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In brief

UK to roll out crucial Covid treatment that was given to Donald Trump

Thousands of vulnerable health service patients in the UK hospitals due to Covid-19 are set to benefit from a life-saving new antibody treatment called Ronapreve, which was given to former US president Donald Trump. A combination of two monoclonal antibodies, Ronapreve, will be targeted initially at those in hospital who have not mounted an antibody response against the coronavirus. The treatment was used as part of the suite of experimental medicines given to Trump when he tested positive for Covid-19 last year. "We have secured a brand new treatment for our most vulnerable patients in hospitals across the UK and I am thrilled it will be saving lives from as early as next week," said UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid.

Tharoor calls for permanent president to head Congress

Senior Congress leader and Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor on Saturday called for a permanent president to head the party, which is 'now at an interim stage'. He said all the Congress leaders have sought a permanent president for the party. "We all liked the leadership of Sonia Gandhi. But we are now at an interim stage. For the last two years we haven't had a permanent president. That must be remedied. We need to instil energy in the organisational structure of the Congress party. We all have sought for a permanent president for the party," he said.

Photos show N. Korea expanding uranium enrichment plant

Recent satellite images shows North Korea is expanding a uranium enrichment plant at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex, a sign that it's intent on boosting the production of bomb materials, experts say. The assessment comes after North Korea recently raised tensions by performing its first missile tests in six months amid long-dormant nuclear disarmament diplomacy with the United States. The expansion of the enrichment plant probably indicates that North Korea plans to increase its production of weapons-grade uranium at the Yongbyon site by as much as 25 percent, Jeffrey Lewis and two other experts at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey said in a report.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Bhadrapada & Shukla Paksha
panchangam

Tithi : Chaturdashi 29:27

Nakshatram: Shatabhisha 27:28

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam: 4:40 pm - 6:11 pm

Yamagandam: 12:09 pm - 1:40 pm

Variyam: 10:35 am - 12:11 pm

Gulika: 3:10 pm - 4:40 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 8:14 pm - 9:50 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:45 am - 12:33 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 29

Humidity: 74%

Sunrise: 6:04 am

Sunset: 6:14 pm

Current Weather Conditions
Updated September 18, 2021 5:00 PM

OBTUSE ANGLE



'Ready for any test'

KTR pans 'buffoon's complaint' to ED

□ 'Anyone speaking against TS govt will be booked for sedition'

□ 'Delhi parties know only silly politics'

□ 'If CM is confined to his farm house, how are investors coming and welfare schemes being implemented?'

□ 'We celebrated Sept 17 as a party, but as a government June 2 remains our Liberation Day'

NAVEENA GHANATE
■ HYDERABAD

Municipal Administration and IT Minister K T Rama Rao, in his first-ever response to wild allegations made by opposition parties, said that he was ready for any kind of drug test, and sought to know whether Rahul Gandhi would be ready for the same.

KTR was furious with Congress leaders for calling him an 'ambassador for drugs'. He asked what he had to do with drugs and said a buffoon had given a letter to ED (the Enforcement Directorate). KTR made these remarks during a chit-chat with media persons at Telangana Bhavan here on Saturday.

Referring to the ways of the Maharashtra government, which had booked Union Minister Rane for his remarks, KTR said, "We will also start booking cases against those making false allegations and comments against the government



or the Chief Minister. If needed, they will even be booked for sedition. He said that anyone who spoke against Telangana would not be spared. He said that during the agitation, when CM KCR used harsh language, it was mainly to express emotions. He sought to know whether there was any need for the opposition parties to use abusive language.

If, as alleged by opposition parties, Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had been sleeping in his farm house, how were welfare schemes being implemented, unlike in any other state, or how were the invest-

ments coming, he sought to know.

KTR said that there was a real estate boom in the Congress and observed: "They will even sell the PCC post in future. Vanteru Pratap Reddy did bigger Sabhas than the Gajwel Sabha on Friday. Nobody is scared of MIM, except BJP". He said that Amit Shah came to state, but did not speak of even one project given by the Center. He questioned what BJP leaders elected as MPs had done for the state.

KTR commented that Delhi parties knew only 'silly politics'. "They do not know what the people of Telangana want. The ruling TRS party is focused on developmental programmes. One jobless person is doing Padayatra and another is creating hullabaloo. He questioned if the BJP and Jan Sangh were involved in the Telangana armed struggle? KTR said: "For us, June 2 is Liberation Day because Telangana was carved out of Andhra Pradesh after a long struggle. We celebrated Sept 17th as a party, but as a government June 2 remains our Liberation Day. We will not support any efforts to target one particular community."

KTR said that new parties were emerging in TS to snatch the TRS party votes. The new parties were banking on national parties. He asked why RS Praveen Kumar, who had praised KCR in the past, did not question the Centre on the allocation of Navodaya Vidyalayas. He said Sharmila was also acting in the same way. Speaking about Saidabad rape incident, KTR said: "I believe, from whatever I see on social media, justice is being served in Telangana even faster than (via) fast-track courts".

Revanth Reddy throws 'White Challenge' at KTR and Konda

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee chief A Revanth Reddy has thrown what he calls a 'White Challenge' at IT Minister KT Rama Rao and Chevella former MP Konda Vishweshwar Reddy during them to undergo drug tests.

While speaking to media persons at Gandhi Bhavan on Saturday, Revanth appealed to political leaders and celebrities, particularly cinema actors, to participate in his 'White Challenge' to send a good message to the youth and protect them from drugs and cannabis.

Revanth apparently wants for his anti-drug campaign something sim-

- Revanth asks KTR and Konda to come to Gun Park on Monday to go to hospital to give blood and hair samples
- Revanth announces 'White Challenge' similar to 'Green Challenge' to protect the youth from drugs

ilar to Rajya Sabha member J Santhosh Kumar's 'Green Challenge'. He explained that the one who accepted the White Challenge would have to prove that he was not using drugs by undergoing blood and hair tests and later the same person had to throw the White Challenge to two more celebrities or political leaders.

Amarinder resigns as Punjab CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Congress veteran Amarinder Singh on Saturday resigned as Chief Minister of Punjab, declaring that he feels "humiliated" and said he won't accept state Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu as the next CM or the party face in the Assembly polls.

The development has come amid a power tussle that polarised the ruling party in the State headed for elections in just about four months.

69% of instant approvals on TS-bPASS accepted

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Nearly 69% of instant approvals on TS-bPASS are accepted post verification as well. About 13% of the applications that are rejected are mostly due to non-submission of mandatory documents and submission of incorrect information in the application. Nearly 18% of the applications are under process.

Officials of the Municipal Administration and Urban Development say this shows the faith the public has in TS-bPASS policy. The government is planning to conduct awareness programmes on the application process and issue a checklist shortly to reduce the rejections.

The Telangana State Building Permission and Approval and Self-Certification System, which does away with the earlier cumbersome process and paperwork that had citizens running from pillar to post to obtain building permits or layout approvals, came into effect on November 16, 2020.

Governor starts giving shocks

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan has started giving shocks to the Telangana Rashtra Samiti government two years into her post. With two years plus to go before the next Assembly elections in Telangana, some of her recent actions have started worrying the ruling party.

The first shock given by the Governor was to keep on hold the file relating to the state cabinet's decision to nominate P Kaushick

From ignoring KTR's text to investing Rs 2,400 cr in TS

Kitex MD more than doubles investment plan, hails State

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Kochi-based Kitex group on Saturday announced a Rs 2,400 crore investment in Telangana State, with potential to create 22,000 jobs.

Kitex MD Sabu Jacob revealed that he decided to make the investment only because of K T Rama Rao, though initially he had ignored the Minister's text message.

Sharing the details on Saturday, KTR said, 'Jayesh Ranjan through his 5th degree of separation got me Jacob's number and I sent him a text message introducing myself as Minister in Telangana and would like to speak to him'. KTR said, "He did not reply as he didn't seem interested or maybe thought I wasn't the Minister. Jayesh somehow convinced that it's the Minister reaching out to him. I was explaining him all wonderful things in Telangana... I urged Jacob to visit Hyderabad as seeing is believing. Without



thinking, I just said I will send a flight and he was taken aback". He said the Kerala govt would stop him, so he was asked to announce just before departure. This interesting conversation on phone translated to Rs2,400 crore investment.

Devotees all set to bid adieu to Ganapati Bappa

P:3

Google abused Android dominance, says report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Google abused the dominant position of its Android operating system in India, using its "huge financial muscle" to illegally hurt competitors, the country's antitrust authority found in a report on its two-year probe, accessed by news agency Reuters.

Alphabet Inc's Google reduced "the ability and incentive of device manufacturers to develop and sell devices operating on alternative versions of Android," says the June report by the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) investigations unit.

The US tech giant told Reuters in a statement it looks forward to working with the CCI to "demonstrate how Android has led to more competition and innovation, not less."

Google has not received the investigation report, a person with direct knowledge of the situation said.

The CCI did not respond to a request for comment on the report. Senior CCI members will review the report and give Google another



er chance to defend itself, before issuing a final order, which could include penalties, said another person familiar with the case.

Google would be able to appeal any order in India's courts.

Its findings are the latest antitrust setback for Google in India, where it faces several probes in the payments app and smart television markets. The company has been investigated in Europe, the United States and elsewhere. This week, South Korea's antitrust regulator fined Google \$180 million for blocking customised versions of Android.

Babu Supriyo dumps BJP for TMC, Centre downsizes security

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP MP Babul Supriyo sprang a surprise on Saturday when he joined West Bengal's ruling TMC and asserted he will work for the development of the state.

Soon after, the Union government scaled down the armed security cover of central paramilitary commandos given to him.

Supriyo's security cover has been reduced from the second-highest level of Z category to Y category, after an order was issued by the Union Home Ministry on Friday.



India its sole gold in the 2020 Olympics has drawn a bid of over Rs 1.55 crore while its base price is Rs 1 crore. Badminton rackets of

Paralympians Krishna Nagar and SL Yathiraj and the fence used by CA Bhavani Devi at the Olympics received bids of Rs 10 crore each

during the day, but in the evening when the bids were reviewed, they were found to be fake.

As of now, the highest quoted bids for the badminton rackets of Nagar and Yathiraj are Rs 80 lakh and Rs 50 lakh respectively, at par with their base prices.

The bid for the fence used by Devi also stood at Rs 60 lakh, its base price.

Devi is the first Indian fencer to ever qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

A javelin autographed by Sumit Antil, the gold medalist at the Tokyo Paralympics, has received a bid of Rs 1,00,08,000 against its base price of Rs 1 crore.

Three-day yellow alert for TS: IMD

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The India Meteorological Department (IMD), Hyderabad has issued a three-day yellow alert for Telangana, from Monday to September 22. While Hyderabad has not recorded any rainfall in the last two days, several districts of Telangana, including Jagtial, Mulugu, Kumram Bheem-Asifabad, Warangal Rural, Karimnagar and Peddapalli, have been receiving heavy downpours.

IMD issues a yellow alert to inform people before heavy rains, storm, floods or such natural calamities. The warning means that there is a possibility of heavy rain of 7.5 mm to 15 mm.

The rain is likely to continue for a few hours after the alert is issued.

On Saturday, the highest maximum temperature recorded in the city was 30.2 degree Celsius, whereas the minimum temperature was 24.4 degree Celsius.



According to the data recorded at various Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) by the Telangana State Development Planning Society, almost all the areas of Hyderabad are likely to receive rainfall between 2.5 mm to 15.6 mm in the coming days. The maximum temperature in the city during the period is expected to be between 31 and 33 degree Celsius and the minimum temperature will be in the range 21 to 23 degree Celsius.

This year's Southwest Monsoon has been vigorous over Telangana. So far, between June 1 and September 18, Telangana has received excess rainfall of 32 per cent. While almost all the areas of the city received excess rainfall, Warangal Urban has witnessed the highest rainfall of 1133.3 mm, which is about 71 per cent more than normal. Hyderabad, too, has received 18 per cent excess rainfall this monsoon.

Kishan denies recommending names for TTD

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy has addressed a letter to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy making it clear that he didn't recommend anyone for the membership of TTD Board. He also made it clear that he didn't recommend Y Ravi Prasad's name as TTD special invitee.

Congress to launch ‘Dharmayuddam’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Congress has decided to launch Nirudyoga Dharmayuddam from TRS working president and IT Minister KT Rama Rao's constituency Sircilla on October 2 marking the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Telangana Congress would wage a Nirudyoga Dharmayuddam meeting on the last day. The executive committee decided to meet

Speaking to the media after the Executive Committee meeting on Saturday at Gandhi Bhavan, TPCC senior vice-president Mallu Ravi said that it decided to wage a war on unemployment from October 2 to December 9. He said that they would plan to make AICC chief Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi to participate in the Dharmayuddam meeting on the last day. The executive committee decided to meet

unemployed youth and intellectuals by visiting universities and other educational institutions. The party will hold further discussions on the issue in TPCC Political Affairs Committee meeting. The Political Affairs Committee will decide the venues. The Congress party would wage a fight against NDA government's anti-people policies along with 11 other political parties. He said that the TPCC would conduct meetings with

opposition parties following the directions of AICC. He said that TPCC would stage a dharna at Indira Park on September 22. The party will participate in Bharat Bandh on September 27. The party is conducting a meeting with leaders of opposition parties. Already party sent invitations to opposition leaders.

