

India Bulletin

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Gas station manager arrested and charged with billing fraudulent fuel charges. **Page 4**

Indian rocket fails to launch



An Indian rocket carrying a powerful earth observation satellite failed to launch. **Page 10**

Shilpa Shetty returns to show



Shilpa Shetty Kundra returns to show a month after her husband Raj Kundra's arrest. **Page 12**

India hails 'Lord's Miracle'



Indian cricket team led by Virat Kohli pulled off a spectacular victory against England in the second test at Lord's. **Page 20**

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Afghan crisis: Reassurances from Taliban, but fearful Afghans look for the exits



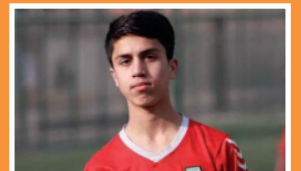
PM Modi in constant touch with officials over evacuation of Indians

Taliban in 'Existential Crisis' Over Role in World: Biden



India very important in dealing with Afghan crisis, says UK

Afghan footballer dies in fall from plane at Kabul airport



NEW DELHI - The Taliban have agreed to allow "safe passage" from Afghanistan for civilians struggling to join a U.S.-directed airlift from the capital, President Joe Biden's national security adviser said Tuesday, although a timetable for completing the evacuation of Americans, Afghan allies and others has yet to be worked out with the country's new rulers.

Jake Sullivan acknowledged reports that some civilians were encountering resistance — "being turned away or pushed back or even beaten" — as they tried to reach the Kabul international airport. But he said "very large numbers" were reaching the airport and the problem of the others was being taken up with the Taliban, whose stunningly swift takeover of the country on Sunday plunged the U.S. evacuation effort into chaos, confusion and violence.

Pentagon officials said that after interruptions on Monday, the airlift was back on track and being accelerated despite weather problems, amid regular communication with Taliban leaders. Additional U.S. troops arrived and more were on the way, with a total of more than 6,000 expected to be involved in securing the airport in coming days.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been in constant touch



Hundreds of people gather near a US Air Force C-17 transport plane at a perimeter at the international airport in Kabul.

with the officials over the situation concerning the evacuation of Indians from Afghanistan and was taking stock of the situation till late at night on Monday, sources said.

He was updated when the flight took off to Afghanistan and brought Indian 120 people, including the Indian ambassador and embassy staff to Jamnagar airbase in Gujarat.

The sources said that the Prime Minister instructed that adequate arrangements be made to ensure food for all those who

came to Jamnagar.

They said India parked its C-17 aircraft, which was on Tuesday used for evacuating Indians from Afghanistan, at Ayni Air Base in Tajikistan as there was a huge rush at Kabul airport

The Indian aircraft were on standby at Ayni Air Base and C-17 aircraft flew to Kabul when cleared by the US which is controlling Kabul Airport.

The sources said India is also exploring options to hire charter planes to evacuate more Indians from Afghanistan.

They said that the Indian Embassy in Kabul is not closed and local staff is providing consular services.

More than 1,650 people have applied for their return to India, the sources said.

Taliban entered Kabul on Sunday and took control of the presidential palace.

India has been issuing periodic travel and security advisories for all Indian nationals in Afghanistan, given the deteriorating security situation in the country.

Thought of the Week: "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination." - Jimmy Dean

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Indian media cheer court order putting new IT rules on hold



Some Indian media on Monday cheered a court order over the weekend which put on hold a part of new rules seeking to regulate content on digital news websites, calling the move significant for press freedom in India.

By Sankalp Phartiyal

NEW DELHI - Some Indian media on Monday cheered a court order over the weekend which put on hold a part of new rules seeking to regulate content on digital news websites, calling the move significant for press freedom in India.

The Bombay High Court put on hold the implementation of rules that digital news media would have to compulsorily follow the code of conduct laid down by the Press Council of

India, a self-regulating press watchdog, and the country's cable TV code.

The court ruled following petitions filed by a news website and a journalist.

It also put on hold a three-tier regulatory structure for digital news media including an oversight mechanism by the federal government, a rule which sparked concerns it would curb the ability of news outlets to report independently and was seen by many as part of government efforts to rein in the media.

The broad reach of the 2021 rules "bring about a chilling effect" on the freedom of speech and expression of the media, the court said, adding that the rules also go beyond the scope of India's Information Technology Act.

"The Bombay High Court order staying the most obnoxious part of the government's new IT Rules as they apply to digital news media is a shot in the arm for press freedom," said Sidharth Varadarajan, the founding editor of independent news

website The Wire.

"The government was attempting to pressgang digital news into an official straitjacket but the court has rightly put a halt to this process."

A final hearing in the case is scheduled for Sept. 27.

Mumbai resumes rail services as part of wider easing

MUMBAI - Authorities in India's financial capital Mumbai have almost fully resumed suburban rail services for the first time in more than a year, as part of a wider easing of COVID-19 restrictions, as the pace of infections declined.

Previously, only essential workers were allowed to use the trains, but those who are fully vaccinated were allowed on board trains from Sunday.

Parks, seafronts and playgrounds were also allowed to stay open for all until 10 p.m. local time (1630 GMT), from the previous closing hours of 4 p.m., the city's civic body said.

On Monday, the second day that trains were 95% open, crowds were sparse because of a public holiday.

In normal times, more than 8 million people travel on Mumbai's local trains every day, but services have been closed to commuters since March 2020, when the first COVID-19 related lockdown was announced in the state.

In February this year, commuters were allowed on trains at non-peak hours, before being shut again as the country faced a devastating second wave that killed hundreds of thousands.

The thriving metropolis in the largest industrial state of Maharashtra, saw a peak of 11,000 daily cases a day at the height of the second wave in May-June, but new cases have fallen after stringent lockdown curbs, with overnight infections dropping to

267 new cases and four deaths on Sunday.

India is relying on two home-produced vaccines, AstraZeneca's Covishield, which is manufactured in India by the Serum Institute of India, and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin. Almost half of India's 950 million adults have received at least one dose of the vaccine so far.

