



Australia reported a record high Covid-19 deaths on Tuesday, and its second-largest state declared an emergency in hospitals to cope with surging patient admissions amid a staffing shortage due coronavirus



Japan's government is preparing social restrictions in Tokyo and other regions as the omicron variant of the coronavirus infects more people. The order will be finalised this week and is likely to take effect Friday

# Microsoft buys US gaming giant for whopping \$69bn

Deal with Activision will make MS third-largest gaming company in the world

## TECH

NEW YORK: Microsoft announced on Tuesday a landmark \$69 billion deal to purchase US gaming giant Activision Blizzard, grabbing the sex harassment scandal-hit firm as the tech colossus seeks to boost its power in video games.

Merging with troubled Activision will make Microsoft the third-largest gaming company by revenue, behind Tencent and Sony, it said, a major shift in the booming world of games. "This acquisition will accelerate the growth in Microsoft's gaming business across mobile, PC, console and cloud and will provide building blocks for the metaverse," Microsoft said in a statement.

Activision, the California-based maker of "Candy Crush" has been hit by employee protests, departures, and a state lawsuit alleging it enabled toxic workplace con-

ditions and sexual harassment against women. Over the past seven months, the company has received about 700 reports of employee concerns over sexual assault or harassment or other misconduct, in some cases separate reports about the same incident, *The Wall Street Journal* has reported.

Nearly 20 per cent of Activision Blizzard's 9,500 employees have signed a petition calling for CEO Bobby Kotick to resign. "Acquiring Activision will help jump start Microsoft's broader gaming endeavors and ultimately its move into the metaverse with gaming the first monetisation piece of the metaverse in our opinion," Wedbush analysts said after the news broke.

"With Activision's stock under heavy pressure (CEO related issues/overhang) over the last few months, Microsoft viewed this as the window of opportunity to acquire a unique asset that can propel

its consumer strategy forward," Wedbush added.

Microsoft has just marked 20 years of the "Halo" video game franchise that turned its Xbox console into a hit.

Microsoft launched a host of initiatives to mark two decades of both Halo and the Xbox, including a virtual museum exploring key moments in the console's history.

Xbox remains a key player in a video game industry now thought to be larger than the movie sector, with market research firm Mordor Intelligence valuing it at \$173.7 billion in 2020.

Troubles, meanwhile, have stacked up for Activision over its sex harassment and discrimination scandal.

"The culture of our organization is my number one priority," Nadella said, adding that "it's critical for Activision Blizzard to drive forward on its" commitments to improve its workplace culture.

Activision CEO Bobby Kotick will retain his role and will focus on improving culture.

## COVID

BEIJING: Hong Kong will cull hundreds of hamsters after some tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said on Tuesday, as the city pushes to maintain its strict "zero-Covid" strategy.

The Chinese territory's staunch adherence to the mainland's "zero-Covid" policy has kept the number of cases low, but maintaining it has cut the finance hub off from the rest of

the world for the last two years.

The decision to cull about 2,000 hamsters and other small animals comes after health officials recorded Covid cases at a Hong Kong pet shop.

Health secretary Sophia Chan said the move will protect public health after a pet shop employee and a customer handling hamsters tested positive.

The employee was found to be infected with the Delta variant, which has become rare in

Hong Kong. "Internationally, there is no evidence yet to show pets can transmit the coronavirus to humans, but... we will take precautionary measures against any vector of transmission," Chan said during a press conference.

Eleven preliminary positive samples were found on hamsters for sale at the Little Boss pet shop in the bustling shopping district of Causeway Bay. Officials believe they were

imported from the Netherlands and urged anyone who bought a hamster after December 22 to give up their pet for culling.

About 1,000 animals from Little Boss and its warehouse will be seized and put down, while staff and customers have been sent for testing. Health officials also issued quarantine orders for around 150 people who visited the pet shop as well as more than 20 warehouse employees.

The shop was shuttered on Tuesday.

# Chip woes push auto sales down

## TECH

EU car sales fell to a new low last year as the auto sector was hobbled by the Covid pandemic and a shortage of computer chips, industry figures showed on Tuesday.