Youth Congress chief Shiva Sena Reddy and TPCC Campaign Committee vice-chairman were also present.

Digital media director wins PRCI Award '21

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dileep Konatham, Director, Digital Media, Government of Telangana, received the Public Relations Council of India's Chanakya Award for the second year in a row.

The award was presented by Goa Chief Minister Sri Pramod Sawant on 17th September at the 15th PRCI Global Communications Conclave, being held at Goa.

The PRCI Chanakya Award recognises outstand-

ing contributions made by individuals, corporates and institutions in the Public Relations sector. Each year, PRCI presents these Awards to achievers and leaders who brought name and fame to the country in their chosen fields.

Dileep was also a recipient of PRCI Chanakya Award in 2020 as well. Basavaraj Bommai, CM of Karnataka, had handed over the award to Dileep in March 2020 in Bengaluru.

Record 5.27 L...

Continued from page 1

So far 2.14 crore doses have been administered, of which first dose was given to 1,54,66,557 people and second dose to 59,47,769 people.

Babu Supriyo...

Continued from page 1

Supriyo, after joining the ruling party in West Bengal, told the media that he was very excited about joining the TMC, led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and that he will work for the development of the state. Supriyo, a two-term MP from Asansol, had earlier declared he will quit politics, before being persuaded by the BJP leadership to continue as a Lok Sabha member. The singer-turned-politician joined the TMC in the presence of party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and Rajya Sabha MP and spokesperson Derek O'Brien.

‘Expose communal face of KCR’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Minister & ex-Leader of Opposition in Telangana Legislative Council Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Saturday urged the Congress cadre to aggressively campaign across the State, especially in the villages, to expose the failures of the TRS Government and bring the party back to power in the 2023 elections.

He was addressing a meeting organised by minority leaders of the Congress party at his residence in Jubilee Hills on Saturday to felicitate him on being appointed Convener of Political Affairs Committee of Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC).

Shabbir Ali said that the Congress party was very strong with a huge organisational structure across

Telangana State. Stating that Congress cadre is present in every lane and by-lane of Telangana State, he asked the party workers to strengthen their ties with the people to understand and raise their issues.

The Congress leader said that the TRS party did nothing for the welfare of minorities. Instead, he said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao made all institutions related to minorities' welfare dysfunctional. "KCR cheated Muslims on the promise of 12% reservation and judicial powers to Wakf Board. TRS leaders often talk about Shaadi Mubarak and Minorities Residential Schools to claim that KCR Govt was pro-minorities. Both the schemes were originally launched by the previous Congress Government during 2006-08.

TRS Govt only renamed them by increasing the allocations. However, the number of beneficiaries was much higher during Congress regime compared to present TRS Govt," he said while asking the Congress cadre to present facts and real statistics before the people.

He said CM KCR neglected minorities in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and Telangana Public Service Commission. He said nearly 80% of Muslims fall under the BC-E category. However, no Muslim member has been appointed in the BC Commission. He said all minority bodies including Minorities Finance Commission, Urdu Academy and Haj House are presently headless. Those institutions have no funds, no manpower, or even a body to carry out their activities.

TSRTC to run 565 special buses for Ganesh immersion

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) has decided to run 565 special buses to take part in the Ganesh Nimajjanam programme under Greater Hyderabad limits on September 19. The TSRTC Managing Director VC Sajjanar told the commuters to contact 9959226154 (Rathifile Bus Station) and 9959226160 (Koti Bus Station) for further information about the special buses.

On the other hand, newly appointed TSRTC chairman Bajireddy Goverdhan has met Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar. On the occasion, Bajireddy gave a flower bouquet to the Minister and the Minister felicitated Bajireddy offering him a shawl.

Revanth Reddy throws ‘White challenge’ at KTR and Konda

Continued from page 1

Revanth offered to come to Gun Park on September 20 at 12 noon. He said that he was ready to come to any hospital chosen by KTR and Konda Vishweshwar Reddy. "Let us go to Osmania Hospital as part of the White Challenge. Let us give blood and hair samples to the doctors for tests. We have the responsibility of protecting the youth", he said.

KTR must spell out why he was not responding to investigations in the drugs and money laundering case and why he did not interfere even as a Minister. He sought to know why the Prohibition and Excise Department was not giving details to the Enforcement Directorate with regard to the drugs case.

Revanth said the state gov-

ernment must tell as to who was the secret person protecting Daggubati Rana and Rakul Preet Singh from the Prohibition and Excise Department case then and now. "Who is the person behind not summoning Rana and Rakul in the year 2017 and who is the person behind summoning Rana and Rakul now for the interrogation? The ED has served notices and conducted interrogation of Rana and Rakul now", he stated. He wanted KTR to tell as Minister why the state government was not extending its cooperation to the central investigating agencies in the drugs case.

Revanth found fault with Union Home Minister Amit Shah for not giving appointment to the Telangana Congress leaders. Amit Shah

gave appointment to My Home Chief Juppally Rameshwara Rao on September 16 -- a day before Amit Shah came to Telangana. He said that Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy had acted as the link between Amit Shah and Juppally Rameshwara Rao. He alleged that Amit Shah had been giving appointments only to the persons looting the public assets. He said that Rameshwara Rao met Amit Shah to urge him not to criticise KCR in Nirmal meeting and not to give appointment to Congress party. He said that there were two groups in Telangana BJP: one pro-KCR; and; the other one; anti-KCR. There was no use with Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay's Praja Sangrama Yatra as there were pro-KCR leaders in BJP, he said.

‘Humiliated’ Amarinder resigns; won’t accept Sidhu as Punjab

Continued from page 1

Sidhu was made the State Congress chief earlier this year, despite opposition by Amarinder Singh.

"I feel humiliated," Amarinder Singh told reporters outside the Punjab Raj Bhavan after submitting his resignation to Governor Banwarilal Purohit.

"I have resigned, let them make anyone (next CM)," he further said.

The Congress leader, however, in another interaction with the media said he won't accept Navjot Singh Sidhu as the Punjab Chief Minister, describing him as "a total disaster".

The man who could not handle one ministry, can never run entire Punjab, he said.

Replying to a question, he said he will never agree to Navjot Singh Sidhu as the next Chief Minister.

"He is a total disaster. When he was a minister (in Amarinder cabinet), he could not even run one ministry, now can he run entire Punjab?

I know that man has no capability at all," said Amarinder Singh.

If Sidhu is made the face of the Congress for the Punjab polls, Singh said he will oppose him "tooth and nail".

Earlier in the day after submitting his resignation, when asked about his next course of action, Singh told reporters, "There is always an option and I will use that option when time comes."

"I have been in politics for the past 52 years and I have been a Chief Minister for nine-and-a-half years. I will talk to my colleagues, supporters," he said.

He submitted his resignation along with that of his council of ministers, his media adviser said. The resignation has been accepted by the Governor.

Singh's resignation came hours before a crucial meeting of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) on Saturday evening, pre-empting what was widely being seen as a move to remove him from the CM's post.

In the meeting, Punjab Congress MLAs authorised party's national president Sonia Gandhi to pick a new CLP leader and in a unanimously passed resolution praised Amarinder's contribution for Punjab and the Congress.

"I spoke to the Congress president in the morning and I told her that I am resigning today," Amarinder Singh told reporters.

"They called the MLAs to Delhi twice and now convened a CLP here in Chandigarh today," he said.

"I think if there is an element of doubt on me that I could not run (the government) or if there was something else, I feel humiliated the way things have happened," he said.

To a question on joining any other party, he said, "Whatever you have to say, you can say. I can only tell you that I have been a Chief Minister from the Congress. And I am in the Congress and I will consult my colleagues and then we will decide the future course of politics."

69% of instant approvals on...

Continued from page 1

Out of 3,255 revoked instant permissions, the government successfully initiated a refund for 1,601 eligible files as of 17 September 2021.

It may be mentioned here that fee is forfeited for unauthorized constructions.

Further, while refunding the building permit fee, TS-bPASS user charges are retained by government. Should applicants face irregularities while processing the file, they need to give detailed information via email to ts-bpass-support@telangana.gov.in.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹165
Without Skin	₹175
Broiler at Farm	₹135

EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	428
VIJAYAWADA	438
VISAKHAPATNAM	470
RETAIL PRICE (IN HYDERABAD)	₹4.28

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Devotees all set to bid adieu to Ganapati Bappa

DAVE BENNETT SILVERY
■ HYDERABAD

Devotees, pandal organisers and government departments are gearing themselves up for the massive Ganesha immersion procession on Sunday, after a break last year due to the pandemic.

The GHMC, along with the HMWSSB, HMDA, police, electricity, tourism, fire and road and buildings departments, have put in place personnel and machinery to ensure that the procession passes off smoothly.

Officials of the Telangana Police in the city are showing out in full force with 27,000 police officers being deployed in the Hyderabad Police Commissionerate and 6,500 officers in the Cyberabad commissionerate.



In Cyberabad, a total of 8,434 idols were installed, with 2,001 in Madhapur zone, 3,379 in Balanagar zone and 3,054 in the Shamshabad.

With 2,787 idols being immersed on the final day, 1,054 are to be immersed in IDL Tank, Kukatpally. 620 idols will be immersed in Hussain Sagar, Tank Bund lake of which 218 are from Rajendranagar and 141 from Sanathnagar. There are a total of 35 important lakes in Cyberabad in which 23 are in GHMC limits, 3 are in the Medchal Collectorate and 9 are in the Ranga Reddy, for which 36 static and 54 mobile cranes are deployed.

Liquor outlets to remain closed on Sunday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As an added precaution, all the liquor outlets in the Rachakonda Police Commissionerate limits will be

closed in view of the Ganesh idol immersion on Sunday, said a release by the Commissioner's office.

As per a notification issued by Rachakonda Police

Commissioner Mahesh M Bhagwat on Saturday, in the interest of public peace and tranquility, all the toddy and wine shops will remain closed from 6 am on Sunday till 6 pm

Falaknuma RuB to make way for Balapur Ganesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Balapur Ganesh idol will be taken for immersion via the new Road under Bridge (RuB) at Falaknuma.

The authorities of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) along with the railways had taken up remodeling works on the old bridge in the last six months.

"The works on the old bridge are nearly completed. The organisers sought permission for using the bridge for taking the Ganesh idol, following which senior officials visited and after inspection, agreed to allow it for use on Sunday," a senior GHMC official said.

After the idols pass, the RuB



will again be closed for the traffic as BT roads are to be laid. "After a couple of weeks, we will open it for traffic," the official said, adding that works on another parallel bridge were also in progress.

famous Balapur Ganesh laddu will be up for grabs through an auction this year. The Balapur Ganesh Utsav Samithi, which organised Ganesh festivities on a low key due to the Covid-19 pandemic last year, has now decided to conduct the auction of 21-kg laddu on the last day of the festivities.

Last year, the Samithi did not organise the annual auction of the popular laddu due to the pandemic and instead, presented it to Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao. In the last auction held in 2019, Balapur resident Kolan Ram Reddy successfully bid for the laddu for a whopping Rs 17.60 lakh.

The history of auctioning of the Balapur Ganesh laddu dates back to 1994, when it was successfully bid by Kolan Mohan Reddy for Rs 450. Since then, the tradition of auctioning the laddu has continued. Bidders believe that successfully bidding for the laddu will bring them health, wealth and prosperity.

Railways to operate 8 MMTS special trains

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In order to clear extra rush of passengers during Ganesh idol immersion, the SCR has announced restoration of eight MMTS services between various destinations in the city on 19 and 20 September.



Train No GSH-1 Secunderabad-Hyderabad MMTS special will depart at 23:30 hrs on 19 September and arrive at 00:05 hrs of 20 September. Train No GSH-2 Hyderabad - Lingampalli special will depart at 00:30 hrs on 20 September and arrive at 01:20 hrs on the same day. Train No GSH-3 Lingampalli - Hyderabad special will depart at 01:50 hrs on 20 September and arrive at 02:40 hrs on the same day. Train No GSH-4 Hyderabad - Secunderabad special will depart at 03:30 hrs on 20 September and arrive at 04:00 hrs on the same day. Train No GHL-5 Hyderabad - Lingampalli special will depart at 23:00 hrs on 19 September

and arrive at 23:50 hrs on the same day.