India as a whole reported 32,937 new infections of the novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours, taking its total caseload to 32.23 million, data from the federal health ministry showed on Monday.

Deaths rose overnight by 417, with the country's COVID-19 death toll standing at 431,642, the health ministry said.

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NATIONAL NEWS

Gas station manager arrested and charged with billing fraudulent fuel charges on Amtrak vehicles



NEWARK, NJ - A New Jersey gas station manager was charged this month in connection with entering fraudulent charges on fuel credit cards assigned to at least four Amtrak vehicles, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced.

Umer Hassan Mir, 39, of South Amboy, is charged by complaint with knowingly and intentionally stealing and converting to his own use approximately \$9,600 in money of a department or agency of the United States. He is also charged with making false statements to federal law enforcement. Mir appeared by videoconference this afternoon before U.S. Magistrate Judge Cathy L. Waldor and was released on \$20,000.

From July 29, 2019, through Aug. 3, 2021, while working as a manager and attendant at a Delta gas station, in Metuchen, New Jersey, Mir caused numerous fraudulent fuel charges to be entered on fuel credit cards leased by the General Services

Administration (GSA) and assigned to Amtrak vehicles. Amtrak employees using GSA vehicles are instructed to purchase regular unleaded fuel and provide accurate odometer readings when they are fueling their assigned vehicles with their fuel credit cards. The fraud was initially discovered when a GSA loss prevention technician discovered dozens of fuel credit card charges that exceeded the associated Amtrak vehicle's fuel tank capacity, along with premium fuel transactions, and non-sequential

odometer entries. Additional fuel credit cards assigned to Amtrak vehicles were discovered to have been compromised by fraudulent fuel charges at the Delta gas station.

The fraudulent charges were entered at the Delta gas station by Mir, who would manually enter information regarding fuel credit cards collected during legitimate fuel transactions electronically into the point-of-sale terminal. Immediately following certain false fuel transactions, Mir withdrew cash in the

amount of the fraudulent transaction from the gas station's cash register.

Mir made false statements to law enforcement when questioned about his presence at the gas station during one of the recent fraudulent transactions.

The theft charge carries a maximum potential penalty of 10 years in prison while the false statement charge carries a maximum potential penalty of five years. Each charge carries a maximum \$250,000 fine.

Indian national arrested for \$2.3 million elder fraud scheme

NEWARK, NJ - An Indian national was arrested this month in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain at least \$2.3 million from elderly victims by impersonating fraud prevention representatives from United States banks, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced.

Ashish Bajaj, 28, of India, is charged by complaint with conspiracy to commit wire fraud. He appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Joe L. Webster in federal court in the Middle District of North Carolina and was detained pending his initial appearance in the District of New Jersey.

"As alleged in the complaint, this defendant and his co-conspirators took advantage of elderly victims by posing as trusted bank employees who could help the victims catch fraudsters. In fact, the defendant and his co-conspirators were the fraudsters," Acting U.S. Attorney Honig stated. "Detecting and preventing elder fraud continues to be a priority for this Office, whether the defendants

reside in the United States or operate out of call centers located overseas. Together with our law enforcement partners, we will track them down and bring them to justice."

"Unfortunately, it has become a regular occurrence for our citizens to be duped into giving up their hard-earned money by someone pretending to work for a bank, a fraud detection company, or even a law enforcement agency," Special Agent in Charge George M. Crouch Jr. said. "These unscrupulous schemers keep evolving and push every button until they hit the one that will earn them the confidence of their victims or one that they can use to scare and intimidate. While the FBI will continue its relentless pursuit of scammers, the public's best defense is to remain aware and take extra precautions before handing over money, such as by checking, first, with the supposed entity on the other end of the line. If you have an elderly loved one, educate them so they won't become the next victim."

Panera Bread merges with Caribou Coffee and Einstein Bros. Bagels to form Panera Brands

By Heather Lalley

Panera Bread, Caribou Coffee and Einstein Bros. Bagels announced that they've joined forces to form Panera Brands, "a new powerhouse platform in fast-casual," according to the company.

The combined company will have nearly 4,000 units and 110,000 employees across 10 countries.

Panera CEO Niren Chaudhary will lead the new group, while also continuing as head of Panera. Einstein Bros. CEO Jose Alberto Duenas and Caribou CEO John Butcher will report to Chaudhary while continuing to lead their brands, the company said.

No details of the new financial relationship were disclosed.

"We believe Panera Bread, Caribou Coffee and Einstein Bros. Bagels together will leverage each company's unique expertise and services to build an unrivaled fast-casual platform with a tremendous runway for growth," Chaudhary said in a statement.

The partnership intends to leverage Panera's "broad omnichannel retail network, strong digital infrastructure, industry-



leading loyalty program, robust food innovation pipeline, world-class supply chain and access to extremely well-capitalized franchise owners" to speed growth for the Caribous and Einstein Bros. chains, the company said.

Panera got its start in 1993 when Ron Shaich acquired the 19-unit Saint Louis Bread Company, which would later become Panera Bread.

In 2017, Panera was acquired by JAB Holding Co. for \$7.5 billion and became a private company.

Today, Panera has more than 2,100 bakery cafes.

Caribou, which was founded in 1992, has 713 locations in 10 countries. And Einstein currently operates 1,005 locations.

"At Einstein Bros. Bagels, our relentless focus on delivering the

most craveable breakfast experience for our guests and our efforts to transform the business during 2020 allowed us to come out of the pandemic as a stronger, more profitable, and more nimble company," Dueñas said in a statement. "I'm looking forward to seeing our powerful brand portfolio, executed with a simplified retail model and optimized for a great digital experience, continue to gain momentum."

The merger continues an active period for JAB's restaurant concepts. It took the global coffee company JDE/Peet's public in Europe last year and took Krispy Kreme public in the U.S. this year. Panera more recently sold off Au Bon Pain to Ampex Brands. The company has been reported to be considering its own initial public offering.

