

Must-reads

THE BIG STORY
New scheme for big users to buy electricity at fixed rates

Large electricity users here, such as shopping malls and manufacturing facilities, will be cushioned from the recent volatility in the electricity market under a new scheme that will enable them to buy electricity at fixed rates. The scheme will allow such users to pay for electricity at a rate capped at 39.7 cents per kilowatt hour. **A1**

WORLD
Malaysia passes budget as Ismail's deal with PH holds

Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob has passed the first major test of his leadership with debate on Budget 2022 concluding in Parliament yesterday. The measure survived unscathed largely due to a confidence and supply agreement Datuk Seri Ismail inked with opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH) in September. **A10**



A worker administering a swab test at a makeshift testing station in Seoul yesterday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

THE BIG STORY
Unprecedented Covid-19 surge threatens South Korea

South Korea's rush to open up has led to an unprecedented spike in hospitalisations and deaths, which threatens to undo the progress

the country has made so far. South Korea reported 6,320 cases each day on average in the past week, more than three times as many cases as it did the week before the Nov 1 return to normal. Bed shortages have reached critical levels at hospitals across the country. **A5**

WORLD
Thailand aims to cut sodium intake by 20% with salt tax

A salt tax, which was slated to have come into effect in Thailand this year but was deferred, could be implemented next year with a lead time of one or two years for industries to adapt. The government's goal is to cut daily sodium intake by 20 per cent within 10 years, in line with a sugar tax implemented in 2017. **A11**



PHOTO: REUTERS

SINGAPORE
Rise in stress for caregivers of dementia patients: Study

People caring for dementia patients amid the pandemic have reported that a lack of in-person engagement activities has led to deterioration in the conditions of their charges, resulting in more stress for them as caregivers. This was captured in a study last year that demonstrated the need for non-Covid-19 care support during the pandemic. **B1**

SINGAPORE
Heritage firms innovate to thrive in modern world

Even pre-pandemic, heritage operations already found the going tough. But the pandemic made things worse. The National Heritage Board this year set up an Organisation Transformation Grant to help struggling heritage businesses innovate. The Straits Times looks at three of the 12 grant recipients. **B2**

Coronavirus: Singapore

Singapore confident it can cope with Omicron; boosters are key: PM Lee

With vaccinations, nation in a much stronger position to face pandemic today, he says

Goh Yan Han

While Singapore is not yet out of the woods, it is confident it can cope with the Omicron variant, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

This is because with vaccinations and boosters, Singapore is in a much stronger position today to

deal with the pandemic, he added. He noted that Singapore is starting to see encouraging signs in its Covid-19 journey.

"The surge in cases over the last three months is subsiding. We've protected our healthcare system and kept fatalities low," he said.

The number of Covid-19 cases reported by the Ministry of Health (MOH) daily has been on the decline.

Since the middle of last month, the number of new cases has fallen from around 2,000 or 3,000 a day, to fewer than 1,000.

The number of patients in the intensive care unit (ICU) has also decreased over the last few weeks.

There were 30 critically ill cases in the ICU on Sunday, compared with 75 on Nov 12. The ICU utilisation rate on Sunday was 46.9 per cent.

PM Lee said: "Now, we are preparing for the impact of the Omicron variant. Booster shots of the vaccine will be a key part of our strategy."

He was speaking at the launch yesterday of the latest tranche of Community Development Council (CDC) vouchers to be given out to 1.3 million Singaporean households.

Earlier this month, MOH had said it was too early to say for sure how severe the Omicron variant is, but there is an emerging view among scientists that existing Covid-19 vaccines will still work against it in protecting people against severe illness.

Singapore reported its first local Omicron case last Thursday – a front-line worker at Changi Air-

port who was infected despite having received a booster Covid-19 vaccine shot. Another case of an airport front-line worker was reported last Friday.

That day, MOH also announced that vaccination for children aged five to 11 years using paediatric doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech/Comirnaty Covid-19 vaccine would begin before the end of the year.

The ministry also said that from today, the nationwide vaccination booster programme would be extended to individuals aged 18 to 29.