Train No GLF-6 Lingampalli - Falaknuma special will depart at 00:10 hrs on 20 September and arrive at 01:50 hrs on the same day. Train No GFS-7 Falaknuma - Secunderabad special will depart at 02:20 hrs on 20 September and arrive at 03:00 hrs on the same day. Train No GSH-8 Secunderabad-Hyderabad special will depart at 04:00 hrs on 20 September and arrive at 04:40 hrs on the same day.

City cops issue traffic advisory

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad City Police, in order to ensure a smooth Ganesh immersion on Sunday, will impose traffic restrictions throughout the procession route.

The restrictions will be in place from Saturday night and continue till Monday morning hours till culmination of the procession.

The police will monitor the traffic with the help of Google Maps to avoid traffic snarls. Vehicles other than those carrying Ganesh idols will be diverted at several points in addition to the main procession route. The police have issued colour coded stickers based on which the route to be taken for the vehicles carrying the idols was decided earlier.

The traffic police advised commuters to take alternate routes to avoid traffic congestion. City buses and those bound for districts will ply on certain routes or will be diverted.

Hyd Metro Rail to run till 1 am

For facilitating safe travel of commuters on the Ganesh

Nimajan day, Metro trains will be operated till late in the night in all the three corridors on Sunday. The last Metro trains will leave at 1 am of September 20 from the originating stations in all directions and reach their respective destination stations at the other end by about 2 am.

"For everyone's safety, passengers are advised to strictly follow the Covid safety guidelines including social distancing, wearing of face masks, regular hand sanitisation and thermal screening, among others," said L&T Metro Rail Hyderabad Limited spokesperson.

119 stalls, 30L water sachets to quench thirst of devotees

Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) Managing Director Dana Kishore on Saturday inspected the water stalls set up by the board for the benefit of the devotees taking part in the Ganesh idols immersion processions on September 21. The HMWSSB has set up 119 water stalls across the city and made available 30.72 lakh water sachets to quench the thirst of the devotees, he said adding that the water stalls

have been located all along the route of the immersion procession. Besides water sachets, arrangements will be made to provide water in drums at vantage points for the benefit of the devotees, he said. Moreover, the HMWSSB has been supplying drinking water free of cost to the poor feeding programmes arranged across the city by the Ganesh pandal organisers, he said. The quality assurance teams of the board will test the water quality from time to time and

ensure that the chlorine levels in the water are in adequate quantities, he said. He asked the HMWSSB officials to ensure that there were no water leakages, overflow of sewers all along the route of the Ganesh Sobha Yatra and told them to remain alert in this regard. He told them to inspect the lids on the sewers in areas through which the Sobha Yatra passes through and take steps to repair them if they are not in order.



'DINE-IN'

The Rs 5 Annapurna Meal Scheme is augmenting its facilities in the city, with seating arrangements and tables being arranged at the Annapurna Centres across the GHMC limits. The additional facilities come in the wake of instructions from Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister KT Rama Rao. According to Urban Development Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar, the Minister had advised that 'sitting arenas should be arranged for Annapurna centres wherever possible in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits'. "About 12 locations, using adjacent public space have/ shortly going to have these arrangements and more are in offing," Arvind Kumar tweeted on Saturday.

Cops arrest two chain snatchers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Meerpet Police apprehend two persons, including a minor, involved in a chain snatching offence and recovered 15 grams of gold ornaments from their possession on Saturday.

The arrested person has been identified as Shanmugam Gowtham, 19, a medicine delivery boy from Saidabad and a child in conflict with the law (CCL).

The police received a complaint from a 70-year-old victim, who said that while she was walking at Sai Nagar of Meerpet, two unknown persons came on a bike, the pillion rider got down from the bike and snatched her chain from her neck and the duo then fled from the scene. The Meerpet Police registered a case and nabbed the accused persons.

TS Guv calls for improved healthcare infrastructure

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

State Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan has called for the improved healthcare infrastructure in primary health centres to offer timely and better treatment to the snakebite victims.

used in a virtual mode by the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Council, New Delhi, from the Raj Bhavan, here, on Saturday.

She expressed concern that our country was registering an alarming number of deaths due to the snakebite.

"Most of the deaths are preventable with greater awareness and improved and accessible healthcare," she added.

The Governor suggested the establishment of dialysis centre to offer the immediate treatment to those with the renal failure.

The Governor was addressing the National Snakebite Awareness Summit, organ-

Newborn baby girl abandoned

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A newborn baby girl was found abandoned at a temporary shed on the roadside in Rein Bazaar here on Saturday. Police suspect her parents abandoned her soon after birth.

The local residents, who heard the baby crying, checked the shed and found her wrapped in a cloth. They alerted cops, who reached the spot immediately and shifted her to a nearby private hospital, from where she was later shifted to Niloufer Hospital for better treatment.

BTech student found hanging

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 20-year-old engineering student committed suicide by hanging herself in her hostel room at Maisammaguda at Petbasheerabad late on Friday night. Officials suspect that the victim was depressed, leading her to take the extreme step.

The victim was identified as K Madhavi, a native of Jangaon, she was staying in a hostel at Maisammaguda and was in her third year of engineering at a private college.

Madhavi was found hanging in her hostel room, from the ceiling fan. Officials said no suicide note was found at the spot and that her family members also said she had no problems. However, the police said that a few of her friends noticed that she was not herself during the last few days and was downcast. The Petbasheerabad Police registered a case of suspicious death and are investigating the incident. The body was shifted to the Gandhi Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Himayat Sagar gates shut as inflows ebb

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Acting on directions from top officials of the irrigation department, the gates of the Himayat Sagar, were closed down at 2 pm on Saturday as the inflows into the dam dwindled.

Two gates of the project were lifted on August 31 and two more were lifted on September 1 to let out 2100 cusecs of flood water into River Musi as the project received heavy inflows following continuous down pour recently.

The authorities closed down one gate after the other as the inflows receded into the dam. On Saturday, the last gate was also closed down even as the water level in the reservoir measure at 1762.55 feet. This year, the dam's gates have been

lifted twice to let out the flood waters. For the first time, the gates were lifted on July 20 this year and were closed down on July 26. For the second time, the gates were lifted on August 31 and closed down on September 18.

TS, AP among top 3 states in human trafficking cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As many as 1,714 cases of human trafficking were registered by the government's Anti-Human Trafficking Units in 2020 with sexual exploitation for prostitution, forced labour and domestic servitude being the top reasons behind it, according to the NCRB data.

The data also showed that the case conviction rate of human trafficking was 10.6 percent.

Among states, Maharashtra and Telangana recorded the highest number of such cases at 184 each, followed by Andhra Pradesh at 171, Kerala

at 166, Jharkhand at 140 and Rajasthan at 128.

The conviction for cases of human trafficking was recorded at 0 in seven states, while the highest conviction rate of such cases was reported from Tamil Nadu at 66 percent followed by Delhi at 40 percent.

The NCRB, in its report, said it started collecting data on human trafficking cases from these Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU) across the country. As per data provided by States and Union Territories, 1,714 cases of human trafficking have been registered by AHTUs during 2020.

According to the report,

2,278 human trafficking cases were registered in 2018 and 2,260 in 2019, respectively. The report further said that 4,709 victims, including 2,222 below 18 years, were trafficked across the country in 2020.

The maximum trafficking cases were registered for sexual exploitation for prostitution at 1,466 followed by forced labour at 1,452 and domestic servitude at 846.

The data on cases recorded of human trafficking have been provided by anti-human trafficking units through their State Crime Records Bureau and this data represents only those cases which have been



registered by respective AHTUs.

As per the data provided by States/UTs, so far, 696 AHTUs

are functional and 20 states/UTs have achieved their target of setting up AHTUs in all districts.

Roop Sen, founding member of Sanjog, one of the NGOs which is a part of the Indian Leadership Forum Against Trafficking, a national platform by and for the survivors of human trafficking, said the country went into lockdown from March 23 so for majority part of the year all transportation systems, including major rails and buses, were stopped and there was very strong monitoring of interstate travel.

He said a question can be asked about how the number of trafficking cases is so large. "...even sex workers talked about completely dwindling

businesses, factories, brick kilns were non-functional so by that logic there would have been no demand of trafficked labour in that period," he said.

Jyoti Mathur, executive director, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, said the number of children rescued since the beginning of the lockdown by their sister organisation, the Bachpan Bachao Andolan, is substantially higher than the number of children rescued during the same period in 2019.

According to the NCRB data, the conviction rate in human trafficking cases in 2020 was 10.6 percent.

CEO asks collectors to issue voter ID cards quickly

PNS ■ WANAPARTHI

Chief Electoral officer Shashank Goel has directed district officials to clear the applications received under Form-6 for issue of the photo identity card as early as possible after booth level officials subjecting them to scrutiny. Reviewing the Special Summer Revision-22 progress with the district collector through video conference held from Hyderabad on Saturday, the CEO asked the officials to make changes in the photo identity card if any and remove the names of the dead from the enrolment list.

Asking the Collector to inspect the EVM godowns from time to time, he told him to take steps to shift the EVMs to the newly built godowns. If the construction of godowns is not yet over, he asked them to ensure that their construction is completed at the earliest.

He also asked the district collector to undertake voter awareness programmes. Collector P Uday Kumar told the CEO that over 1757 applications for the issue of photo identity card are still pending and the pendency will be cleared in a week.

He asked the RDOs to clear the applications received so far under Form-6 within a

Conduct awareness camps on voting, says district Collector

PNS ■ MEDAK

District Collector Dr S Harish said awareness camps should be conducted on the importance of voting to those who crossed 18 years of age in the district so that they would show more interest in enrolling themselves as voters. Participating in the video-conference conducted by the State Election Commissioner Shashank Goyal on the Voters' List of 2022 on Saturday, he said that it was important that the youth, especially students, should get themselves enrolled in



large numbers and participate in voting to make democracy successful.

He said that electoral literacy clubs should be setup in schools and colleges and every voter should exercise his franchise by following

the election guidelines without fail.

Collector Harish said that the Election Commission of India has printed a booklet "Come let us vote" and also published its Telugu version "Voteddam Randi".

'Make voters' list error-free'

PNS ■ MULUGU

State Election Commissioner Shashank Goyal told the District Collectors to sort out the pending issues regarding the 2022 voters' enrolment and also those pertaining

ing to EPIC cards and swipe cards. Addressing the collectors and district election officers through a video-conference from the Collectorate in Mulugu on Saturday, he directed them to ensure that the voters' list was error-free.

Twitter war continues between KTR and Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Twitter war has been continuing between the TRS working president and IT Minister KT Rama Rao and Congress leaders.

On Saturday too, KTR tweeted saying "What about Supari AICC in-charges who sells the post of PCC Chief? Am not saying this; your own colleague INC MP has said it on record. Have some shame when you comment on journalists and their professional etiquette". KTR posted the news item which has a headline of Komatir-eddy: Manickam Tagore sold TPCC Chief's post. Reacting to KTR's tweet, Telangana Congress Affairs in-charge Manickam Tagore tweeted saying "Dear@KTRTRS if you accept my party MP colleague's angry words one day will you accept that your father KCR is the 'Biggest Traitor?'".

KCR extending full support to Munnuru Kapus: Gangula

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Civil Supplies Minister Gangula Kamalakara said that the Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has been extending his support to the Munnurukapus.

He said that the state government allocated 5 acres of costly land at Kokapet besides allocating Rs.5 crore for the construction of Munnurukapus Atma Gourava Building. He said that the government has already allocated one acre land and Rs.1 crore for the Atma Gourava Building for Munnurukapus in Huzurabad. Gangula said that he is feeling proud for representing Munnurukapus. He assured Munnurukapus stating that he will extend full support to the Munnuru Kapus and solve any problem.

While participating in Munnuru Kapus Athmeeya



Chief Minister in the past cared about Munnuru Kapus. He said that the Chief Minister is the person who has the heart to provide any amount of funds for the development of Munnuru Kapus. Gangula, who is a Munnurukapu, said that KCR gave him an important portfolio.

Gangula said that the TRS government has been spending thousands of crores of funds for the sake of BCs including Munnurukapus in regard to residential schools, welfare hostels, fees reimbursement, overseas scholarships, Kalyana Laxmi and other schemes. He assured that the TRS government is committed to the development of Munnurub kapus in Huzurabad. He said that as a Munnurukapu he will strive hard for the interests of Munnuru bnkapus community and to benefit Munnuru Kapus.

Rs 50 lakh model market to be set up at Kardhanur

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy said that a model market would be constructed in Kardhanur village within the Patancheru mandal at a cost of Rs 50 lakh. Inaugurating a 'Swachh-Hee Seva-2021' programme at the

monkeys feeding centre in Kardhanur, he said that the model market would be very useful to the future generations. He laid the foundation for the market construction works.

Mahipal Reddy said that the State government wants to setup more markets basing

on the needs of the expanding population. For this, mini-markets were also being setup, he added. He said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao was also concerned about the welfare of monkeys and he setup several feeding centres with fruits and flowers for them. It

reflected the chief minister's vision and kindness for animals, he added.