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ONLINE AUCTION SEPT. 9 FROM 2 P.M. TO 5 P.M. (CDT)

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8-year-old boy faces death penalty in Pakistan for blasphemy after peeing on carpet



been falsely indulged in these matters,” one family member told the publication, from an undisclosed location for their protection.

“He still doesn’t understand what his crime was and why he was kept in jail for a week.”

“We have left our shops and work, the entire community is scared and we fear backlash. We don’t want to return to this area. We don’t see any concrete and meaningful action will be taken against the culprits or to safeguard the minorities living here.”

While nobody has been legally

executed since the penalty was introduced in 1986, mobs frequently take it upon themselves to carry out the sentence; more than 75 people were murdered for blasphemy between 1987 and 2017.

Hundreds of other Hindu families have reportedly also been forced to flee the area in fear of reprisal attacks.

“I demand charges against the boy are immediately dropped, and urge the government to provide security for the family and those forced to flee,” human rights activist Kapil Dev told the publication.

“Attacks on Hindu temples have increased in the last few years showing an escalating level of extremism and fanaticism. The recent attacks seem to be a new wave of persecution of Hindus.”

According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, around 80 people are known to be incarcerated in Pakistan on blasphemy charges — half of which face either life in prison or the death penalty.

Human rights groups claim the blasphemy laws are used primarily for persecuting religious minorities.

KARACHI - An eight-year-old Hindu boy in Pakistan could be executed after being charged with blasphemy.

He is accused of intentionally urinating on a carpet at a madrasa — an Islamic religious school — where religious books were kept, The Guardian reported.

The boy was released on bail last week, triggering an outraged Muslim mob to attack a Hindu temple; 20 arrests were made after troops were sent in to quell

the unrest.

The boy’s family are now in protective custody having been forced to flee their homes in Punjab.

The child is the youngest ever in the country to be charged with blasphemy, which is punishable by death.

But according to the boy’s family, he doesn’t even know what he has done wrong.

“He is not even aware of such blasphemy issues and he has

India’s trade with Afghanistan stalls but likely to resume soon says industry

By Rajendra Jadhav

MUMBAI - India’s trade with Afghanistan has dried up as borders and banks have closed since the Taliban took over the country, but industry officials said that the disruption was temporary and that it would be business as usual soon.

New Delhi is one of the leading suppliers of essential commodities to Afghanistan, which exports mainly dry fruits to India.

Shipments between the two countries were delayed or disrupted after Taliban insurgents started making military advances earlier this month, leading to the

fall of the capital Kabul on Sunday, industry officials said.

“There is a temporary glitch in trade as Afghanistan is witnessing a transition of power. But within a few days trade will restart,” said Rahil Shaikh, managing director of Mumbai-based MEIR Commodities, which exports sugar to Afghanistan.

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Sunanda Pushkar case: Shashi Tharoor cleared of wife's murder

By Zoya Mateen

NEW DELHI - Indian MP and former UN diplomat Shashi Tharoor has been cleared of all charges related to aiding his wife's suicide.

Sunanda Pushkar was found dead in the suite of a five-star hotel in Delhi on 17 January 2014.

Her death was initially treat-

ed as suicide but police in Delhi later said she had been murdered.

In 2018, they charged Mr Tharoor with abetment to suicide and cruelty to his spouse - a charge he denied.

A court in Delhi has now exonerated him of all charges citing lack of evidence.

Mr Tharoor, who attended the court proceedings virtually on

Wednesday, thanked the court for its verdict.

"It had been seven and half years and it was a torture. I'm so grateful," he said, according to Live Law website.

In a statement posted on Twitter, Mr Tharoor added that the verdict brought a "significant conclusion to the long nightmare" which had enveloped him after his wife's death. "I have



Shashi Tharoor

weathered dozens of unfounded accusations and media vilification patiently, sustained by my faith in the Indian judiciary, which today stands vindicated," he said.

Mr Tharoor is an MP from the southern state of Kerala for India's main opposition Congress party. A diplomat with 25 years of experience, he served as undersecretary general at the United Nations for communications

and public information.

He married Pushkar, a former Dubai-based businesswoman, in 2010.

The cause of Ms Pushkar's death is still unclear.

The first post-mortem report suggested she may have died of a drug overdose, but subsequent reports have referred to "poisoning", "mysterious injection marks" and, in one case, a "deep bite" on her palm.

477 children rescued from Central Railway platforms in Maharashtra

MUMBAI - Railway Protection Force (RPF) rescued 477 runaway children from railway platforms at stations on Central Railway across Maharashtra over the past seven months and reunited them with their parents.

As per information shared by Central Railways, those rescued include 310 boys and 167 girls and were reunited with their guardians with the help of non-governmental organisations like Childline.

"Most of these children came to the railway stations without informing their families due to some fight or some family issues or in search of better life or glamour.

They were found loitering on the platforms or near the railway stations by trained RPF personnel or sometimes in trains also. Many of the parents express their deep gratitude and thankfulness for this noble service of the Railways," read the statement.

These children were rescued over the period of January to July 2021 from Mumbai, Bhusawal, Nagpur, Pune and Solapur divisions of Central Railways.

Central Railways shared an incident where a 17 year-old-girl of Patna, who had run away from her home to make a career in modelling and acting in Mumbai

without informing anyone, was rescued. In another incident, a 14 year-old-girl, who ran away from her home in Telangana after being scolded by her mother, was rescued.

General Manager Anil Kumar Lahoti said that the Railways play its role of social responsibility by connecting with the runaway children, understanding their problems and counselling them to go with their family. He also appreciated the RPF and frontline staff who play an important role by identifying such cases with their innate sense and taking immediate action as a counsellor.



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Indian states preparing for next COVID wave focus on children



A healthcare worker checks the temperature of a child during a door-to-door surveillance to safeguard children amidst the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), at a village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, India.

