will be part of the government's National Hydrogen Energy Mission aimed at generating hydrogen from green power sources.

"Government plans to float bids for manufacturing green hydrogen, which will be supplied to fertiliser units and petroleum refineries. Similarly, the plan is also to supply green hydrogen for PNG. The government will offer free transmission (of power) for this like in the case of RE. The objective is to blend 15 per cent green hydrogen with PNG, as it is technically viable. Beyond this, the gas pipeline would have to be refurbished," the official explained.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/govt-planning-to-blend-15-per-cent-green-hydrogen-with-piped-natural-gas/article38073350.ece>

NTPC arm to float global tender to set up Rs 15k-cr 3 GW RE project by Feb

State-owned power giant NTPC arm NTPC Renewable Energy Ltd (NREL) will float a global engineering procurement and construction tender to set up a 3GW renewable energy project with a battery storage system worth around Rs 15,000 crore by February 2022, according to a senior official. "The NREL has decided to float a global tender or RFP (request for proposal) for a 3GW renewable energy project (like solar and wind) with battery energy storage system in the next two months (by February 2022). This entails an investment of about Rs 15,000 crore," the senior official told PTI. A request for proposal (RFP) is a business document that announces a project, describes, and solicits bids from qualified contractors to complete it. The development assumes significance given India's ambitious target of having 175GW of renewable energy by 2022, including 100GW of solar and 60 GW of wind energy.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/ntpc-arm-to-float-global-tender-to-set-up-rs-15k-cr-3-gw-re-project-by-feb-121123000556_1.html

States

PM lays foundation stone of projects worth over Rs 17,500 cr in Uttarakhand

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday inaugurated and laid foundation stones of projects worth over Rs 17,500 crore here ahead of the assembly elections in Uttarakhand. The unveiling of projects by Modi included the inauguration of six worth Rs 3,420 crore and laying the foundation stones of 17 others worth Rs 14,127 crore. The inaugurated projects include three different stretches of the Chardham all-weather road which have been widened, Nagina-Kashipur National Highway, Suring Gad hydel project and sewage works under the Namami Gange programme at Nainital. Lakhwar multi-purpose hydro-electricity project worth Rs 5,747 crore, an AIIMS satellite centre for Kumaon worth Rs 500 crore, Moradabad-Kashipur four-lane road, improved road connectivity with Nepal and an Aroma Park in Kashipur are among the key projects whose foundation was laid by the prime minister.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/pm-lays-foundation-stone-of-projects-worth-over-rs-17-500-cr-in-uttarakhand-121123000662_1.html

AFSPA extended in Nagaland for 6 months, declared 'disturbed area'

Days after forming a committee to review the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) in Nagaland, the Centre on Thursday extended it in the entire state till June 30 next year, declaring the entire state as 'disturbed area'. According to the Gazette notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA): "Whereas the Central Government is of the opinion that the entire area comprising the whole of the state of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that use of armed forces in aid of Civil is necessary.

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958 (No. 28 of 1958), the Central Government hereby declares that whole of the State of Nagaland to be 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from 30th December, 2021, for the purpose of the said Act," the notification reads further.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/afspa-extended-in-nagaland-for-6-months-declared-disturbed-area-121123000323_1.html

TN govt provides sops to registered startups for public procurements

Tamil Nadu government proposes to provide support to the startups registered with Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Mission (TANSIM) through its portal. It will provide concessions to the registered startups for public procurements that are below ₹20 lakh to improve the startup ecosystem in the State. The concessions include exemptions from payment of Earnest Money Deposit (EMD), prior turnover and experience. and waiver of tender cost. The startup should have a registered office in Tamil Nadu. Eligibility would be restricted as defined in the Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Policy, says a Government Order.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/tn-govt-provides-sops-to-registered-startups-for-public-procurements/article38071727.ece>

Delhi govt supports traders' protest against GST hike: Sisodia

Delhi government supports protest of traders against increase in goods and services tax on textile, and will raise the issue in GST council meeting, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Thursday. Several markets dealing with garment business remained shut in national capital on Thursday to oppose the central government's move to hike GST rates on textile from existing 5 per cent to 12 per cent from January 1. "The protest by textile traders against

hike in GST from 5 per cent to 12 per cent is justified. The AAP and Delhi government under leadership of Arvind Kejriwal have been in favour of keeping the tax rates low. I will demand keeping tax on textile low in the GST Council meeting tomorrow," tweeted Sisodia who is also minister incharge of Delhi government's Finance department.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/delhi-govt-supports-traders-protest-against-gst-hike-sisodia-121123000633_1.html