Registrations of new passenger cars in the EU slid by 2.4 per cent in 2021, to 9.7 million vehicles, the worst performance since statistics began in 1990. That follows the fall of nearly 24 per cent suffered in 2020 due to pandemic restrictions, and brought new car registrations in the EU to 3.3 million below the pre-crisis sales of 2019.

# Spain's govt to reign in on cryptocurrency ads

## CRYPTOCURRENCY

MADRID: Spain will tighten its rules regulating advertisements for cryptocurrencies to ensure investors are aware of the risks, the country's stock market supervisor said Tuesday. Advertising of unregulated cryptocurrencies, such as bitcoin, has surged, particularly by social media influencers, drawing attention from regulators worldwide. Under new rules that will come into place in February in Spain, ads for cryptocurrencies and other crypto assets must be "clear, balanced, impartial and non-misleading," stock market regulator CNMV said. They must also include "information on risks in a prominent manner," it added.

Providers of crypto services must inform the regulator of ad campaigns aimed at 1,00,000 people or more with at least 10 days notice. These rules also apply to promotional activity by any person advertising on behalf of third parties.

## CONTAMINATION RISK

# One-third of US states shut doors on nuclear energy

## ENVIRONMENT

PROVIDENCE: As climate change pushes states in the US to dramatically cut their use of fossil fuels, many are coming to the conclusion that solar, wind and other renewable power sources might not be enough to keep the lights on.

Nuclear power is emerging as an answer to fill the gap as states transition away from coal, oil and natural gas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stave off the worst effects of a warming planet. The renewed interest in nuclear comes as companies, including one started by Microsoft founder Bill Gates, are developing smaller, cheaper reactors that could supplement the power grid in communities across the US.

Nuclear power comes with its own set of potential problems, especially radioactive waste that can remain dangerous for thousands of years. But supporters say the risks can be minimized and that the energy source will be essential to stabilise power supplies as the world tries to move away from carbon dioxide-emitting fossil fuels.

Tennessee Valley Authority President and CEO Jeff Lyash puts it simply: You can't significantly reduce carbon emissions without nuclear power.

"At this point in time, I don't see a path that gets us there without preserving



the existing fleet and building new nuclear," Lyash said. "And that's after having maximized the amount of solar we can build in the system."

The TVA is a federally owned utility that provides electricity to seven states as the nation's third largest electricity generator. It's adding about 10,000 megawatts of solar capacity by 2035 — enough to power nearly 1 million homes annually — but also operates three nuclear plants and plans to test a small reactor in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. By 2050, it hopes to hit its goal of becoming net zero, which means the amount of greenhouse gases produced is no more than the amount removed from the atmosphere.

A survey of the energy policies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia found that a strong majority— about two-thirds— say nuclear, in one fashion or another, will help take the place of fossil fuels. The momentum building behind nuclear power could lead to the first expansion of nuclear reactor construction in the US in three decades.

MANAPPURAM FINANCE LTD.

## GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

The pledges, in specific and the public, in general, are hereby notified that public auction of the gold ornaments pledged in the below accounts is proposed to be conducted at the following branches on 16/02/2022 from 10.00 am onwards. We are auctioning gold ornaments defaulted customers who have failed to make payment of his/her loan amount despite being notified by registered letters. Unauctioned items shall be auctioned on any other days without further notice. Changes in venue or date (if any) will be displayed at auction centre and on website without any further notice.