The MLA said that politics would not come in the way for implementing social welfare programmes. He lauded the government for taking up several development works in the villages.

DC urges youth to get vaccinated

PNS ■ WANAPARTHI

District Collector Shaik Yasmin Basha has called upon all youth who are above 18 years of age to take Covid-19 vaccination without any doubts or fear.

She paid a surprise visit to the CVCs at Munnuru in Gopalpet mandal and Balanagar and surrounding areas in the town on Saturday.

The vaccination centres are located in all villages and asked the youth to come to the centres to get themselves vaccinated. She asked the sarpanches, officials, medical and health staff and ASHA workers to undertake door-to-door visit and sensitise people to get



themselves vaccinated as it is harmless.

The vaccine would have no side effects, she said but asked the medical and health staff to keep ready fever tables.

She asked the authorities to post the progress from time to time online. She wanted them to ensure that 100 per cent vaccination is achieved in two days.

District Collector inspects Covid vaccination centres

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

District Collector S Venkat Rao directed the officials concerned to take appropriate steps and ensure cent per cent vaccination in district without fail in the special 'Covid-19 Vaccination' drive which would be conducted for the next 15 days. On Saturday, he inspected the Covid vaccination centre, setup in the 25th municipal ward in Jadcherla Town to know about the facilities there. While the target was to give vaccination to 100 people daily, the officials told the Collector that vaccination was given to 83 people. He told them to ensure that there was 100 percent vaccination in all the 27 municipal wards in the district.

The Collector instructed them to organise awareness



camps and dispel doubts among the people regarding vaccination. They should also involve the elected representatives and municipal councilors in this programme. All those who crossed 18 years of age should be vaccinated without fail, he added.

The District Collector also directed the Municipal Commissioner to plant huge and small saplings near the Mahabubnagar-Jadcherla Highway to beautify it.

DC, CP inspect immersion ghats

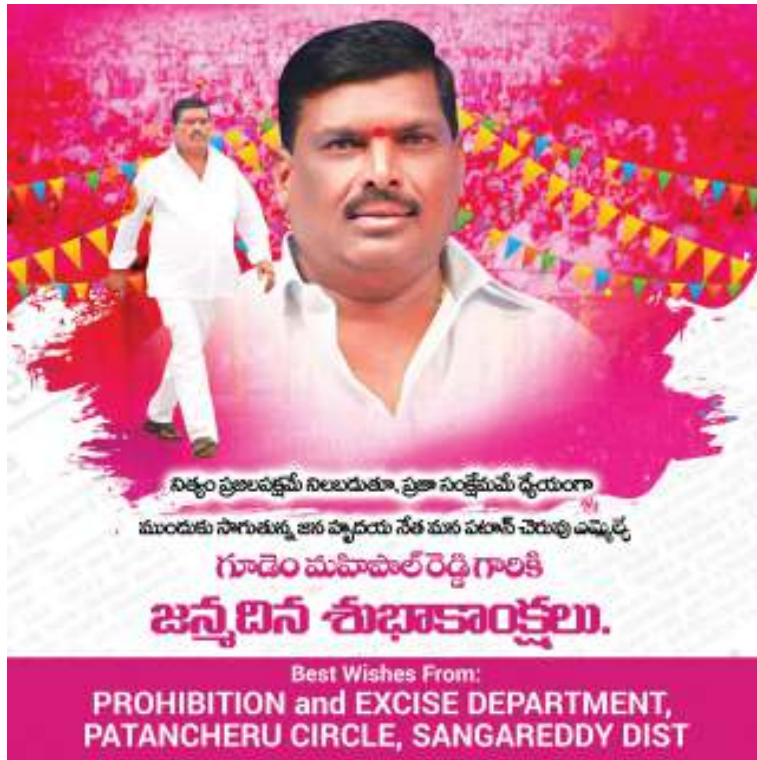
PNS ■ KHAMMAM

District Collector VP Gautam and Police Commissioner Vishnu S Warriar inspected the arrangements that were being made for the immersion of the idols of Lord Ganesha at the Kalavoddu near Munneru.

Later, they made some suggestions to the policemen and officials of the Revenue and Municipal departments regarding the precautionary measures that should be taken.

The District Collector directed the officials concerned to take appropriate steps and ensure that no untoward incident takes place on the day of immersions.

He said that the Ganesh idols should be immersions in the officially recognised ghats at Munneru.



All steps in place for Ganesh immersion, says police chief

PNS ■ PEDDAPALL

Ramagundam Commissioner of Police S Chandrasekhar Reddy said that all major safety precautionary steps have been taken to ensure that the 'Ganesh Nimmajana Shobha Yatra' passes off peacefully in Pedapalli town and Mancheriyal district. Arrangements have been made fully in this regard and people can happily take part in the procession without any fear, he added.

Speaking to the media here on Saturday, the Police Commissioner cautioned the people not to be carried away by rumours spread by mischievous anti-social elements. They can get information at their nearest police station, if necessary. He also warned them not to believe false news



being spread in the social media. He said that there would be traffic diversions during the immersion of Ganesh idols.

Chandrasekhar Reddy advised the people not to drive vehicles after consuming liquor. Wine shops would be closed. He warned that stringent action would be taken against those who drive vehi-

cles carrying Ganesh idols. He said the devotees should not burn fire crackers and play DJs during the immersion ceremony. The procession would be taken out under strict surveillance of CC cameras, he added. Furthermore, the police commissioner also advised the organisers to keep the Ganesh pandals in good condition.





Metro network in India to reach 900 km by 2022: Puri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 740 km of metro lines are at present operational in various cities in India and the network span is steadily scheduled to rise to about 900 km by 2022, Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Saturday.

He was speaking after inaugurating the nearly 1-km Najafgarh-Dhansa Bus Stand corridor, an extension of the Grey Line of the Delhi Metro, via a video-conference link.

"Nearly 740 km or so of metro lines are operational in various cities in India and the network span is 'steadily scheduled to rise' to about 900 km by 2022," the minister said.

Besides, another 1,000 km metro lines are under construction in various cities in the country, so the total span will be close to 2,000 km in the coming years, he said.

Puri lauded the Delhi Metro for its various accomplishments despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

PM says birthday was emotional for him after 2.5 cr vaccinations

PNS ■ PANAJI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said he was humbled as over 2.50 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered in the country on his 71st birthday, and called it an emotional and unforgettable moment.

Without naming any party, Modi also said the overwhelming response in the country to the vaccination drive on his birthday on September 17 made a political party experience fever, and react during midnight.

Modi was interacting with healthcare workers and vaccination beneficiaries in Goa via video link to mark the first dose vaccination to the entire eligible population in the state.

"I want to speak my maan ki baat. So many birthdays came and went. I kept away from celebrating them. But in my entire life, yesterday was an emotional day," he said.

He said people from medical fraternity are associated with the vaccination programme for the last one and a half year, but the record created yesterday is a big thing as over 2.5 crore people received the jab.

"One dose will save one life," he added.

He said the country was glued to the CoWin dashboard yesterday as every hour more than 15 lakh vaccines were given, which means 26,000 jabs every minute and 415 every second.

"More than one lakh vaccination centres were involved in the



mission," Modi said. The country's vaccination network and skilled manpower reflects in this capability, he added.

Modi said that on his birthday, he had called an elderly friend, who asked him about his age. "I told him, there are 30 more years remaining," he said.

Modi said that states having a large tourist footfall like Goa, Himachal Pradesh, and Sikkim were given importance in the vaccination programme so that the tourism sector opens up.

It is important that our tourism sector opens up and a state like Goa attains an important position in reviving the tourism sector of the country, he said.

"When everyone from the hotel industry, taxi drivers, vendors and shopkeepers are vaccinated, people will feel safe to travel that destination," he said.

"Goa is among the international tourist destinations where everyone is vaccinated," he added. He said the spread of the virus

has been reduced but people should not take things lightly. "We should give importance to COVID-19 protocol as much as to vaccination," he said.

Modi said the Central government has taken up steps to encourage international tourism by offering sops like free visa for the first five lakh arrivals, Rs 10 lakh loan for hospitality sector companies and Rs one lakh loan for tourist guides.

During the interaction, Modi recalled former Goa chief minister Manohar Parrikar. "Had he been alive, he would have been proud of the achievement of the state," Modi said. Parrikar's legacy of progress has been successfully taken forward by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, he added.

Modi interacted with a doctor, nurse, a senior citizen and a social worker on issues like overcoming vaccine hesitancy and logistics involved in transportation of the doses.

Wish PM Modi celebrated his birthday everyday: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi should celebrate his birthday every day as some BJP-ruled states 'performed' on the day and vaccinated many times the daily average, the Congress said on Saturday. The party took a dig at Modi a day after India achieved the highest record of 2.5 crore COVID-19 vaccinations on a single day.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said this is the pace of vaccination the country needs. "Looking forward to many more days of 2.1 crore vaccinations. This pace is what our country needs," he tweeted. Party leader P Chidambaram said he was happy and grateful that 2.5 crore vaccinations were administered on Friday. "But why did we have to wait until the PM's birthday," he asked. Suppose the prime minister's birthday was on December 31, would the 2.5 crore vaccinations have been done only on the last day of the year, Chidambaram also asked. "Vaccination is not like cutting a cake on a birthday. Vaccination is a programme, it is a process. It has to be accelerated every day, not scale a peak on a



birthday," he said on Twitter. "BJP ruled states - UP, MP, Gujarat and Karnataka - 'perform' on the PM's birthday and vaccinate many times the daily average. On other days, they are 'non-performing' states. I wish the PM celebrated his birthday every day," the former Union finance minister added. In another tweet, he said, one-third of the adult population was yet to receive its first dose and only 21 per cent had been fully vaccinated. Prime Minister Modi, in a swipe at the opposition, on Saturday said there is talk of fever as a vaccine side-effect, but a political party experienced fever after 2.5 crore vaccines were administered on his birthday.



Govt frames adoption rules under HAMA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has brought out regulations to ease inter-country adoptions under the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (HAMA). According to the Adoption (Amendment) Regulations 2021, families adopting under the Act can receive a NOC from the government's nodal adoption body Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) to take the child abroad.

Until now, the NOC was issued only by a court.

Till now, there were no regulations for CARA regarding inter-country adoptions under HAMA, which covers Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. The Act deals with the rules for

adopting children as it gives an adopted child all the rights enjoyed by a biological child.

In a notification issued late on Friday, the Women and Child Development Ministry said CARA shall issue a no-objection certificate for Hague-ratified countries.

CARA will issue the NOC based upon a verification certificate from the district magistrate of the respective region.

In cases of countries outside the Hague Adoption Convention in respect of inter-country adoptions, a letter accepting the adoption from the government department concerned of the receiving country shall be sought by CARA in order to issue the final support letter by the agency.

INDIA CORNER

IAF to hold air show over Srinagar's Dal Lake on Sep 26



An air show will be held here on September 26 where IAF's skydiving team Akash Ganga and Suryakiran Aerobatic and Display Team and paramotor flying will maneuver the skies over the famous Dal Lake, officials said on Saturday. The air show will be organised by the Air Force Station Srinagar and the Jammu and Kashmir administration

as part of the ongoing celebrations commemorating 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', they said. The main aim of the exercise - under the theme 'Give Wings to Your Dream' - is to motivate the youth of the valley to join the Indian Air Force (IAF) and to promote tourism in the region, the officials said. The event will be flagged off Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha at the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) overlooking the Dal Lake. More than 3,000 college and school students are expected to participate in the programme to witness the impressive maneuvers of the IAF, which will motivate them to dream about a career in the force and in the aviation sector, the officials said.

Central Teacher Eligibility Test between Dec 16-Jan 13



The Central Board of Secondary Education will conduct the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) between December 16 and January 13, it said in a statement. The test will be conducted in 20 languages throughout the country in computer based test mode, the board said. The

information bulletin containing details of the examination, syllabus, languages, eligibility criteria, examination fee, examination cities and important dates will be available on the CTET's website <https://ctet.nic.in> from September 20, according to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Candidates have to apply online only through the CTET website. The online application-process will be start on September 20 and end on October 19. The fee can be paid up to October 20 before 3.30 pm.

Delhi University UG cut-off schedule likely by next week



Delhi University officials will be holding a series of meetings with college principals to finalise the cut-off schedule that is likely to be released by next week, officials said on Saturday. The university plans to release its first cut-off on October 1 to accommodate students who are appearing for

improvement or compartment exams, they added. Professor Rajeev Gupta, chairman of the university's admission committee said, "We will finalise the cut-off schedule very soon. October 1 is a tentative date for the first cut-off. We plan to release the cut-off on that day. We will be holding meetings with college principals and nodal officers to finalise the schedule." He said they plan to release a cut-off schedule for at least five cut-offs by next week.