Kerala tourism gets a big boost as houseboat service resumes

The tourism in Kerala is witnessing an overwhelming footfall as the houseboats are operating again after a long gap due to COVID-19 infection and lockdown."The COVID-19 restrictions stopped all boat services in Kumarakom for almost a year, now all are back for Christmas and New Year tourism season", said a boat owner. "Houseboat tourism restarted after a long time in Kottayam as COVID-19 situation has improved after the pandemic but footfall isn't high. 70 per cent of tourists are from Kerala while the rest 30 per cent are from other states", said Sreekumar another houseboat owner. "I hope that the Omicron situation would be over soon and the tourism business will bounce back", Sreekumar added.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/kerala-tourism-gets-a-big-boost-as-houseboat-service-resumes-121123000562_1.html

Healthcare

Covaxin for Children: Study says robust safety, immunogenicity in 2-18 year old volunteers

Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL), on Thursday announced that BBV152 (Covaxin), its whole-virion inactivated COVID-19 vaccine candidate, has proven to be safe, well-tolerated, and immunogenic in paediatric subjects in phase II/III study. Bharat Biotech had conducted phase II/III, open-label, and multicenter studies to evaluate the safety, reactogenicity, and immunogenicity of Covaxin in healthy children and adolescents in the 2-18 age group, a press release from the vaccine maker said.

Krishna Ella, Chairman and Managing Director, Bharat Biotech, said, "Covaxin's clinical trial data from the paediatric population is very encouraging. Safety of the vaccine is critical for children and we are glad to share that Covaxin has now proven data for safety and immunogenicity in children. We have now achieved our goal of developing a safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccine for adults and children." The clinical trials conducted in the paediatric population between June-September 2021 have shown robust safety, reactogenicity, and immunogenicity. The data was submitted to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) during October 2021 and received emergency use nod for children aged 12-18 from DCGI recently.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/health/covaxin-for-children-study-says-robust-safety-immunogenicity-in-2-18-year-old-volunteers/2394410/>

India may have to wait longer for Pfizer, GSK's Covid drugs

There is uncertainty over the availability in India of Pfizer's antiviral drug Paxlovid and GSK's monoclonal antibody Sotrovimab (sold under the brand name Xevudy) - two therapies that appear to be effective against the Omicron variant, as both companies are yet to apply for emergency use approval. Both drugs have been approved in the US, Europe, UK and other countries. "Nothing firmed up as yet. We are discussing options with the global team," GSK India spokesperson told ET, referring to Xevudy. Pfizer said it is firmly committed to supporting India in its fight against the pandemic.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/pharmaceuticals/india-may-have-to-wait-longer-for-pfizer-gsk-covid-drugs/articleshow/88603405.cms>

External

Pakistan, India inch closer towards deal on Afghan wheat transit: Report

India has provided a list of Afghan contractors and truck drivers to the Pakistan government who would transport the Indian consignment of 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan as humanitarian assistance, as the two neighbours inch closer towards finalising the agreement, a media report said on Thursday. Both countries have agreed to the modalities, and the shipment of wheat would commence once Pakistan approves the list of Afghan contractors and drivers, the Express Tribune newspaper said.

In October, India announced 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat for Afghanistan as humanitarian assistance and requested Pakistan to ship the food grains via the Wagah border. Currently, Pakistan only allows Afghanistan to export goods to India, but doesn't allow any other two-way trade through the border crossing.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/pakistan-india-inch-closer-towards-deal-on-afghan-wheat-transit-report/2394301/>

India, Australia expected to complete talks for interim FTA soon

India and Australia are expected to complete negotiations for an interim free trade agreement (FTA) soon, a move aimed at boosting economic ties between the two countries, the commerce ministry said on Thursday. It said that the final agreement, which is officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), is expected to be completed by the end of 2022. The pact covers areas such as goods, services, investment, rules of origin, customs facilitation, legal and institutional issues. "India-Australia CECA negotiations are at an advanced stage. Both countries are expected to complete negotiations for the interim agreement soon," it said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-australia-expected-to-complete-talks-for-interim-fta-soon/articleshow/88587432.cms>