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Police must free Mandeep Punia, says Editors Guild

Akshara DM

BENGALURU: The Editors Guild of India (EGI) took to Twitter to issue a statement on Tuesday, February 2, demanding the release of freelance journalist Mandeep Punia.

Punia, who contributes to The Caravan and Junputh, was picked up by the Delhi Police on the evening of January 30 from the farmers' protest area of Singhu border.

Punia, who was initially detained on grounds of obstructing policemen from discharging their duty, is now reportedly detained under four sections of the Indian Penal Code.

The Editors Guild statement said, "Punia's arrest is an attempt to muzzle the young courageous voice of independent journalists that through reporting are bursting fake news and speaking truth to power."

EGI further stated that it is deeply concerned over the incarceration of Punia, who was just reporting from the Singhu border on the protests against the Central government's farm laws.

The guild demanded Punia's release and further appealed to the Delhi Police to restore circumstances for the media to report with neither fear nor favour.

AeroIndia: Traffic to airport rerouted

Alwin Benjamin Soji

BENGALURU: As Bengaluru gears up to host the three-day AeroIndia 2021 from Wednesday, February 3, several roads that lead to the city's airport have been closed.

Instead, the Bengaluru City Traffic Police have provided alternative routes that people can take to reach the airport.

For people coming from the eastern part of Bengaluru, which includes Whitefield, Indira Nagar and Shivaji Nagar, they can travel through Ramamurthy Nagar, then through Hosuru Bande to Chagalhatti to Beguru Power Station to Kempegowda International Airport (KIA).

For people coming from the



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South and Central part of Bengaluru, which includes Electronic City, Koramangala, Jayanagar and

Majestic, they have to travel through Basaveshwara Circle, then New BEL Road to Hebbala Circle, followed

by Veerannapalya to Beguru Power Station to KIA.

For people coming from West and North Bengaluru,

which includes Kengeri, Vijayanagar, Mysuru Road and Yeshwanthapura, they have to travel through Gorguntepalya, then MS Palya to Nagenahalli Gate followed by MVIT Junction and Chikkajala, then Airport Toll to KIA.

Kavitha MC, Assistant Commissioner of Police Traffic (East Division), said about the arrangement, "There are no specific restrictions on travel as such. People just have to follow the route that has been posted on the official Twitter handle of the Bengaluru Traffic Police."

She added: "Except KSRTC and BMTC vehicles, all other heavy transport vehicles are prohibited from entering the city."

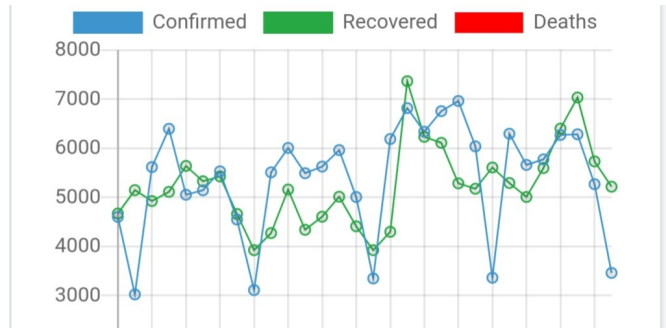
Covid-19 cases at 8-mth low

Vandana Nampoothiri

KOCHI: In a significant development, India's daily new Covid cases dropped below 9,000 for the first time in eight months.

The country also reported less than 100 deaths on Monday, February 1, which is the lowest in eight months.

According to the daily bulletin released by Directorate of Health Services (DHS), Kerala reported 3,459 new cases, increasing the cumulative cases to 9,32,637, and 17 new deaths, with four deaths



Datewise reporting (last 30 days) Government of Kerala Dashboard

reported from Kannur, taking the toll there to 3,760 deaths.

The state has reported the highest number of daily new cases and second highest number of deaths in the

country, according to the press release.

Kerala has also reported the maximum number of single-day recoveries with 5,215 newly recovered cases.

Water-based farming sees growth during pandemic

Priyansha

JHARKHAND: As more and more people took to gardening and growing food at home during the pandemic, hydroponic farming — growing plants and crops in only water and without any soil — has seen exponential growth, say industry insiders.

Arveen Kandhari, a sales executive with one of India's first hydroponic companies, called Ponic Greens Hydroponic and based in Gurugram, said, "The residential sector [of the industry] boomed by 60 percent since the pandemic. This includes installation and assembling of hydroponic systems at homes. The commercial sector, which is about selling of hydroponic

farms saw a hike by 20 to 30 percent."

Rajeev Ranjan, the co-founder of Ranchi-based Hydrocrofters, said: "The pandemic has made people more aware of their health than ever before. This has led them to pay more attention to their food sources." He added: "Now, most of them prefer healthy growth and healthy eating. This is one of the reasons for the growth of hydroponic systems."

Ramesh, sales & marketing in charge at Hydrilla in Bengaluru, said, "Due to the pandemic, people want to grow their own food. This has led to a surge in demand for hydroponic cultivation. Through this process, one can grow strawberries, herbs, tomatoes, leafy vegetables and more."

Florists worry as V-Day approaches

Athul Krishna

THRISSUR: Local flower vendors are wary of the upcoming Valentine's Day season, as the pandemic has affected seasonal sales for the past 11 months, and may play spoilsport again.

February is usually a busy season for flower vendors, but the decline in sales has left them unsure about preparing for this year's Valentine's Day.

"We made all the preparations for festive seasons that happened in the past months, such as Onam and Vishu. But the sales were



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affected due to the pandemic," said Babu, a florist from Thrissur.

He added, "That's why we are confused about purchasing flowers for

upcoming valentine's day."

Ravi, a flower vendor from Guruvayoor, said: "Usually, Valentine's Day season is one of the best times for our business."

He added: "But the loss that happened in the past season resulted in huge financial crisis and debts for us, so I'm not planning to take extra flowers from the market for this year's Valentine's Day."

India's flower market — usually fuelled by religious festivals — was estimated at Rs 13,000 crore in 2017, and was expected to touch Rs 39,400 crore in 2023 before the pandemic intervened.



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