7 girls drown during 'Karma Puja' immersion in Jharkhand



Seven girls aged between 12 and 20 years drowned in a pond at a village in Jharkhand's Latehar district on Saturday, officials said. The tragedy occurred at Bukru village within Balumath police station limits when the girls had gone to the pond for immersion after Karma Puja, a major festival in Jharkhand, Deputy Commissioner Abu Imran said. Rescue teams were rushed to the scene. Some people were also injured and three of them were hospitalised. The Deputy Development Commissioner of the district has been asked to hold an inquiry, Imran said. Karma is a major festival in Jharkhand related to worship of mother nature.

Gurudwara Bangla Sahib asked to close over violation of Covid norms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Chanakypuri district administration has ordered the closure of Gurudwara Bangla Sahib here for alleged violation of COVID-19 norms, prompting outgoing Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee president Manjinder Singh Sirsa to demand action against the officials concerned.

The order by the Chanakypuri sub divisional magistrate (SDM) was issued on September 16. The order stated that a report submitted by executive magistrate (Chanakypuri) found that the management of Bangla Sahib Gurudwara "allowed visitors/prayers inside the Gurudwara" in violation of



DDMA directions. The order asked the management of Bangla Sahib Gurudwara, one of the most prominent Sikh shrines in the national capital, to be closed for visitors with immediate effect. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) had earlier ordered reopening of religious places, but visitors were

not allowed to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus infection.

Meanwhile, SAD leader and outgoing Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) chief Manjinder Singh Sirsa fumed at the Chanakypuri SDM order and demanded action from Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal against the district officials.

In a video message on Twitter, he said, "Cheap action by SDM Chanakypuri by passing this order to close Gurdwara Sri Bangla Sahib for Covid Violations! We condemn this sick mentality of Delhi Govt & demand @ArvindKejriwal Ji to take strictest action against concerned DC & SDM Geeta Grover."

Raj Kundra claims there is no evidence against him, seeks bail

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Businessman Raj Kundra, an accused in the pornographic content case, on Saturday moved a bail application in a court here, claiming that he was being made a "scapegoat" and that there was not a single evidence in the supplementary charge sheet against him being actively involved in creation of alleged questionable content.

The crime branch, probing the case, had recently filed a supplementary charge-sheet against Kundra and three others in the case pertaining to alleged creation of pornographic films and publishing them through some apps.

PORN FILMS CASE

After that, the accused approached the metropolitan court for bail, saying that the investigation in the case was practically over.

Kundra, husband of Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty, was arrested July 19 by after being booked under relevant sections of the IPC and the Information Technology Act. He is currently in judicial custody.

In the bail, filed through advocate Prashant Patil, Kundra claimed that there is not a single iota of evidence till date with the prosecution that would connect the app 'Hotshots' with an offence under law.

As per the probe agency, the Hotshots app was being used by the accused for uploading and streaming obscene content.

The bail plea also said that there is not a single allegation in the entire supplementary charge sheet against the present applicant (Kundra) that he was actively involved in any of the video shootings.

In fact, it is a sole discretion of the individual artists to upload their contents on the app, the plea said.

The contents of the complaint do not disclose any prima-facie offence against Kundra, the application said.

SC for Rs 25 cr for Covid-orphaned kids

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is in favour of disbursing the over Rs 25 crore deposited by the Maharashtra government in the apex court registry five years ago to children who lost both parents during the Covid pandemic in the state.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and B V Nagarathna noted earlier this week that the state has about 19,000 children who lost a parent due to COVID-19 and 593 who lost both their parents.

Maharashtra, one of the worst affected states during the second wave of pandemic earlier this year, had deposited the money in the apex court registry in an old matter related to medical college admissions. The Supreme Court noted that the government of Maharashtra formulated a poli-

cy on June 17, 2021 envisaging that Rs 5 lakh be placed in fixed deposit for children who lost both their parents due to the pandemic and the money will be payable to them after they attain the age of maturity.

"The amount of Rs 20 crores which was deposited (by Maharashtra government) in pursuance of the order dated December 2, 2016 stands enhanced to Rs 25,53,25,548 as a result of accretions of interest," the bench said.

The top court said before it directs the disbursement of the money to the State of Maharashtra, it wants that a concrete statement be placed on affidavit about the manner in which the money will be utilised for the benefit of children affected by the death of either or both parents due to the Covid pandemic.

Army is fully prepared to meet any challenge from adversaries: Lt. Gen

PNS ■ JAMMU

The Army is fully prepared to meet any challenge, like the use of drones and social media, by adversaries to safeguard the country, Commandant of Chennai-based Officers Training Academy (OTA) Lieutenant General M K Das said on Saturday.

Lt Gen Das, who is also the colonel of Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAKLI) regiment, said the situation in Jammu and Kashmir is getting better with the Army and other security agencies working together to stamp out terrorism.

Speaking to media persons on the sidelines of the maiden attestation parade of 460 new recruits of the 126th batch after a successful 40-week training period at Dansal here, he said the Indian

Army is aware of the challenges and prepared to give a befitting response to the enemies of the nation.

Responding to a question about the need to introduce special training courses for soldiers in the aftermath of the developments in Afghanistan, the Army officer said "our training is very contemporary as it caters for all the contingencies and unforeseen situations."

"I have no doubt that my young soldiers who have taken the oath to defend the constitution and the country will live up to all the challenges. One of the unique things of this regiment (JAKLI) is that all our troops hail from J&K and Ladakh. Therefore, they have this ingrained quality to be security conscious much more than others," he said.

Lauding the regiment for its exceptional and outstanding record



in all counter-insurgency operations within and outside the country since its birth in 1947, Lt Gen Das said, "All the situations unfolding in the country or in our neighbourhood, I am more than confident that the JAKLI regiment will continue to excel and be the lead agency in the fight against terrorism."

Asked about the challenges posed by the use of drones to hit targets and deliver weapons and narcotics from across the Line of

Indianisation of our legal system is need of the hour: CJI

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Chief Justice of India N V Ramana on Saturday said Indianisation of the country's legal system is the need of the hour and it is crucial to make the justice delivery system more accessible and effective.

He said Courts need to be litigant-centric, and the simplification of justice delivery should be the pressing concern.

"Very often our justice delivery poses many barriers for the common people. The working and the style of courts do not sit well with the complexities of India. Our systems, practice, rules being colonial in origin, it may not be best suited to the needs of the Indian population," Justice Ramana said. Speaking at an event organised

here to pay tributes to late Supreme Court judge Justice Mohan M. Shantanagoudar, he said the need of the hour is the "Indianisation of our legal system."

"When I say Indianisation, I mean the need to adapt to the practical realities of our society and to localise our justice delivery system. For example, parties from a rural place fighting a family dispute are usually made to feel out of place in the court; they do not understand arguments or pleadings which are mostly in English, a language alien to them," he added.

Further noting that these days judgments have become lengthy, the Chief Justice said it further complicates the position of the litigants.

"For parties to understand the implication of the judgment they are forced to spend more money. Courts need to be litigant-centric as they are the ultimate beneficiaries. The simplification of justice delivery should be our pressing concern. It is crucial to make justice delivery more transparent, accessible and effective," he said.

Justice Ramana said procedural barriers often undermine access to justice.

"A common man while approaching the court should not feel scared of judges and the courts; he should be able to speak the truth. It is the duty of lawyers and judges to create an environment which is comforting for litigants and other stakeholders," he said.



"We must not forget that the focal point of any justice system is the litigant, the justice seeker," he said, adding that "usage of alternative dispute mechanisms such as mediation and conciliation would go a long way in reducing

the friction between parties and would save resources. It also reduces the pendency and requirement of having lengthy arguments and judgments."

Remembering Justice Shantanagoudar who died on April 25 at a private hospital in Gurugram, where he was admitted due to a lung infection, at the age of 62, as an "extraordinary judge", the Chief Justice said these are the topics he used to discuss with him everyday.

Expressing "deep gratitude" to Shantanagoudar's contribution to Indian Judiciary and the country's jurisprudence and for his friendship, the Chief Justice said, "in losing him the country has lost a common man's Judge. I have personally lost a most

cherished friend and a valuable colleague."

Justice S Abdul Nazeer, Justice A S Bopanna, Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka, Justice BV Nagarathna, Acting Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court Satish Chandra Sharma, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, Law Minister J C Madhuswamy, several present and former judges of Supreme Court and High Court, office-bearers and members of Bar Council, among others, were present.

Late Justice Shantanagoudar's family was also present at the event.

Recalling his long association with him since a young age, Chief Minister Bommai said Shantanagoudar was a down to earth personality.

Higher investment required in agri R&D, India says at G20 agri meet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday stressed at G20 agriculture meeting that there is a need to increase investment in agricultural research and development amid the challenges of climate change and expected increase in food demand by 2030.

The G20 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting is one of the ministerial meetings organised as part of the G20 Leaders Summit 2021 to be hosted by Italy in October.

Addressing a session on the topic 'Research as a driving force behind sustainability', Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar shared that agricultural research has played a major



role in transforming India from a net food importer to exporter.

"Today with an annual production of 308 million tonnes

of food grains, India is not only in the realm of food security but is also catering to needs of other countries," he said and

added India has experienced a revolution in the field of agricultural produce due to the efficient research of scientists.

However, the demand for foodgrain is expected to rise to 350 million tonnes with likely increase in India's population to 150 crore by 2030-32. The demand for food will rise amid depleting natural resources and the challenge of climate change, he said in an official statement.

In this backdrop, the minister said, "There is a need to rethink and adapt agricultural research and development, along with increasing investment in scientific research to achieve adequate and nutritious food along with environmental sustainability."

He said research contributes significantly to the three aspects of food security availability, access and affordability.

To make the country self-reliant, concerted efforts will continue in agricultural research in areas such as genomics, digital agriculture, climate-smart technologies and methods, efficient water use equipment, development of high yielding and bio-friendly varieties, systematic production, quality and safety standards among others, he said. The minister also said the strategy to meet the increased demand revolves around increasing productivity and increasing the income of farmers.

US court sets aside proposed Trump-era rule on H-1B visa

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

A US federal judge has struck down a proposed Trump-era rule that aimed to replace the current H-1B cap lottery system with a wage-level-based selection process.

Judge Jeffrey S White of the US District Court for the Northern District of California vacated a Trump-era H-1B cap selection regulation on the grounds that then-Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf was not lawfully serving in his role at the time the regulation was promulgated.

The judge on Wednesday granted the US Chamber of Commerce's motion for summary judgment in the its lawsuit challenging the regulation, according to the court order



uploaded by the Chamber's litigation centre.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The number of H-1B visas issued each year is capped at 65,000, plus an additional 20,000 reserved for individuals with advanced degrees. The current system for selecting applications for consideration is a hybrid of first-come, first-served and a lottery.

During former president Donald Trump's final days in office, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced to do away with the traditional lottery system in deciding the successful applicants for the H-1B visas.

The USCIS had said it would prioritise wages to protect the economic interests of American workers, and better ensure that the most highly skilled foreign workers benefit from the temporary employment programme.

AEPC hails inverted duty structure decision

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) on Saturday said the decision of the GST Council to correct inverted duty structure on textiles from January 1, 2022 will lessen the tax burden on manmade fibre (MMF) fabrics and garments.

The GST Council in its latest meeting on September 17 agreed to correct inverted duty structure on footwear and textiles from January 1, 2022.

AEPC Chairman A Sakthivel said the decision will be a big breather to the industry.

"The revision will lessen the tax burden on manmade fibre (MMF) fabrics and garments," he said. He said the inverted duty structure has been an issue with the apparel industry and that the council had made

Nasscom welcomes GST Council's clarification

Nasscom on Saturday said the GST Council's clarification on scope of intermediary services will ensure that BPM exports/R&D exports and IT services-related exports are no longer denied the export status by the enforcement authorities. On Friday, GST Council's recommendations included issuance of certain circulars to remove ambiguity and legal disputes on various issues. This included clarification on scope of 'intermediary services' and clarification relating to interpretation of the

term 'merely establishment of distinct person' with reference to a section of the IGST Act 2017 for export of services. "Nasscom welcomes the decision of the GST Council to issue a circular to clarify the scope of intermediary services. We expect this to lay at rest a long pending issue for the BPM industry and ensure that BPM exports/R&D exports and IT services related exports will no longer be denied the export status by the enforcement authorities," Nasscom said.

recommendations to the government for the elimination of this anomaly that has been resulting in input tax credit accumulation blocking crucial working capital for businesses.

Inputs into the MMF fabric segment (fibre and yarn) attract a GST rate of 18 per cent and 12 per cent whereas the GST

rate on the MMF fabric is 5 per cent and that for the finished goods apparel is 5 per cent and 12 per cent, he said.

It creates a tax structure where the rate on inputs is higher than that on the outputs and this increases the effective rate of taxation of MMF fabrics and garments and violates the

principle of fibre neutrality, Sakthivel said.