List of pledges:  
KANJIRAPPALLY, 104420700732085, 2134, 2339, 2628, 2734, 2790, 3010, 3056, 3144, 3146, 10442070008173, 8199, 8200, 8201, 8354, 8415, 8489, 8779, 8864, 9026, 9220, 9265, KARUKACHAL, 113120700014057, 4300, 4583, 4612, 4646, 4647, 4814, KODUNGUR, 120160700018527, 6560, 6839, 6978, 12016070007959, 8229, 8256, 8257, 8563, 8564, 8605, 8747, KOTTAYAM, 103190700035899, 8199, 8230, 8374, 6493, 6504, 6505, 6636, 6708, 6805, 6865, 6873, 6915, 6974, 6975, 6977, 6992, 7006, 7036, 7044, 7069, 7082, 7125, 7466, 7470, 7474, 7495, 7496, 7505, 7514, 7521, 7528, 7531, 7533, 7542, 7549, 7553, 7555, 7556, 7558, 7560, 7561, 7565, 103190700035036, 5786, 5788, 5974, 5975, 5976, 5977, 6062, 6105, 6106, 6108, 6121, 6137, 6157, 6158, 6171, 6252, 6253, 6274, 6530, 6531, 6565, 6571, 6576, 6665, 6902, 6945, 6950, 6951, 7237, 7258, 7280, 7292, KURISUMMOODU, 117880700016110, 6225, 6227, 6313, 6315, 6659, 6660, 6884, 6889, 6916, 7251, 7511, 7512, 7559, 7598, 7604, 7610, 7611, 7612, 7654, 117880700005270, 5537, 5545, 5664, 5825, 5943, 5983, 6321, 6598, 6600, 6621, 6622, KURUVILANGAD, 114170700014375, 4498, 4552, 4756, 4780, 4789, 4790, 4799, 4800, 114170700002960, 2961, 2980, 3031, 3150, 3156, 3190, 3753, 3860, MANARCAD, 127690700012312, 2717, 12769070003598, 3699, 3721, MUNDAKAYAM, 103260700025242, 5254, 5302, 5337, 5685, 5886, 5970, 6254, 6267, 6274, 6281, 6298, 6300, 6309, 6310, 6311, 6323, 6335, 6338, 6347, 103260700010536, 0537, 2253, 2780, 3414, 3434, 3445, 3446, 3452, 3503, 3507, NALUKODI, 132990700009761, 9828, 9865, 132990700010089, 0108, 0110, 0150, 0224, 0226, 0227, 0525, 0579, 0584, 132990700004554, 4573, 4576, 4601, 4629, 4681, 4773, 4803, 4869, 4900, NEDUMKUNNAM, 119070700016914, 7141, 7286, 7297, 7318, 7352, 7558, 7590, 7627, 7845, 119070700004880, 4895, 5061, 5117, 5136, 5161, 5265, 5386, PAIKA, 126660700008164, PALA, 103590700732772, 2845, 2965, 3222, 3319, 3320, 3709, 3883, 3917, 3984, 4017, 4022, 103590700004867, 4868, 5056, 5256, 5404, 5496, 5901, 5919, 6327, 6329, 6330, 6331, 6332, 6333, 6334, 6335, PAMBADI, 114880700017021, 7509, 114880700007620, 8408, 8558, 8586, 8909, 8910, PANACHIKKAPARA, 129850700018503, 8686, 129850700002273, 2274, PATHANADU, 115900700015808, 6197, 6238, 6246, 6275, 6297, 6345, 6413, 6619, 6620, 6622, 6627, 6898, 6919, 6934, 6958, 6959, 6970, 6973, 6975, 7057, 7084, 7106, 7126, 7213, 7233, 7331, 7360, 7362, 7374, 7375, 7388, 7392, 7395, 7400, 7468, 7577, 7579, 7588, 7593, 7603, 7627, 7628, 7635, 7658, 7665, 7666, 7667, 7669, 115900700004064, 4160, 4267, 4359, 4439, 4442, 4607, 4623, 4629, 4631, 4716, 4741, 4762, 4766, PONKUNNAM, 115820700012858, 2914, 2923, 115820700006459, 7311, 7839, PUTHUPALLY, 120850700010407, 0663, 0761, 0957, 0963, 120850700004867, 4977, 5232, 5234, RAMAPURAM CHURCH ROAD, 104340700722294, 2371, 2381, 2445, 2446, 2451, 2788, 2823, 2928, 2971, 2978, 