By Shilpa Jamkhandikar

MUMBAI - Several Indian states are building facilities with more paediatric beds, plus oxygen, due to concern that children returning to school without being vaccinated will be among the most vulnerable during a third wave of coronavirus infections.

Health administrators have taken heed of trends in the United States, where a record number of children have been hospitalised as the coronavirus Delta

variant, first found in India, has surged through unvaccinated populations.

During a second wave of infections in India that peaked in April and May, hundreds of thousands of people died for want of oxygen and medical facilities, and now there are concerns that another third wave will gather during the winter months.

"We don't know how the virus will behave, but we cannot afford to be unprepared this time around," Suhas Prabhu, who heads the Paediatric Task Force

in the big western state of Maharashtra, said.

"No mother should have to run around looking for a hospital bed when her child is sick."

The Maharashtra government has stockpiled medicines, and built facilities for additional paediatric beds and oxygen provisions in new centres in Mumbai and Aurangabad.

Built on empty stretches of land or in re-purposed stadiums, the Mumbai facilities have a total of 1,500 paediatric beds, most of them with oxygen.

"We can upgrade this capacity to double if needed," Suresh Kakani, a senior official with Mum-

bai's civic body said.

In neighbouring Gujarat, authorities have set up 15,000 paediatric oxygen beds, health commissioner Jai Prakash Shivahare said.

India provides vaccines to people above the age 18. Most vaccines administered in India are made by AstraZeneca Plc, while shots produced by local manufacturer Bharat Biotech are also being used.

Another local firm Zydus Cadilla and Bharat Biotech are separately testing vaccines for children but the results are not expected until the year end.

Meantime, schools in at least 11 of India's 28 states have opened after more than a year of closures, raising worries these could become breeding grounds for transmission of the virus.

As of March 2021, less than 1 pct of India's coronavirus deaths were in the under 15 age group, according to the health ministry, and officials say the severity of the disease in this age group has been minimal so far.

Epidemiologists say there is no evidence to show that the Delta variant or any other mutations affect children more than other parts of the population.

Bombing hits Pakistan Shiite procession, killing at least 3

By Asim Tanveer

MULTAN - A powerful roadside bomb exploded among a procession of Shiite Muslims in central Pakistan on Thursday, killing at least three and wounding over 50 people, local police said.

Videos circulating on social media showed police and ambulances rushing toward the

site of the explosion. Several wounded people were seen waiting for help along a road in the deeply conservative city of Bahawalnagar in the eastern Punjab province, where the attack took place.

City police officer Mohammad Asad and Shiite leader Khawar Shafqat confirmed the bombing. Witnesses said tensions are now high in the city, with Shiites pro-

testing the attack and demanding retribution.

Shafqat said the explosion went off while the procession was passing through a congested neighborhood known as Muhajir Colony. He condemned the attack and urged the government to further step up security at such processions, which are ongoing in other parts of the country as well.

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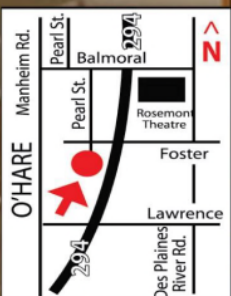
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Australia flags democracies' trade swing from China to India

By Rod Mcguirk

CANBERRA - Australian special envoy and former Prime Minister Tony Abbott said a free trade agreement between his nation and India would signal the "democratic world's tilt away from China."

Abbott visited New Delhi last week as Australia's special trade envoy for India as the Australian government gives priority to sealing a bilateral trade deal.

In an opinion piece likely to anger Beijing that that was published in The Australian newspaper, Abbott said the "answer to almost every question about China is India."

"With the world's other emerging superpower becoming more belligerent almost by the day, it's in everyone's interests that India take its rightful place among the nations as quickly as possible," Abbott wrote.

"Because trade deals are about

politics as much as economics, a swift deal between India and Australia would be an important sign of the democratic world's tilt away from China, as well as boosting the long-term prosperity of both our countries," Abbott added.

Abbott was prime minister when China and Australia finalized a bilateral free trade deal which took effect in 2015. He also hosted a state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping a year



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, waves as he is escorted by Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott as they leave the House of Representatives at Parliament House in Canberra, Australia.

U.N. climate change report sounds 'code red for humanity'

By Nina Chestney and Andrea Januta

Global warming is dangerously close to spiralling out of control, a U.N. climate panel said in a landmark report, warning the world is already certain to face further climate disruptions for decades, if not centuries, to come.

Humans are "unequivocally" to blame, the report from the scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said. Rapid action to cut greenhouse gas emissions could limit some impacts, but others are now locked in.

The deadly heat waves, gargantuan hurricanes and other weather extremes that are already happening will only become more severe.

Last Monday alone saw 500,000 acres of forest burning in California, while in Venice tourists waded through ankle-deep water in St. Mark's Square.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres described the report as a "code red for humanity".

"The alarm bells are deafening," he said in a statement. "This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy our planet."

In an interview with Reuters,

activist Greta Thunberg called on the public and media to put "massive" pressure on governments to act.

In three months, the U.N. COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, will try to wring much more ambitious climate action out of the nations of the world, and the money to go with it.

Drawing on more than 14,000 scientific studies, the IPCC report gives the most comprehensive and detailed picture yet of how climate change is altering the natural world - and what could still be ahead.

Unless immediate, rapid and large-scale action is taken to reduce emissions, the report says, the average global temperature is likely to reach or cross the 1.5-degree Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) warming threshold within 20 years.

The pledges to cut emissions made so far are nowhere near enough to start reducing level of greenhouse gases - mostly carbon dioxide (CO2) from burning fossil fuels - accumulated in the atmosphere.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he hoped the report would be "a wake-up call for the world to take action now, before

we meet in Glasgow".

U.S. President Joe Biden tweeted: "We can't wait to tackle the climate crisis. The signs are unmistakable. The science is undeniable. And the cost of inaction keeps mounting."