He also said that the GST Council's decision to extend the validity of GST exemption on transport of goods by vessel and air from India to outside India till September 30, 2022, will partially help soften the impact of the current exorbitant freight costs.

Jute body hopeful on Tariff Commission report

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Indian Jute Mills Association is hopeful that the government will implement the long due Tariff Commission report after the recent direction by the Calcutta High Court, a senior IJMA official said on Saturday.

The IJMA, the lobby body of the jute mills, said the Calcutta High Court this month has directed the government to approve the Tariff Commission report and make payments in line with the report within November 30.

"We are hopeful that after the recent High Court direction, the government will implement the Tariff Commission report soon. It is

long due and still provisional pricing continues. Implementation of new pricing will help the industry survive," IJMA chairman Raghavendra Gupta said.

The report was supposed to be implemented by March 31.

"At present, all jute mills are surviving on an 'ad-hoc/provisional' price. It was given to them in September 2016 by the Jute Commissioner's office. The mills are suffering Rs 3,000-6,000 per tonne loss", a mill owner and former IJMA office-bearer said.

In Kharif monsoon season (KMS) and Rabi monsoon season (RMS) 2021-22, the Union government has placed an order for the supply of almost 45 lakh bales of jute bags.

Kerala seeks extension of GST compensation regime past 2022

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal on Saturday pitched for extending the GST compensation beyond June next year as he highlighted that the state is already grappling with significant revenue shortfall.

He said the state is not getting its due in the wake of the 15th Finance Commission devolution recommendations.

Kerala will be receiving GST compensation of over Rs 13,000 crore and another one-time grant of over Rs 19,000 crore in the current fiscal ending March 2022, he noted.

In case the GST compensation ends next year, then the state will face further revenue shortfall, he said and expressed hope that the compensation regime would be extended.

The regime of paying compensation to states for revenue shortfall resulting from subsidising their taxes such as VAT in the uniform national tax GST will end in June next year.

However, the cess which is currently levied on top of the GST rate on certain luxury and sin goods to fund the compensation amount for states will continue to be levied till March 2026.

Kaushik Basu shocked at manipulation of World Bank's Doing Business Ranking

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Terming allegations of manipulation of World Bank's Doing Business Ranking as 'shocking', former chief economist of World Bank Kaushik Basu said on Saturday that pressure was there from governments during his tenure, but the multilateral institution never gave in.

The World Bank Group has decided to discontinue publication of its Doing Business (DB) report on country investment climates following allegations of irregularities.



The decision was taken after a probe of data irregularities allegedly due to pressure by some top bank officials to boost China's ranking in 2017

came to light.

"The news of manipulation of World Bank's Doing Business Ranking is shocking. DB was under my charge from 2012 to 2016. There was pressure from govts. We NEVER gave in. Sad that this changed. I may add, to India's credit, I never had pressure from India's govt—current or previous," Basu said in a tweet.

He was the chief economist of World Bank from 2012 to 2016.

"After reviewing all the information available to date on 'Doing Business', including

the findings of past reviews, audits, and the report the bank released today on behalf of the board of executive directors, World Bank Group management has taken the decision to discontinue the Doing Business report," the World Bank Group had said in a statement on Thursday.

The group remains firmly committed to advancing the role of the private sector in development and providing support to governments to design the regulatory environment that supports this, it had said.

Inquiry puts ex-World Bank officials under scrutiny on China

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Former officials of the World Bank are under pressure after an investigation found that they pressured staff members of the bank to alter data on global business conditions in order to favour China and some other governments.

The World Bank said it would discontinue its "Doing Business" report in the wake of the investigation, which was conducted by the law firm WilmerHale after internal questions involving "data irregularities" in the 2018 and 2020 editions of the report and possible "ethical matters" involving bank staff.

WilmerHale's report concluded that Kristalina Georgieva, then the chief executive of the World Bank, and the office of Jim Yong Kim, then the bank's president, pres-



sured staff members to change data on China to support Beijing's ranking in the "Doing Business" report. These rankings are important to China and other developing nations because they can affect their ability to attract investment from overseas.

In a statement, Georgieva disputed the report's conclu-

sion that she was involved in pressuring World Bank staff members to appease China.

"I disagree fundamentally with the findings and interpretations of the Investigation of Data Irregularities as it relates to my role in the World Bank's Doing Business report of 2018," her statement said.

The World Bank, based in

Washington, is among the world's largest sources of development funding. "Doing Business," which evaluates a country's tax burdens, bureaucratic obstacles, regulatory system and other business conditions, is used by some governments to try to attract investment.

The report ranks countries on such factors as how straightforward or burdensome it is to register a business, legally enforce a contract, resolve a bankruptcy, obtain an electrical connection or acquire construction permits.

Timothy Ash, a strategist at the fixed income manager BlueBay Asset Management, said he "cannot overestimate" the importance of the Doing Business report for banks and businesses trying to assess risk in a particular country.

"Any quantitative model of

country risk has built this in to ratings," Ash said. "Money and investments are allocated on the back of this series."

He added that if an analyst at a bank or rating agency had done what is alleged, "I wager they would be fired and would be subject to regulatory investigation."

China has tried over the past two decades to increase its influence over international institutions, including the IMF and the World Health Organisation, and their policies.

The changes made to the 2018 "Doing Business" report followed lobbying by Beijing for a better ranking and came ahead of a campaign by the World Bank to raise capital in which Beijing was expected to play a "key role," the report said. China is the bank's third-largest shareholder after the United States and Japan.

Oil cos get good response to ethanol procurement tender

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned fuel retailing firms have received an "overwhelming" response to the tender they floated for buying ethanol for mixing in petrol, a government statement said on Saturday.

"The first Expression of Interest (EOI) for signing long-term agreement with upcoming dedicated ethanol plants for supply of ethanol has received an overwhelming response, with 197 bidders participating in the same," it said without giving details of the quantity manufacturers have committed to supply.

The EOI was published by BPCIL on behalf of OMCs on August 27, and it opened on September 17.

Sindhudurg Airport receives aerodrome licence from DGCA

Sindhudurg Airport in the Konkan region of Maharashtra has received aerodrome licence from the DGCA, paving way for commercial flight operations from the facility. On September 7, Union minister



Narayan Rane had said the Chipli airport in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra would be inaugurated by Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on October 9. Earlier the Shiv Sena, which is ruling the state in alliance with Nationalist Congress Party and Congress, had announced a similar programme by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. Come up at an investment of Rs 800 crore the first green airport at Chipli in Sindhudurg district, the state is expected to bring economic boom for the region with lots of employment and self-entrepreneurship opportunities for local people, the developer IRB Sindhudurg Airport Pvt Ltd said in a release. IRB Sindhudurg Airport Pvt Ltd is a special purpose vehicle of IRB Infrastructure Developer that was formed and mandated with the task of project development and operations. "IRB Sindhudurg Airport Pvt Ltd, an SPV of IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd, has received aerodrome licence from the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)," the airport operator said in the release. IRB is happy to achieve yet another milestone in the current year and see the airport receive licence to operate after successful completion, said Virendra D Mhaiskar, CMD of the company. "With a concession period of over 90 years and a compelling regional proposition, it offers meaningful avenues of growth," he said.

Explained: Why World Bank is under fire over set of rankings

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Under fire for allegations that it bowed to pressure from China and other governments, the World Bank has dropped a popular report that ranked countries by how welcoming they are to businesses.

The report is important to many companies and investors around the world: They use the World Bank's "Doing Business" report to help decide where to invest money, open manufacturing plants or sell products. Eager to attract investment, countries around the world, especially developing economies, have sought to improve their rankings in the World Bank's report.

Sometimes, nations would

pursue substantive policy changes — by, for example, making it easier for businesses to pay taxes, obtain loans or enforce contracts. Sometimes, they would take a more aggressive tack: Like pushy high schoolers cajoling a teacher for a higher grade, they would lobby the World Bank to provide a higher score on the "Doing Business" report.

Countries that have scored a high ranking have often touted their success. In 2017, for example, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to Twitter to celebrate India's big improvement in 2017. Rwanda's country's development board employs a "Doing Business economist."

But the World Bank has long been accused of using

sloppy methodology and of succumbing to political pressure in producing the "Doing Business" rankings. This week, the bank dropped the report after investigators had reviewed internal complaints about "data irregularities" in the 2018 and 2020 editions of "Doing Business" and possible "ethical matters" involving World Bank staff members.

In an investigation conducted for the bank, the law firm WilmerHale concluded that staff members fudged the data to make China look better under pressure from Kristalina Georgieva, then the CEO of the World Bank and now head of the IMF, and the office of Jim Yong Kim, then the World Bank's president.

What is the World Bank?

Founded in 1944, the 189-country World Bank makes grants and loans, often to finance big public works projects, and offers economic advice, mostly to developing nations. The bank, based in Washington, has also pledged to reduce poverty around the world.

What is "Doing Business" report?

In 2002, the bank introduced the report, whose annual rankings highlight which countries have adopted policies favorable to businesses and which haven't — and how much they're improving or regressing. The bank, which collects information from about tens of thousands of accountants, lawyers and other

professionals in 190 countries, assesses how easy it is to do such things as start a business, obtain a construction permit or connect to the electrical grid. Last year, New Zealand ranked No. 1 and Somalia No. 190. The United States was No. 6.

Why was the report important?

Its rankings have been interpreted by the media and by investors as a proxy for how much countries welcome foreign investment.

"Any quantitative model of country risk has built this into ratings," says Timothy Ash, an emerging market strategist at the fixed income manager BlueBay Asset Management. "Money and investments are allocated on the back of this series."

Why did 'Doing Business' come under pressure?

Questions surrounding the report date back to at least 2018, when Paul Romer, then the chief economist of the World Bank, who would go on to win a Nobel Prize in economics for his earlier work, resigned after complaining about how "Doing Business treated" Chile.

As a result of methodological tinkering, Chile plunged in the rankings while socialist Michelle Bachelet occupied the presidency, rebounded under conservative Sebastian Pinera, then slumped again when Bachelet returned to power. The ups and downs occurred despite little actual change in policy.



the pioneer agenda

FROM THE INSIDE



Taming the dragon

Blinkers Off serves as an important tool in understanding that the threat Beijing poses is multi-dimensional, & response to it should also be the same

8



Mu-tation worry

Even as cases of the COVID-19 delta variant continue to spike the world over, a new variant, Mu, has become a variant

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You have to be the best of whatever you are, but successful, cool actresses come in all shapes and sizes
—Jessica Alba



If streaming services are looking at making profits in India, they should adapt to regional realities, start thinking creatively and take a leaf out of what has worked globally, writes AJAYYA KUMAR

The Covid-19 induced lockdown might have given a shot in the arm for streaming services, but making substantial profits in the Indian market still remains an elusive dream for most of them. In the financial year 2020, Netflix India recorded a revenue of Rs 924 Crore and managed to eke out a marginal profit of Rs 9 crore. The streaming giant's overall profits globally for the same year stood at a whopping \$2.8 billion.

Disney+Hotstar in India, on the other hand, recorded revenue to the tune of Rs 1629 Crore with losses amounting to Rs 362 crore. Hotstar is currently India's largest streaming platform with a subscriber base of 300 million.

According to an analysis by Media Partners Asia, India's online video market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 26 per cent over 2020-25 to reach US\$4.5 billion. Another report by Boston Consulting Group notes that the OTT video streaming market alone in India is set to touch US\$5 billion by 2023. And for a share of this pie contend not just Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+Hotstar, but around 30 streaming platforms including AltBalaji, Zee5, SonyLiv, MXPlayer, ManoramaMax, Neestream, and so on.

The right revenue model still remains an enigma, thanks to the uniqueness of the Indian market. There are no proven models in the Indian media industry to show that subscription-led growth is if at all possible. Be it the newspapers or entertainment channels, the advertisement brings in the lion's share of the revenue. While Netflix and Amazon Prime banks entirely on subscriber revenue, Disney+Hotstar which has a base of both paid and unpaid subscribers see its share of ad revenue coming in through the advertisements shown to the unpaid subscribers. While it is yet to be cracked which of these models would ultimately work, there are few things streaming platforms could work on meanwhile.

EXPLORE THE UNEXPLORED

On June 1, 2021, a review of the Malayalam Movie 'Joji', starring Fahadh Fazil and directed by Dileesh Pothan, appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine. This wasn't the first time the international magazine reviewed an Indian movie. In fact, on April 15 it had published Richard Brody's take on *Duvidha*, the 1973 film by Mani Kaul. But *Joji* was different. For one it was a regional language movie. And rarely has international media recognised non-Hindi movies, probably with the exception of the works of Satyajit Ray, as Indian movies. To take a review seriously or not is one thing. But to me, it was the beginning of a change; Undeniably the world is starting to take note of Indian regional content, especially from the South. Now, this is a moment to be seized; not only by the language movie industry but also by the OTT players that are looking to turn profitable in the Indian market.