3011, 3051, 3117, 3419, 3421, 104340700003454, 3613, 3616, 3632, THALAYOLAPARAMBIL, 106450700028230, 8320, 8534, 8577, 8935, 9199, 9340, 9620, 9643, 9655, 9667, 9689, 9692, 9703, 10645070007537, 7538, 7572, 7573, 7574, 7576, 7771, 8654, 8693, 8760, 8797, THENGANA, 116730700011886, 1932, 1967, 1986, 116730700030885, 3919, 3967, 4086, 4118, VAIKOM, 1031307000020732, 1031307000041732, 1977, 2112, 2925, 3255, 3370, 3478, 3644, 3710, 3779, 3975, 4511, 4513, 4524, 4525, 4541, 4573, 4579, 4605, 4609, 4611, 4615, 4625, 4627, 4645, 4649, 4672, 4680, 4681, 4683, 4696, 103130700004317, 4845, 5599, 5917, 5964, 5975, 5978, 5979, 5984, 5988, 5991, 6002, 6014, VAKATHANAM, 1230607000013746, 123060700005880, 5882, 5897, 6242, 6243, 6245, 6248, 6249, 6323, TRISSUR, ALOOR, 1157807000022548, 2733, 2894, 2986, 2987, 115780700005012, 5039, 5058, 5104, 5134, 5135, 5137, 5178, AMMAADAM, 106990700005836, 6123, 6231, 6260, 6441, 6487, 6513, 6572, 6902, 6909, 7024, 7092, 7104, 7171, 7396, 7398, 7412, 7418, 7424, 7443, 7445, 7453, 7462, 7495, 7500, 7528, 106990700007530, 7531, 7533, 7534, 7558, 7684, 7831, 7832, 7911, 7919, 7923, 8126, 8127, 8182, 8275, 8726, ANNAMANADA, 106750700020856, 0877, 0977, 1047, 1175, 1443, 1497, 1501, 1504, 1505, 1514, 1521, 1537, 1570, 1607, 1615, 1616, 106750700004536, 4988, 4989, 5210, 5220, 5230, 5231, 5233, 5236, AZHICODE, 102250700751653, 1918, 1919, 1920, 2187, 2223, 2245, 2365, 2397, 2497, 2838, 3158, 3194, 3200, 3332, 3464, 3487, 3490, 3495, 3507, 3533, 3544, 3550, 3560, 3568, 3588, 3611, 3613, 3619, 3620, 102250700005322, 5884, 5903, 5605, 5713, 5718, 5736, 5756, 5760, 5875, 6114, 6278, 6535, 6538, 6549, 6554, 6562, 6564, CHALAKUDY NORTH, 107460700006257, 6646, CHAVAKKAD, 1302107000024938, 5430, 5431, 5432, 5455, 5505, 5530, 5577, 5581, 5597, 5799, 5935, 5939, 6062, 6198, 6259, 6284, 6369, 6396, 6399, 6754, 6770, 6825, 6837, 6862, 6864, 6885, 6894, 6899, 130210700007071, 7206, 7264, 7388, CHAZHUR, 104190700730241, 0341, 0344, 0346, 0450, 0660, 1122, 1280, 1286, 1623, 1624, 1631, 1647, 1665, 1680, 1694, 1703, 1710, 1715, 1721, 1726, 1730, 1741, 1745, 1756, 1765, 1770, 104190700005990, 5991, 6011, 6513, 6529, 6692, 6704, 6705, 6706, 6715, CHELAKKARA, 130350700017168, 7254, 7843, 7952, 8585, 8586, 8587, 130350700015602, 6139, 6140, 6726, 7340, 8000, 9397, 9308, 13035070001266, 1267, 1268, 1269, 1276, 1284, 2346, 2350, 2353, 2356, 2357, 2378, 2409, 2410, 2414, 2429, 2430, CHENDRAPPINI, 130500700012649, 2799, 2833, 2938, 3068, 3069, 3272, 3238, 3245, 3549, 3904, 3950, 3952, 3977, 3981, 3984, 3986, 3995, 4013, 4037, 4066, 13050700008313, 8417, 8561, 8586, 8618, 8818, 8931, 8934, 8965, 9487, 9512, CHERPU, 100940700766714, 7217, 7219, 7369, 7890, 8100, 8162, 8163, 8175, 8182, 8268, 8273, 100940700006373, 6376, 6378, 6557, 6558, 6636, 6637, 6638, 6639, 6640, 6641, 6643, 6768, 6769, 6871, 6872, 