

Daily News Monitor: 18 January 2021

1. Govt officials likely to meet to discuss future course of Covid vaccination

Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))

To discuss the future course of COVID-19 vaccination efforts, the government officials likely to hold a meeting with representatives of pharmaceutical industries and other stakeholders on 18 January. According to a source, the government officials likely to hold a meeting with representatives of pharmaceutical industries along with other stakeholders to discuss the subsequent course of vaccination drive in the country. Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Sunday informed that over 2.24 lakh people vaccinated against COVID-19 till now. 17,072 beneficiaries vaccinated in six States on the second day of the vaccination drive. "More than 2.24 lakh people vaccinated against COVID-19 till now. 17,072 beneficiaries vaccinated in 6 States on day 2. Three cases of post-vaccination hospitalisation reported. India vaccinates the highest number of persons on day 1 of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive; more than many other countries," Vardhan said in a tweet.

2. Metropolis Healthcare to acquire Chennai-based diagnostic lab for Rs 511 cr

Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))

Metropolis Healthcare, a leading diagnostic service provider, is set to acquire Chennai-based Dr Ganesan's Hitech Diagnostic Centre Pvt Ltd for a cash consideration of Rs 511 crore. Metropolis will acquire 100 per cent equity of Dr Ganesan's Hitech Diagnostic Centre in a cash and stock deal. The entity is a debt free company and will issue up to 495,000 equity shares of face value Rs 2 each on preferential basis, subject to shareholders approval, to the promoter group of Hitech. The cash consideration will be funded through internal accruals and a debt of up to Rs 300 crore. Dr Ganesan, promoter and founder, will be part of the leadership team for the next few years to enable a smooth transition and integration with Metropolis. Metropolis will get access to 31 laboratories including three NABL and ICMR accredited laboratories and 68 collection centres of Hitech. The acquisition is expected to be completed within three months.

3. Budget may offer new direct tax dispute resolution framework

Source: The Economic Times ([Link](#))

The upcoming budget could unveil a new and continuous framework for faster resolution of disputes over direct taxes. The government is considering options such as mediation or a

permanent dispute resolution system with pre-specified benchmarks on the lines of the 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme have been discussed, a person familiar to the pre-budget discussions said. According to the FY21 budget, more than Rs 8 lakh crore is locked up in direct tax disputes. It is being felt that along with the already introduced faceless assessment, an alternate settlement mechanism can be very effective at keeping disputes contained and would also be appreciated by the global investors.

4. Reliance aims to embed JioMart in WhatsApp

Source: Livemint ([Link](#))

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Retail Ltd plans to embed its e-commerce app JioMart into WhatsApp within six months, allowing the 400 million users of India's most popular messaging service order products without having to leave the app, two officials aware of the development said, requesting anonymity. The integration will allow JioMart catapult its reach across India, allowing Reliance Retail to pose a serious challenge to Flipkart and Amazon's domination in India's fast-growing online retail market. Ambani is trying to wrest a bigger share of India's retail market, estimated to reach \$1.3 trillion by 2025. Reliance is already India's biggest offline retailer.

5. Covid 19 vaccination: India records highest number of inoculation on Day 1

Source: Livemint ([Link](#))

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan on 18 January said that India holds the record for the highest number of vaccinations on Day one. As per the health ministry, this is much higher than many other countries such as USA, the UK and France. The health minister also pointed out that till now 2.24 lakh beneficiaries getting inoculated. On 17 January more than 17,000 people were vaccinated on the second day. On Monday, the health minister tweeted, One More Record! India vaccinates the highest number of persons on DAY1 of the nationwide vaccination drive; ahead of many other countries. He also said, COVID19 vaccination to more than 2.24 L persons till now. 17,072 beneficiaries vaccinated in 6 States on DAY2

6. Govt may allow the elderly to self-register on CoWIN

Source: Livemint ([Link](#))

The Centre may allow self-registration by the elderly and those with comorbidities on the Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network (CoWIN) platform for faster and easier enrolment of people to receive a shot of the covid-19 vaccine. An Aadhaar-based enrolment process is likely to be rolled out for the elderly and those with comorbidities on the CoWIN platform, which is set to be integrated with the widely used Aarogya Setu app. According to documents

accessed by Hindustan Times, the CoWIN platform will allow the public to access its limited features, only those required for enrolment and vaccination and not the complex back-end operations, on the Aarogya Setu app. The app, the single window interface for health-related updates related to covid-19, has been downloaded by more than 170 million users. This would now be used in the world's largest vaccination programme.

7. Aviation industry seeks tax sops, cut in airport charges

Source: Livemint ([Link](#))

India's aviation sector expects the finance minister to announce a series of measures, including tax sops, in the upcoming budget to help the industry tide over the crisis as the covid pandemic has accentuated its financial woes. The government must consider bringing aviation turbine fuel under the goods and services tax (GST) regime, besides reducing airport charges, overflight fees, and excise duty on fuel, as well as extending lower rate for withholding taxes, to help the aviation sector bounce back, experts told Mint. Indian airlines are expected to post a net loss of ₹21,000 crore this fiscal year, following travel restrictions and diminishing travel appetite amid the covid crisis, and will require additional funding of ₹37,000 crore from FY21 to FY23 to recover from the losses and debt, credit rating agency ICRA Ltd said in a December report.

8. GI tag sought for India's costliest mushroom

Source: The Hindu, Business Line ([Link](#))

A geographical indication (GI) tag has been sought for one of the costliest mushrooms in the world that grows in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district. Locally called Gucchi, or Morel, the mushroom, priced at over ₹20,000 a kg, is a forest produce collected by local farmers and tribals. Last June, saffron from the State had been granted a GI tag. The GI tag application for Gucchi mushroom was filed at the Geographical Indication Registry recently by Jammu-based NGO Border World Foundation and facilitated by the Director of Agriculture, J&K. The spongy, edible fungus that is said to have medicinal and anti-inflammatory properties is found in the temperate forests of the Doda district. The applicants hope that a GI tag will create branding and commercial interest for this rare heirloom crop, thereby helping the tribal populace dependent on it for their livelihoods.

9. Govt targets to complete 11,000 km of national highways this fiscal

Source: The Hindu Business Line ([Link](#))

Road Ministry hopes to complete 11,000 km --stated target--of national highways (NH) by end-March this fiscal. The Ministry has constructed 8,169 km of NH from April 2020 to

January 15, 2021, in the current financial year 2020-21, with a speed of about 28.16 km per day, an official release said. This is 2 km a day higher than the stretch of roads constructed during the same period in the last fiscal (when 7,573 km roads were constructed with a speed of 26.11 km per day). The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) has created a record by constructing 534 km of NH in the last week that started from January 8. The pace of award for highway projects has doubled from April to January 15.