The report says emissions "unequivocally caused by human activities" have already pushed the average global temperature up 1.1C from its pre-industrial average - and would have raised it 0.5C further without the tempering effect of pollution in the atmosphere.

That means that, even as societies move away from fossil fuels, temperatures will be pushed up again by the loss of the airborne pollutants that come with them and currently reflect away some of the sun's heat.

The 1.1C warming already recorded has been enough to unleash disastrous weather. This year, heat waves killed hundreds in the Pacific Northwest and smashed records around the world. Wildfires fuelled by heat and drought are sweeping away entire towns in the U.S. West, releasing record carbon dioxide emissions from Siberian forests, and driving Greeks to flee their homes by ferry.

earlier.

Relations have since soured over issues including Australia banning Chinese telecom giant Huawei from major communications infrastructure projects, outlawing covert foreign interference in Australian politics and calling for an independent investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abbott accused Beijing of "capricious boycotts" of Australian exports including coal, barley, wine and seafood that demonstrated Chinese use of trade as a "strategic weapon."

"The basic problem is that China's daunting power is a consequence of the free world's decision to invite a communist dictatorship into global trading networks," Abbott said.

"China has exploited the West's goodwill and wishful thinking to steal our technology and undercut our industries; and, in the process, become a much more powerful competitor than the old Soviet Union ever was, because it's now a first-rate economy that's rapidly developing a military to match; and spoiling for a fight over Taiwan,

a pluralist democracy of 25 million that's living proof there's no totalitarian gene in the Chinese DNA," Abbott added.

The Chinese Embassy in Australia did not respond to a request for comment.

Negotiations between India and Australia on a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement began in 2011 but were suspended in 2015.

India is particularly concerned by freer trade in Australian farm exports. New Delhi's demands for less restrictive visas for Indian workers is a major sticking point for Australia.

Australia's current Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi last year upgraded the bilateral relationship with a raft of agreements that strengthened defense ties and committed both nations to expanding trade.

Abbott visited India last week to "propel our economic relationship to its full potential, to the mutual benefit of the Indian and Australian people," Australian High Commissioner to India Barry O'Farrell said in a statement.

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Indian rocket fails to launch earth observation satellite



An Indian rocket carrying a powerful earth observation satellite failed to fire fully on Thursday, the state-run space agency said, in a setback for the country's space programme.

BENGALURU - An Indian rocket carrying a powerful earth observation satellite failed to fire fully last Thursday, the state-run space agency said, in a setback for the country's space programme.

The satellite, meant for quick monitoring of natural disasters such as cyclones, cloud-bursts and thunderstorms, was launched on a geosynchronous satellite launch vehicle (GSLV) at 0013 GMT, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in southern India.

But while the liftoff was smooth, the rocket failed in its final phase, the Indian Space Research Organisation said.

"Performance of first and second stages was normal. However, Cryogenic Upper Stage ignition did not happen due to technical anomaly. The mission couldn't be accomplished as intended," ISRO said.

It did not say what happened to the GSLV spacecraft and the EOS-03 satellite it was meant

to place in a geostationary orbit nearly 36,000 km (22,500 miles) above the equator.

Scientists had mounted a large telescope on the satellite to look down on the Indian subcontinent.

Jonathan McDowell, a U.S.-

based astronomer, said the satellite and the rocket probably fell into the Andaman Sea, west of Thailand.

India has built a reputation as a maker of earth imaging satellites and the ability to launch them into low orbits at

a fraction of the cost of Western agencies.

But over the past several years, it has moved into the more lucrative area of launching heavier geostationary satellites that are used for communications and meteorology.

Taliban announces 'amnesty,' urges women to join government

By Ahmad Seir, Tameem Akhgar, Kathy Gannon and Jon Gambrell

KABUL - The Taliban declared an "amnesty" across Afghanistan and urged women to join its government on Tuesday, trying to calm nerves across a tense capital city that only the day before saw chaos at its airport as people tried to flee their rule.

The comments by Enamullah Samangani, a member of the Taliban's cultural commission, represent the first comments on governance from a federal level across the country after their blitz across the country.

While there were no major reports of abuses or fighting in Kabul, many residents have stayed home and remain fearful after

the insurgents' takeover saw prisons emptied and armories looted. Older generations remember their ultraconservative Islamic views, which included stonings, amputations and public executions during their rule before the U.S-led invasion that followed the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks.

"The Islamic Emirate doesn't want women to be victims" Samangani said, using the militants' term for Afghanistan. "They should be in government structure according to Shariah law."

He added: "The structure of government is not fully clear, but based on experience, there should be a fully Islamic leadership and all sides should join."

Samangani remained vague on other details, however, implying people already knew the rules of

Islamic law the Taliban expected them to follow.

"Our people are Muslims and we are not here to force them to Islam," he said.

Under the Taliban, which ruled in accordance with a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, women were largely confined to their homes. The insurgents have sought to project greater moderation in recent years, but many Afghans remain skeptical.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, Stefano Pontecorvo, NATO's senior civilian representative to Afghanistan, posted video online showing the runway empty with American troops on the tarmac. What appeared to be a military cargo plane could be seen in the distance from behind a chain-link fence in the footage.

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Modi says India will soon unveil \$1.35 trln infrastructure plan

By Aftab Ahmed

NEW DELHI - India will launch a 100 trillion rupee (\$1.35 trillion) national infrastructure plan that will help generate jobs and expand use of cleaner fuels to achieve the country's climate goals, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said last Sunday.

The infrastructure programme, called "Gati Shakti", will help boost productivity of industries and boost the economy, Modi said during his speech at the Independence Day celebrations in New Delhi.

"We will launch a masterplan for Gati Shakti, a big programme ... (it) will create job opportunities

for hundreds of thousands," Modi said from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort in the capital city.

While Modi did not announce details of the plan, he said the plan will help local manufacturers compete globally and create new avenues of future economic growth.