If *Joji* premiered on Amazon Prime, *The Great Indian Kitchen*, yet another Malayalam movie that garnered critical acclaim from across the world, made its first appearance on Neestream, a regional OTT platform. The movie later became available on Amazon Prime too. *Nayattu* and *Jagame Thandhiram* streaming on Netflix, *C U Soon*, *Kuruthi* and *Karnan* streaming on Amazon Prime and *Netrikann* streaming on Disney+Hotstar are some of the notable movies from regional productions that premiered on international OTT platforms during the pandemic season. Some of the other notable Malayalam films currently streaming include *Aarkkariyam* and *Santhoshathinte Onnam Rahasyam*, while the Tamil movie industry came together to produce the anthology *Navarasam* now running on Netflix.

Meanwhile what particularly stands out is the glaring absence of any noteworthy productions from the behemoth that is Bollywood. Clearly, it is the regional language movies that have helped the streaming platforms to offer a diverse range of content and cash in on the subscription surge during the pandemic. This is a signboard. The first step towards profitability for OTT platforms is to spot the industries that are nimble, agile, dynamic and quick to adapt to the changing socio-economic circumstances. But the efforts shouldn't stop at simply sourcing the content. Given the diversity of movie industries in India, streaming platforms are looking at a cornucopia of possibilities.

Let's start from the South. Given the high literacy rates in the Southern states, OTT platforms are looking at a large market for their English and international content. While *The New Yorker* might have reviewed *Joji* this year, what is to be noted is that there already exists an international audience for Malayalam movies and a Malayali audience for international movies, thanks to IFFK and various other film festivals.

Then there is the large Indian diaspora outside the country. According to a report by the United Nations, India has the world's largest diaspora population — 18 million — living outside the country. A large part of them is Malayalis, Tamils, and Punjabis. In other words, by exploring regional content, streaming platforms would be striking a goldmine.

OFFER MORE DIVERSITY, LEARN FROM WHAT HAS WORKED INTERNATIONALLY

Streaming services in India should take a leaf out of what has worked internationally for their global counterparts.

According to news reports, French show *Lupin* streamed on Netflix held the number one spot in countries like Brazil, Argentina, Germany, Italy and Spain and the number two spot in the US. This only means one thing — out there, there seems to be a genuine and ever-increasing demand for premium non-Anglophone content. In this sense, India is a

“ACCORDING TO AN ANALYSIS BY MEDIA PARTNERS ASIA, INDIA'S ONLINE VIDEO MARKET IS PROJECTED TO GROW AT A CAGR OF 26 PER CENT OVER 2020-25 TO REACH US\$4.5 BILLION. ANOTHER REPORT BY BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP NOTES THAT THE OTT VIDEO STREAMING MARKET ALONE IN INDIA IS SET TO TOUCH US\$5 BILLION BY 2023. AND FOR A SHARE OF THIS PIE CONTENT NOT JUST NETFLIX, AMAZON PRIME, AND DISNEY+HOTSTAR, BUT AROUND 30 STREAMING PLATFORMS INCLUDING ALTBALAJI, ZEE5, SONYLIV, MXPLAYER, MANORAMAMAX, NEESTREAM, AND SO ON

”

goldmine for streaming services with its linguistic diversity.

But linguistic diversity alone doesn't serve the purpose. Barring a handful of shows or movies, Indian content has not been able to create much of a ripple in the international arena, owing to the relatively poor quality of the content.

Now here is something to consider. One of the features that have set Netflix a class apart from its competitors globally is its huge investment in original content. Reports suggest that in 2019 about 85% of its new spending was set apart for original content, more than any of its competitors dared to. In India too Netflix has taken a lead by setting up its first global post-production facility in Mumbai.

Producing original content of all hues and (Indian) languages with strict quality checks for a pan-Indian and international audience could work magic for Indian streaming services. Keep experimenting and do not hesitate to disrupt your own revenue/content models if need be. Because now this is a bus that OTT platforms cannot afford to miss.

ROPE IN THE STALWARTS

What streaming platforms should further aim is to bring traditional producers into their folds. If the initial focus of OTT platforms was to license existing content, the pandemic has changed their course of action to producing original content and premiering movies. But there is still a large section of producers who are wary of these platforms. These traditional producers have been deciding the ways of the industry for a long time. Many of them are actors and even superstars controlling production, distribution, and the overall dynamics of the industry. Alienating them or even appearing as a threat to their business would in no way bode well for the new-age players.

But if streaming platforms could come up with ways to accommodate them and make a business model around it, it would be a win-win for all. OTT services so far have more or less been working with the new crop of movie makers from the regional cinema and have been able to successfully give shape to new movie aesthetics and language. Roping in the traditional players would be the cherry on top and will help attract a wider segment of the audience. For example, consider streaming services tying up with AMMA, the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists. Such a partnership would mean that now the streaming services would get to enjoy the benefits of the clout wielded by the stalwarts of the industry, while the industry reaps the benefits of being in alliance with platforms that are international, sophisticated, and professional. If streaming services this way get a dip at the massive pool of talent, for artists and technicians it would mean more work even during crisis times like the pandemic and therefore more stability.

Such partnerships would also help to usher in a world where theatres do not view OTT platforms as a threat. It would open up a new world of complementary existence where theatres would still benefit from the rush during the initial release and for sustained viewing and wider reach, there would be the OTTs. And no doubt, the ultimate winner would be the movie itself which would get the grand release it deserves without worrying about 'running' days being cut short as new movies come in.

In a nutshell, being creative in the ways it associates with the movie industry and its stakeholders should be the way forward for OTT services.

EXPERIMENT WITH DYNAMIC CONTENT

While all that is said about static content, what still remains uncharted territory for streaming services is dynamic content. Exploring live content like music concerts and stand-up comedy will help the OTT players further their reach and bring in a new audience who have been deprived of live shows during the pandemic. It is in fact surprising that such programmes are still largely hosted on video communication platforms like Zoom given that the pandemic has been the perfect opportunity for the Netflixes and Amazon Primes of the world to experiment with it.

If you are further looking to expand your reach, ever thought of news and the popularity of news programmes in India? Sure, there may be regulatory issues for OTT channels to broadcast news as of now. But, learn from the radio. In India, All India Radio holds the right to broadcast news and current affairs programmes, and private broadcasting stations are prohibited from airing the same. But several FM stations have found workarounds in the form of programmes that are satirical takes on current affairs or other fun variations which are essentially not news programmes, but yet manage to pass on the news to the audience. To sum it up, be creative. If OTT platforms could come up with shows similar to that of 'Last Week Tonight with John Oliver' it is bound to capture the attention of a huge section of the audience.

There is also a growing audience for art and science content. Although streaming services have covered this to an extent, to make it a more balanced mix would be a welcome move.

All that said and done, ultimately the success and profitability of OTT platforms would depend on how well they can gel with our lifestyles. Movies and theatres succeeded by doing the same, by being our oases of entertainment and our weekly escape from reality. Streaming services should pull all stops to replicate the same and leave no stone unturned in this journey.

The writer is an ethical Investor, start-up mentor, art curator and author

Mu-tation worry

Even as cases of the COVID-19 delta variant continue to spike the world over, a new variant, Mu, has become a variant of interest for the WHO. This new strain appears to have mutations with the potential to evade immunity provided by a previous COVID-19 infection or vaccination. Could Mu be a variant of concern? SUPRIYA RAMESH speaks with experts to tell you more

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe last year, there has been no let up — either in the number of cases globally nor in the emergence of new variants. When the second wave hit India, there was talk of how the third wave would affect the children more. But now, it appears that there are more worries ahead. A new variant — Mu — that had been detected in Colombia, South America is the new worry — not just for India but for the entire world.

The good part is that the Government has said that the variant has not been found in India yet, there is no telling when it may enter the country and wreak havoc.

The country reported its first COVID-19 case in Kerala on January 27, 2020, and the country has been cuffed by the virus ever since and coming out of this pandemic dungeon looks only like a distant dream. Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Delta variant as the Variant of Concern (VOC) on May 6, 2021, the country has seen a new wave of cases and death worldwide, slowing down the nation's recovery, threatening economic stability and severe social and political impacts.

The new variant is getting more attention now as it has started to spread around parts of the country and it is something to make a note of. Mu is not only being seen in high numbers or high percentages but it is being detected in different places throughout the US with highest prevalence of the variant in Colombia currently.

It carries a cluster of mutations in the genome of COVID in the genetic structure. According to the WHO, it is still a Variant of Interest (VOI) and no samples have been detected in India yet.

"From Colombia it has spread to other South American countries such as Ecuador (13%) and Chile (around 40%). The Mu variant has now been detected in 43 countries including the United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Japan, Ecuador, Canada and parts of Europe. So far, it has not been detected in India," says Dr Rahul Pandit, Member, COVID-19 Task Force, Maharashtra Government.

He further adds that there are more than 4700 cases of the Mu variant worldwide. Although with 2000 cases, the US has recorded the highest number of Mu cases, it is not yet regarded as an immediate threat.

"A VOI becomes a VOC when we see documented evidence that there is an increase in transmissibility of the virus, it is more dangerous, have more resistance to vaccines, and higher infectivity rate," says Dr Ankita Baidya, Consultant, Infectious Diseases, Manipal Hospital, Dwarka, New Delhi.

Despite making its first presence in January 2021, and being around since, the Mu variant doesn't seem to be as bad as Delta, which is the dominant variant across most of the world. But Mu has mutations which possess the potential of evading the protection we get from the COVID vaccines.

However, the concern is that it can lead to immune escape phenomena in the form that the existing antibodies through natural infection might not be able to protect us from this infection. "When we see such novel strains circulating in the world, it becomes a concern especially with so many mutations in it that can evade our immunity and can also reinfect a person who has already recovered from the virus from some different strain," Baidya tells you.

The WHO has said, "The Mu variant has a constellation of mutations that indicate potential properties of immune escape. Preliminary evidence shows that these mutations may allow it to escape vaccine- and convalescent serum-induced antibodies, similar to the Beta variant."

Dr Shomeshwar Singh, Lead Consultant, ENT, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital says that though the reports have suggested its



decline in most of the world apart from South America lately, we have to watch carefully how this strain spreads.

The exact infection rate as of now is not well established and requires more data because there have only been sporadic cases. "With the mutation that it is carrying, there are chances of having a more severe infection from this strain as it is showing some sort of immune escape phenomena, which means that the previous antibody is not working and it can result in higher infectivity rate," says Baidya.

Talking about the efficacy of vaccines, there is still a lot of research to be done in order to confirm whether the existing vaccines will be effective against the Mu strain or not. Simultaneously, the risk that it can lower the vaccine's effect is also present.

Baidya says that the signs and symptoms of the mu strain are very much similar to the Delta variant. It also has a good amount of gastrointestinal symptoms along with the normal viral symptoms of upper respiratory tract that is the cough and cold, mild fever, loose motions, abdominal symptoms, nausea and dyspepsia. There can also be some headache, leg pain and body pain as with the other viral symptoms.

- A report from England's public health agency last month suggested the mu variant might be as resistant to vaccines as the worrisome beta variant first seen in South Africa, but said more real-world data was needed
- WHO officials said the mu variant appears to be rising in some countries in South America, but that the delta variant still spreads far more easily
- The mu variant doesn't seem to be

spreading quickly: It accounts for fewer than 1% of COVID-19 cases globally

- In Colombia, it may be responsible for about 39% of cases
- Scientists monitor emerging COVID-19 variants based on suspicious genetic changes and then look for evidence to determine whether the new version is more infectious or causes more severe illness
- Viruses evolve constantly and many new variants often fade away

Currently, only symptomatic treatment is given for any variant, similar to that of existing strains. The treatment is mostly designed according to the severity of the disease whether it is mild, moderate or severe.

Many of us are wondering how quickly the virus mutates and with every new variant emerg-

ing, recovering from this deadly pandemic seems difficult and looks like a far-fetched dream. On the other hand, we are learning to live with the pandemic and now consider it as a part of life. The virus will continue to undergo mutation in the genetic structure to evade the immune response, to evade the antibody

pressure and to evade the antiviral pressure. The new mutations may be less or more severe than the existing strains but at the same time we should not stop from taking adequate infection control precautions like wearing a mask, practising hand hygiene and maintaining social distancing. "Today, the world is a smaller place since people travel far and wide in a matter of hours, this helps the virus spread. We need to exercise carefully drawn up social isolation and quarantine measures to fight the virus spread. Vaccination is very important," Singh tells you.