As at last Friday, 30 per cent of the total population have received their booster shots.

Each household will be able to claim \$100 worth of CDC vouchers. PM Lee said they are meant to show appreciation to Singaporeans for their solidarity amid the pandemic as well as support heartland businesses.

He thanked Singaporeans "for staying united and resilient in the face of Covid-19".

"Together as a society, we can take steps forward, step by step, find our way to living with the virus, and safely resume all the things that we love to do."



CASES SUBSIDING

The surge in cases over the last three months is subsiding. We've protected our healthcare system and kept fatalities low... Now, we are preparing for the impact of the Omicron variant. Booster shots of the vaccine will be a key part of our strategy.



PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG

gyanhan@sph.com.sg



National Centre for Infectious Diseases executive director Leo Yee Sin said she was inspired to translate her observations working on the front lines of the pandemic into writing for children, in her book titled My Coronavirus Story. Professor Leo and Health Minister Ong Ye Kung launched the book at Woodlands Regional Library yesterday. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Book by NCID head looks at pandemic through eyes of children

Timothy Goh

As a veteran researcher and scientist, Professor Leo Yee Sin, 62, has published hundreds of papers filled with terms and diagrams that would make a layman sweat.

But the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) executive di-

rector's latest work is written in rhyme, and filled with drawings done by children and youth, some as young as five years old.

The book, titled My Coronavirus Story, captures perspectives of the pandemic through the eyes of a young child, and is aimed at educating the young about Covid-19 and encouraging resilience as the world lives with the virus.

Written for readers aged four to 12, it was launched by Health Minister Ong Ye Kung at Woodlands Regional Library yesterday.

The book, supported by the National Healthcare Group (NHG), pays tribute to the courage and selfless contributions of front-line workers in steering Singapore into the endemic stage of the pandemic.

Prof Leo, who read the book on stage with Mr Ong, said the pandemic has been a confusing period for children as they try to make sense of the changes around them.

"I saw first-hand what it means to be on the front line dealing with Covid-19, and I was inspired to translate my observations into the perspective of the young – to ex-

plain the virus in a simple manner, describe how it has impacted their lives, and help them see the way forward," she said.

Professor Benjamin Seet, NHG's deputy group chief executive for education and research, said the idea for the book was conceived in March.

At the time, NHG had worked with the Singapore Art Society to

put together an exhibition to honour front-line workers.

As part of that exhibition, an art competition was held, with about 1,000 entries submitted by children and youth. NHG then compiled 21 of them into a book.

"While many of them appear simple, they convey the views and perceptions of young children who have been affected by this pandemic, like us," said Prof Seet, adding that schools were closed and co-curricular activities cancelled as a result of the pandemic.

Prof Leo said she was initially hesitant to write the book as it was an endeavour that was out of her comfort zone.

But she was inspired by the artwork submitted by the children, and their efforts to pay tribute to healthcare workers.

"I think it's very important for children to understand that they are part of a society and carry the same risk as anyone in the community," said Prof Leo, adding that she hoped the book would allow children to be more aware of concepts like why personal hygiene is important and help parents communicate such ideas.

Prof Leo added that the book's launch coincided nicely with the recent announcement that children from five to 11 years old will be able to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech/Comirnaty vaccine.

"The virus doesn't differentiate whether you are a kid or an elderly (person)... so whenever there's technology or a tool available for us to protect ourselves, it should be used," she said, adding that vaccines are one such tool.

When asked about the Omicron variant, Prof Leo said: "Omicron's arrival is one of those unanticipated moments, so do have an open mind and be flexible. We have to watch the virus very closely... to be able to put up our defences and responses appropriately."

About 1,000 copies of the book have been printed and members of the public will be able to borrow them from most public libraries.

They will also be distributed to all primary schools.

Prof Seet said: "Educating the public has been key during this pandemic, but efforts to reach out to young children have been limited."

"This book serves to fill the gap, and its bright colours bring a message of hope in this time of fear."

timgoh@sph.com.sg