Boosting infrastructure in



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspects the honour guard during Independence Day celebrations at the historic Red Fort in Delhi, India on August 15, 2021.

Asia's third largest economy is at the heart of the Modi's plan to pull back the country from a sharp economic decline worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the last fiscal year, India's economic output fell by a record 7.3% and a second wave of COVID-19 has delayed economic recovery.

The prime minister also set a target to become energy independent by 2047, saying the goal

can be achieved through a mix of electric mobility, moving to a gas-based economy and making the country a hub for hydrogen production.

Modi said the country spends more than 12 trillion rupees annually on energy imports and becoming energy independent was critical, as he also announced the launch of a National Hydrogen Mission to boost the government's clean energy plans.

Twitter reinstates accounts of India's Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders

By Abhirup Roy

MUMBAI - Twitter unblocked the accounts of India's main opposition party Congress, its leader Rahul Gandhi and other party officials last Saturday, days after suspending the accounts over a tweet on the alleged rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl.

Gandhi's account has 19.5 million followers. It was locked after he posted a photograph of himself with the parents of a girl who was allegedly raped and killed in New Delhi on Aug. 1, saying the family deserved justice.

The accounts have been restored after Twitter reviewed

Gandhi's submission of formal consent from people depicted in the image, the U.S. social media giant said in an emailed statement, adding that it has withheld the tweet in India.

The tweet is available globally but withheld in India under laws relating to disclosure of the identity of children and victims of sexual assault, according to a notification from Twitter to a Congress leader, and seen by Reuters, after his account was reinstated.

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala confirmed the restoration of all accounts and said the party

"fought undeterred" against the block.

Gandhi criticised Twitter for blocking the accounts, saying the platform was playing partisan politics. A Twitter spokesperson said its rules were "enforced judiciously and impartially."

For months, Twitter has been in a tussle with the government for not swiftly complying with India's new IT rules that required the firm to hire compliance officers by May and are aimed at regulating content on social media. Twitter completed the hiring and complied with the rules this month, the government has said.




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BOLLYWOOD Insider™

Bollywood Beat

Sanjay Dutt shoot for movie during health diagnosis



Sanjay Dutt who plays the role of Ranchordas Pagi in *Bhuj: The Pride of India* has been receiving various accolades for his impactful dialogue delivery and high spirited performance. Ranchordas Pagi worked as a scout on behalf of the Indian Army, he was an integral part in getting intel and also played an important role in the victory of the Indo-Pak war in 1971.

The actors' walk in the desert where his character is all set to go far war has been talked about a lot in the film. Little did anyone know that the actor shot for that sequence right after being diagnosed with health issues. Being a thorough professional, Sanjay Dutt was keen to shoot for the film and finish his part before taking time away for the treatment.

Sanjay Dutt's determination and professionalism to finish his commitment were highly commendable. The team ensured that his time during the shoot was extremely comfortable and the schedules were made keeping in mind his health needs.

The actor even met the Army men in Suratgarh Army Range in Rajasthan while shooting for the film. The honorable Army men spent a lot of time with Sanjay Dutt talking about their war experiences and sharing each other's journey which was an inspiring conversation for Sanjay.

Shamshera is a power packed theatrical experience with drama, romance and thrills: Vaani Kapoor

Shamshera is a period action drama directed by Karan Malhotra and produced by Yash Raj Films. The movie stars Ranbir Kapoor, Vaani Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt, Ashutosh Rana, Ronit Roy, and Saurabh Shukla in interesting roles. Fans of the actors are eagerly waiting for the film's release. Though there still is time till *Shamshera* hits screens, Vaani Kapoor, who was recently in conversation with *Bollywood Hungama*, gave a brief insight into what to expect from *Shamshera*.

When asked about how it was shooting for *Shamshera* and sharing screen space with Ranbir Kapoor and Sanjay Dutt, the actress added, "*Shamshera* is a very big film, and I am looking very different in the movie. It is one of a kind thing that I have never done before. It is set in a period which has not been explored by either me nor Ranbir. So it is a very different periodic film on a grand scale. There is drama, there is romance, and there are thrills... there is everything in it.



Shamshera is a power packed film which is made for a theatrical experience."

As for the film, *Shamshera* will see Ranbir Kapoor playing the role of dacoit

Shamshera and also his father, while Sanjay Dutt will be seen as villain Shuddh Singh with Vaani Kapoor essaying the role of Adarshini.

Johar to produce war-hero epic for every Independence Day



After the critical and mass success of two war-hero biopics *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* in 2020 and *Shershaah* in 2021, which were both released during the Independence Day weekend, producer Karan Johar is now on to his third bio-pic on freedom fighter Usha Mehta.

This bio-pic too will be released for Independence Day 2022.

Sources very close to Karan

Johar say Karan intends to make his Independence Day films a regular occurrence. "The idea now is to produce a film about an unsung national hero every year. It started as a one-off thing when Karan Johar produced *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* about the Indian first air force pilot. Now this year in 2021 *Shershaah* about Paramvir Chakra winner Vikram Batra has also been well received.

Kaun Banega Crorepati season 13 to air from August 23



With the 13th Season on the anvil, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, a show that commands unparalleled success and popularity, is all set to regale the audience starting 23rd August, every weekday at 9:00 pm on Sony Entertainment Television. With a thunderous response received

during the digital auditions, the contestants are just one step away from the Hot Seat! Produced by StudioNEXT, and hosted by the superstar, Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, this season of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* makes way for an array of stellar surprises for its viewers.



Tiger Shroff is not only an actor, but he is excellently skilled in martial arts, gymnastic and dance. He also helped Aamir Khan build his physique for *Dhoom 3*.

UNKNOWN FACTS ABOUT BOLLYWOOD CELEBRITIES

Disha Patani is a B.Tech graduate in Computer Science. She was the head girl of her school. She's bringing brains, talent and beauty; the whole package to the table.



Bollywood Trivia

Who directed the film 'Gully boy'?