The Mu variant has severe mutations such as T95I, Y144S, Y145N, R346K, E484K, N501Y, D614G, P681H, Y144T, K417N and D950N in the spike protein. Some of these mutations have been detected in the variants of concern. The N501Y and P681H mutations are also present in the Alpha variant (B.1.1.7, first detected in the UK) and have been linked to rapid transmission. The N501Y mutation is also present in the Beta and Gamma variants of concern (VOC). The E484K and K417N mutations, which also occur in the Beta variant (B.1.351, first detected in South Africa) are associated with immune escape. However, the significance of other mutations is not yet known.

‘To prevent new variants, get swiftly vaccinated’

The World Health Organization (WHO) has added a fifth variant of interest (VOI)— B.1.621.1 and labelled it — Mu variant — on August 30, 2021. The other four present VOIs are Eta (B.1.525), Iota (B.1.526), Kappa (B.1.617.1) and Lambda (C.37).

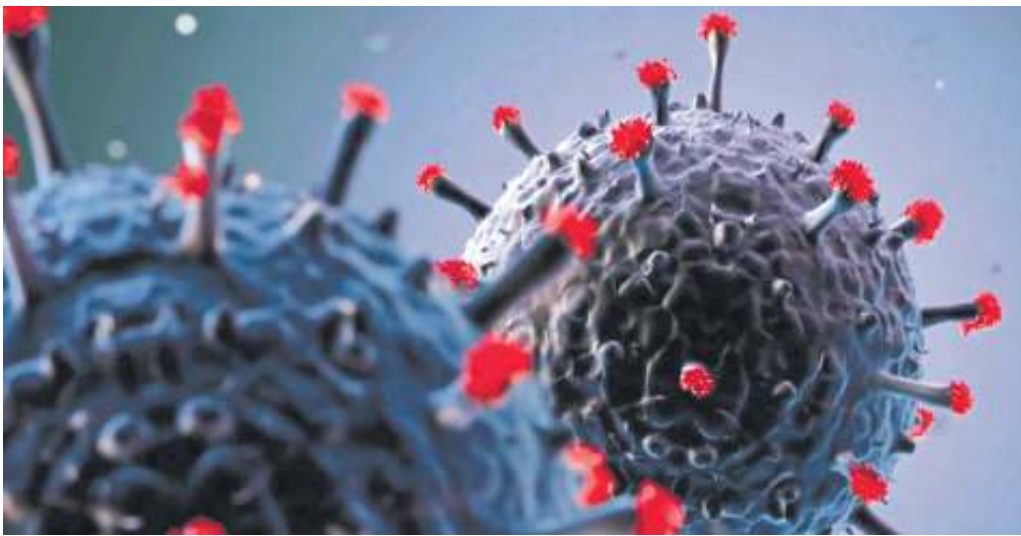
The Mu variant was first identified in Colombia in South America in January 2021, where Mu has been detected in 39 per cent of the samples analysed. From there, it has spread to other South American countries such as Ecuador (13 per cent) and Chile (around 40 per cent).

The Mu variant has now been detected in 43 countries including the US, the UK, South Korea, Japan, Ecuador, Canada and parts of Europe. So far, it has not been detected in India.

According to Dr Dr Rahul Pandit, Member, COVID-19 Task Force, Maharashtra Government there are more than 4,700 cases of the Mu variant worldwide. Although with 2000 cases, the US has recorded the highest number of Mu cases, it is not yet regarded as an immediate threat.

Last month, the WHO has said that the Mu variant has a constellation of mutations that indicate potential properties of immune escape. "Preliminary evidence shows that these mutations may allow it to escape vaccine- and convalescent serum-induced antibodies, similar to the Beta variant," Dr Pandit says.

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The Delta variant (B.1.617.2) continues to be the predominant variant across the world and the major cause of resurgence of cases

in many parts of the world.

At present, the Mu variant accounts for only 0.1 per cent of cases globally, even though it has been around since January this year.

Although it is not a variant of concern (VOC) yet, it is being closely monitored to detect any changes that would make it more transmissible than the delta variant, cause more severe disease and make vaccines less effective. If this happens, it may be re-categorised as a VOC.

"The best strategy to prevent emergence of new variants is to swiftly vaccinate as many people as possible. The larger the vaccinated population, the less the vulnerable population for the virus to infect and mutate," Dr Pandit says.



UK eases rules for vaccinated; benefit for India-UK route

The UK government on Friday announced a major relaxation of international travel rules for vaccinated people coming in and out of England, with long-haul routes between India and the UK set to benefit.

From October 4, the current traffic light system of red, amber and green countries based on levels of COVID-19 risk will be scrapped and replaced with one red list only.

The scrapping of an amber list, which is what India is currently on, means reduced cost burden for travellers - especially for the Indian people vaccinated in the UK - related to compul-

sory PCR tests.

However, an expanded list of countries whose vaccines are recognised in England does not include India, which means that Indians vaccinated with Covishield - the Serum Institute of India produced Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine - would still be required to undergo a pre-departure PCR test and further tests on landing in the UK.

From October 4, travellers from 17 additional countries with eligible vaccines, including Japan, Singapore and Malaysia, will no longer need to take pre-departure PCR tests for travelling into England.

100 world leaders to meet for UN event

Some 100 world leaders descend on New York next week in a partial return of the annual UN extravaganza despite Covid concerns, with progress sought on pressing global problems -- starting with the pandemic. The UN General Assembly will also look to build momentum to reach an ambitious climate agreement and seek unity after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, in the shadow of high tension between the United States and China. "We need to re-establish confidence. The current geopolitical division in the world is an obstacle," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told AFP ahead of the summit. The world "is really in a very dangerous situation," he said. "We need to sound an alarm to wake up political leaders."



'Won't sell UAE villa...': Singer Honey Singh on Court order

Singer Honey Singh, after recording his statement at a Delhi Court on Friday, assured the court that he will not create any third party rights on his UAE Property. The court vacated the status quo order issued on September 15, 2021.

On the last date of hearing, the court had restrained Honey Singh from alienating or creating any third party interest owned directly or through his companies and had directed him to file all the documents of his companies registered abroad along with other details. The same was not filed on Friday by Honey Singh.

iPhone 13 pre-order begins in India

iPhone 13 series was launched earlier this month. The range includes iPhone 13 mini, iPhone 13, iPhone 13 Pro, and iPhone 13 Pro Max. All the phones are set to go up for pre-orders starting today, September 17, with sales starting from September 24. Alongside India, the pre-orders for the iPhone 13 series will go live later today in Canada, China, Dubai, Singapore, the UK, the US, and more than 30 other countries

and regions around the world. iPhone 13 mini and iPhone 13 come with dual rear cameras whereas iPhone 13 Pro and iPhone 13 Pro Max feature triple rear cameras.

Here is a low-down on the prices of iPhone 13 mini, iPhone

13, iPhone 13 Pro, iPhone 13 Pro Max phones in different countries, including India.

iPhone 13 series price

The new iPhone 13 mini is priced starting at Rs. 69,900, Rs. 79,900, and Rs. 99,900 for the 128GB, 256GB, and 512GB storage options, respectively. iPhone 13 is priced in India starting at Rs. 79,900, Rs. 89,900, and Rs. 1,09,900 for the 128GB, 256GB, and 512GB storage options, respectively.



US Tycoon Robert Durst guilty of best friend's murder

US real estate scion Robert Durst was Friday convicted of killing his best friend to prevent her talking to police about his wife's disappearance.

Durst, a multi-millionaire who was the subject of explosive HBO documentary "The Jinx," had always denied that he shot Susan Berman in the back of the head in 2000 at her Beverly Hills home.

But a jury in Los Angeles took a total of just eight hours to find the 78-year-old guilty of the execution-style slaying.

Prosecutors had said he murdered crime writer Berman in December 2000 to prevent her from being questioned by New York police over the disappearance of his wife Kathleen two decades earlier.

Berman, the daughter of a Las Vegas mobster, had acted as a spokeswoman for Durst after he became a suspect in Kathleen's disappearance. Durst, an estranged

member of one of New York's wealthiest and most powerful real estate dynasties, was never charged in his wife's case.

He was arrested in March 2015 in a New Orleans hotel room in connection with Berman's murder, hours before the final episode of the HBO documentary "The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst" aired.

In the documentary's stunning finale, Durst is heard muttering to himself, "There it is, you're caught" and "Killed them all, of course" -- apparently unaware that a microphone remained switched on while he used the restroom.

The series also delved into the 2001 death of Durst's neighbor in Texas, Morris Black, who was found dismembered.

Durst admitted the dismemberment, but claimed the killing was self-defense. He was acquitted.

Durst testified for 14 days in a trial that gripped local media.

'UNACCEPTABLE': FRANCE RECALLS US, AUSTRALIA ENVOYS OVER SUBMARINE ROW



France on Friday recalled its ambassadors to the United States and Australia for consultations in a ferocious row over the scrapping of a submarine contract, an unprecedented step that revealed the extent of French anger against its allies.

President Emmanuel Macron

ordered the recalling of the envoys after Canberra ditched a deal to buy French submarines in favour of US vessels, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said.

Le Drian said in a statement that the decision was made to "immediately" recall the two French ambassadors due to "the exceptional seri-

ousness of the announcements made on September 15 by Australia and the United States."

The abandonment of the ocean-class submarine project that Australia and France had been working on since 2016 constituted "unacceptable behaviour among allies and partners," the minister said.

Satyarthi appointed UN sustainable development goals advocate

UN chief Antonio Guterres on Friday appointed Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi as new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Advocate ahead of the start of the 76th UN General Assembly.

Along with Satyarthi, STEM activist Valentina Munoz Rabanal, Microsoft President Brad Smith and K-pop superstars BLACKPINK were appointed as new SDG Advocates, said a press release issued by the UN.

Satyarthi has fought tirelessly for decades against child labour, slavery and trafficking. "We are at a pivotal moment. The choices we make now could put us

Taliban say Afghan boys' school to reopen, no mention of girls



Afghan schools will open for boys from Saturday, the new Taliban ministry of education said in a statement that gave no indication of when girls might be able to go back to their classes.

More than a month after the movement seized the capital Kabul, most educational institutions have remained closed as the Taliban have struggled to reopen the economy and restore normal life in the cities.

At some of the schools that have managed to operate, girls up to the sixth grade have attended, and women students have gone to uni-

versity classes. But high schools for girls have been closed.

Taliban officials have said they will not replicate the fundamentalist policies of the previous Taliban government, which banned girls' education, and they have promised that girls will be able to study so long as they do so in segregated classrooms.

While the Taliban did not order schools to close after their takeover, the movement has said the security situation meant that many activities for women and girls were not yet possible, and the latest statement did not mention girls at all.

WHO emergency approval for Covaxin delayed till Oct 5

World Health Organisation's (WHO) approval for the emergency use authorisation (EUA) to COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin, developed by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, is likely to be delayed till October 5.

As per WHO, the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) will be meeting on October 5 to granting EUA to Covaxin.

Hanna Nohynek, SAGE

member will be introducing session objective setting, an update on regulatory decisions and an overview of Working Group deliverables.

The session will recommend EUA based on the clinical data on Covaxin from phase 1, 2, 3 trial and post-marketing studies on safety, immunogenicity, efficacy and effectiveness. It will update on global, regional and country-level plans for vaccine safety monitoring.



'New' dark energy could solve Universe expansion mystery

Cosmologists have found signs that a second type of dark energy -- the ubiquitous but enigmatic substance that is pushing the current Universe's expansion to accelerate -- might have existed in the first 300,000 years after the Big Bang.

Two separate studies -- both posted on the arXiv preprint server in the past week -- have detected a tentative first trace of this 'early dark energy' in data collected between 2013 and 2016 by the Atacama Cosmology Telescope (ACT) in Chile. If the findings are confirmed, they could help to solve a long-standing conundrum surrounding data about the early Universe, which seem to be incompatible with the rate of cosmic expansion measured today. But the data are preliminary and don't show definitively whether this form of dark energy really existed.

"There are a number of reasons to be careful to take this as a discovery of new physics," says Silvia Galli, a cosmologist at the Paris Institute of Astrophysics. The authors of both preprints -- one posted by the ACT team, and the other by an independent group -- admit that the data are not yet strong enough to detect

early dark energy with high confidence. But they say that further observations from the ACT and another observatory, the South Pole Telescope in Antarctica, could provide a more stringent test soon. "If this really is true -- if the early Universe really did feature early dark energy -- then we should see a strong signal," says Colin Hill, a co-author of the ACT team's paper who is a cosmologist at Columbia University in New York City. Both the ACT and the South Pole Telescope are designed to map the cosmic microwave background (CMB), primordial radiation sometimes described as the afterglow of the Big Bang. The CMB is one of the pillars of cosmologists' understanding of the Universe. By mapping subtle variations in the CMB across the sky, researchers have found compelling evidence for the 'standard model of cosmology'. This model describes the evolution of a Universe containing three primary ingredients: dark energy; the equally mysterious dark matter, which is the primary cause of the formation of galaxies; and ordinary matter, which accounts for less than 5% of the Universe's total mass and energy.