6873, 6876, 6919, 6967, 6969, 6997, 7006, 7039, 7232, 7233, 7264, 7265, 7287, 7303, 7466, 7479, 7496, 7503, 7504, CHERUTURUTHY, 106930700028635, 9292, 9640, 9645, 9836, 106930700003106, 0107, 0464, 0469, 0475, 0493, 0521, 0527, 0559, 0560, 0566, 0584, 0610, 106930700009322, 9379, 9380, 9470, 9736, 9794, 9801, 106930700011441, 2177, 2187, 2233, CHIRAKKAL, 101640700740979, 2027, 2067, 2074, 2086, 2100, 2108, 2111, 2112, 2118, 2119, 2127, 2148, 2158, 2160, 2164, 2224, 101640700006336, 6374, 6492, 6603, 6704, 6705, 6848, 7034, 7307, 7050, 7051, 7052, 7080, CHOONDAI, 115360700023917, 3976, 4107, 4174, 4175, 4244, 4246, 4286, 4516, 4662, 4935, 4936, 4937, 5142, 5144, 5204, 5564, 5573, 5600, 5562, 5606, 5612, 5617, 5637, 5638, 5662, 5660, 5693, 5694, 5695, 5723, 115360700006879, 6922, 6927, 6979, 6998, 6999, 7061, 7050, 7078, 7129, 7372, 7435, 7488, 7567, 7571, 7675, 7888, 8100, 8117, 8143, 8155, 8156, DESAMANGALAM, 106310700024636, 4772, 4799, 4817, 4830, 4869, 5809, 106310700009149, 106310700005163, 0841, 0842, 4057, 4440, 5147, 5161, 5198, 5210, 5222, 5307, 5349, 5362, 5363, 5366, EAST FORT THRISSUR, 10010700017059, 8178, 7203, 7614, 7977, 100107000006496, 6652, 6724, 6728, 6788, 6800, 7290, 7306, ELANAD, 105190700761311, 2005, 2233, 2399, 2437, 2629, 2633, 2673, 2817, 2831, 2835, 2867, 2972, 2995, 3048, 3301, 3390, 4013, 4152, 4157, 4205, 4257, 4376, 4932, 4999, 5010, 5011, 5025, 5093, 5102, 5145, 5160, 5183, 5188, 5192, 5272, 5326, 5330, 5331, 5332, 102207000020126, 0174, 0483, 0490, 0491, 0524, 2196, 2454, 2467, 2534, 2548, 2649, 2950, 3131, 3396, 3626, 3846, 3856, 3878, 3879, 3894, 3895, 3977, ERAVU, 1062507000016702, 6727, 6894, 106250700006015, 6016, 6061, ERIYAD, 106820700002932, 9985, 1068207000030075, 0095, 0100, 0162, 0165, 0451, 0494, 0568, 0605, 0657, 0658, 0933, 1223, 1320, 1364, 1365, 1369, 1382, 1388, 1393, 1397, 1415, 1417, 1444, 1445, 1447, 1457, 1487, 106820700007395, 7439, 7496, 7497, 7498, 7500, 7501, 7558, 7570, 7600, 7601, 7684, 7709, 7838, 7964, 8108, 8276, 8277, 8322, 8345, 8353, 8627, 8646, 8647, 8648, 8663, 8669, 8670, 8689, 8696, 8701, 8703, 8704, 8705, ERUMAPPATTI, 106007000024380, 4470, 5294, 106007000003523, ETHAI ENGANDINARU, 130320700011796, 1945, 1983, 1991, 2023, 130320700004859, 4860, 4861, 5001, 5022, 5155, GURUVAYUR, 1000307000811733, 1853, 1867, 2268, 2479, 2817, 2831, 2880, 3071, 3174, 3324, 3571, 3589, 3677, 3734, 3746, 3842, 3851, 3941, 4145, 4176, 4200, 4449, 4461, 4517, 4585, 5086, 5100, 5101, 5103, 5104, 5109, 5140, 5145, 5149, 5155, 5159, 5160, 5167, 5186, 5194, 5204, 5268, 5272, 5285, 5292, 5322, 5308, 5316, 5320, 10003070012425, 2426, 2427, 2720, 3015, 3250, 3399, 3539, 3823, 3874, 3905, 3906, 3911, 3912, 3964, 3968, 3982, 4067, 4909, 4992, 4996, 5025, 5026, 5053, 5060, 5061, 5077, 5081, 5082, 5083, 5084, 5134, IRINJALAKUDA, 100810700515429, 2092, 216