- 1) Karan Johar
- 2) Farhan Akhtar
- 3) Zoya Akhtar
- 4) Anurag Kashyap

Answer: 3

In which month is Ajay Devgan's birthday?

- 1) February
- 2) December
- 3) April
- 4) March

Answer: 3

BOLLYWOOD Insider

MOVIE REVIEW

Bhuj The Pride of India

Banner:
T-Series
Ajay Devgn FFilms
Select Media Holdings LLP

Producer:
Bhushan Kumar
Ginny Khanuja
Krishan Kumar
Kumar Mangat Pathak
Bunny Sanghavi
Vajir Singh
Abhishek Dudhaiya

Director:
Abhishek Dudhaiya

Starring:
Ajay Devgn
Sanjay Dutt
Sharad Kelkar
Sonakshi Sinha
Ammy Virk
Pranitha Subhash
Nora Fatehi
Ihana Dhillon

Music By:
Tanishk Bagchi
Gourov Dasgupta
Lijo George - Dj Chetas
Arko
Vipin Patwa
Amar Mohile

Released Date:
August 13, 2021

Bhuj: The Pride of India is the story of an incredible chapter from the 1971 India Pakistan war. The persecution of East Pakistan residents by Pakistani military in 1971 leads to lakhs of deaths. Innumerable people migrate to India to escape the killings. Hence India too gets involved in this conflict and deploys a majority of its troops on the Eastern border. Taking advantage of this situation, Pakistan begins to attack the defence base of India on the Western side. On December 8, 1971, Pakistan air force suddenly attacks Bhuj airbase, taking command-

ing officer Vijay Karnik (Ajay Devgn) and everyone else present by surprise. Several lives are lost in this attack and the airstrip is also badly damaged. Meanwhile, Pakistan also destroys Surajbari and Banaskatha bridges and five major roads that lead to Bhuj. As a result, Bhuj and Kutch are cut off from the rest of the country. The Indian air force aircrafts can't even land as the airstrip is destroyed and the engineers that can repair it have run away. The Pakistan army meanwhile has begun advancing towards Bhuj and plans to capture the whole region. The only solution in sight is to get the airstrip repaired overnight at any cost. What happens next forms the rest of the film.

Abhishek Dudhaiya, Raman Kumar, Ritesh Shah and Pooja Bhavoria's story is fascinating and also unknown to most people. Most viewers would be amazed to know that an incident like this occurred and that even the common citizens helped the forces in the war. Abhishek Dudhaiya, Raman Kumar, Ritesh Shah and Pooja Bhavoria's screenplay is a mixed bag. The first half doesn't have much development in the story. But it's in the second half where the writers show their brilliance. The climax especially is very well thought of. Abhishek Dudhaiya, Raman Kumar, Ritesh Shah and Pooja Bhavoria's dialogues (additional dialogues by Manoj Muntashir) are intended to generate claps. Ajay's monologue while convincing the villagers is touching.

Abhishek Dudhaiya's direction has its share of glitches but overall it's fair. Talking of the pros, he handles the scale of the film very well. Certain dramatic and action scenes are well executed and this also enhances the impact. Also, certain one-take action scenes add to the entertainment quotient. The climax is nail-biting and he really takes



the film to another level here. On the flipside, the characters are not well defined. The introduction is very quick of all major characters. For a layman, it'll be too much to process so much information. Also, one could sense that certain scenes have been cut, possibly to curtail the length. In several action scenes, logic takes a backseat. The scene of Rancho in the trench in the climax would be loved by the masses but it's difficult to digest. Also, the first half has some interesting scenes but overall, it fails to make the desired impact as the execution is a bit all over the place.

Ajay Devgn plays a one-dimensional character. But performance wise, he's first-rate and lifts certain scenes. His slo-mo walk especially is quite exciting and would have led to a riot in cinemas. Sanjay Dutt, too, plays a character whose back story is not properly explained but he is quite good, especially in the fight scenes. Sonakshi Sinha has a late entry but is the surprise of the film. Nora Fatehi charms

with her performance and action. Her action scene is one of the highlights. Sharad Kelkar (R K Nair) is, as always, dependable. Ammy Virk (Vikram Singh Baj) is decent and gives his best. Pranitha Subhash (Usha), Ihana Dhillon (R K Nair's wife) and Mahesh Shetty (Laxman) get no scope. Navni Parihar (Indira Gandhi) is fair. The actors playing General Yahya Khan, Heena Rehmani's husband Md Hussain Omani, Wing Commander A A Sahu, Mukhtar Baig and Taimoor Rizvi are okay.

On the whole, *Bhuj: The Pride of India* tells an incredible story from a chapter of Indian history. The performances are first-rate and the film goes on an exciting level in the second half, with the nail-biting climax being the best part of the enterprise. A film of this scale should have been released in cinemas as it's full of massy scenes that would have generated immense craze among the audiences.

Rating: ★★★★★

Bollywood Beat

Shilpa returns to show after Raj Kundra's arrest



Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty has been keeping a low profile ever since her businessman husband Raj Kundra was arrested and taken into judicial custody for uploading porn films on mobile applications. The actress took hiatus from *Super Dancer - Chapter 4* where she is one of the judges. Now, she has returned to the set after a month.

According to a tabloid, Shilpa Shetty shot for the episode on Tuesday, August 17. Producer Ranjeet Thakur said that she is the show's judge and she is here to stay without revealing much about her.

Earlier this month, Shilpa Shetty released her first statement in relation to her husband. "As a family, we are taking recourse to all our available legal remedies. But, till then I humbly request you - especially as a MOTHER - to respect our privacy for my children's sake and request you to refrain from commenting on half-baked information without verifying the veracity of the same. I am a proud law-abiding Indian citizen and a hardworking professional for the last 29 years. People have put their faith in ME & I've never let anyone down. So, most importantly, I request you to respect my family's and 'my right' to privacy in these times. We don't deserve a media trial. Please let the law take its course. Satyamev Jayate! With Positivity and Gratitude, Shilpa Shetty Kundra," she said.

Celebrity Birthdays

August 22nd Devoleena Bhattacharjee (1985)	August 28th Deepak Tijori (1961) Karanvir Bohra (1982)	September 2nd Sudeep (1971)
August 23rd Gauhar Khan (1983) Vani Kapoor (1988)	August 29th Richa Sharma (1974)	September 3rd Vivek Oberoi (1976)
August 26th Madhur Bhandarkar (1968)	August 31st Rajkumar Rao (1984)	
August 27th Neha Dhupia (1980)	September 1st Deepak Dobriyal (1975) Ram Kapoor (1973)	

Upcoming Films

Radhe Shyam Prabhas, Pooja Hegde and Krishnam Raju	Atrangi Re Hrithik Roshan, Akshay Kumar, Dhanush and Sara Ali Khan	Thalaivi Kangana Ranaut and Vijay Deverakonda
Maidaan Ajay Devgn, Priyamani and Keerthy Suresh	Gangubai Kathiawadi Alia Bhatt, Parth Samthaan, and Emraan Hashmi	Bhoot Police Saif Ali Khan, Fatima Sana Shaikh, and Yami Gauta
Bachchan Pandey Akshay Kumar, Bobby Deol and Riteish Deshmukh	Brahmastra Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt and Amitabh Bachchan	83 Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone

BIZ BRIEFS

India set to clear Boeing 737 Max to fly again

India is set to allow Boeing's 737 Max jets to resume flights in the country within days, clearing one of the last remaining hurdles for the U.S. planemaker as it seeks to get the model flying again worldwide.

The South Asian nation has been satisfied with the plane's performance since it was un-grounded in the U.S., Europe and a number of other nations, and Boeing has met India's own requirements, which included setting up a Max simulator there, the person said, asking not to be identified because the matter is confidential.

Rajeev Jain, a spokesman for India's aviation ministry, said a decision on ungrounding the Max is awaited. A representative for Boeing said the company continues to work with global regulators to safely return the Max to service worldwide.

Bharat Petroleum scoops up U.S. oil

India's state-run Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd is scooping up rising volumes of U.S. crude, people familiar with the matter said, as fuel demand in the Asian country recovers and weak U.S. crude prices make purchases attractive.

Fuel demand in India rose in July to its highest since April as pandemic restrictions and lockdowns were unwound in most states. The country is the world's third-largest crude importer and consumer.

U.S. crude prices have become more attractive for Asian buyers as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies including Russia restrain production.

Reliance joins Bill Gates, others to invest \$144 mln in U.S. energy storage co

BENGALURU - Indian oil-to-telecoms conglomerate Reliance Industries Ltd said last Tuesday it would invest \$144 million in U.S. energy storage company Ambri Inc, along with billionaire Bill Gates, investment management firm Paulson & Co and others.

The investment comes months after Reliance unveiled a \$10 billion green energy plan in its drive to become a net carbon zero company by 2035, with plans to build four 'giga factories' at Jamnagar in the western Indian state of Gujarat to produce solar cells and modules, energy storage batteries, fuel cells and green hydrogen.

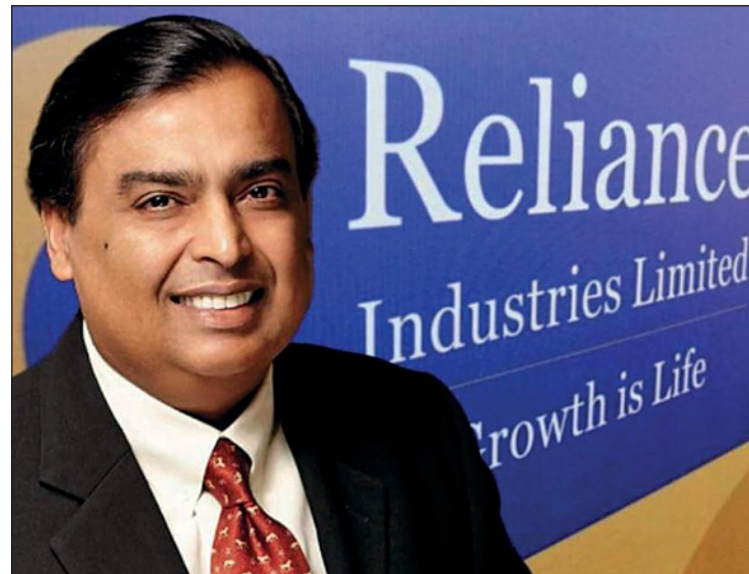
Reliance, through its wholly-owned unit Reliance New Energy Solar Ltd (RNESL), will acquire 42.3 million shares of preferred stock in Ambri for \$50 million,

the company said in a statement.

RNESL and Ambri are also in talks to set up a large-scale battery manufacturing facility in India, the company added.

Designed to last between 4-24 hours, Ambri's energy storage systems "will break through the cost, longevity and safety barriers associated with lithium-ion batteries used in grid-scale stationary storage applications", said the company led by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani.

Ambri, in a separate statement, said it would use the funds to design and build high-volume manufacturing facilities in the U.S. and internationally that will supply its long-duration battery systems to meet growing demand from the grid-scale energy storage market and large industrial energy customers, such as data centers.



Indian oil-to-telecoms conglomerate Reliance Industries Ltd said last Tuesday it would invest \$144 million in U.S. energy storage company Ambri Inc, along with billionaire Bill Gates, investment management firm Paulson & Co and others.

Reliance's entry into the renewable energy business in India will put it in competition with

companies such as Adani Green Energy Ltd and Goldman Sachs-backed ReNew Power.

Invoking 'Quit India', minister welcomes Amazon, Flipkart ruling

By Aditya Kalra and Nupur Anand

NEW DELHI - India's commerce minister welcomed last Tuesday a Supreme Court decision that Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart should face investigations into alleged anti-competitive behaviour, saying their trading practices would be looked into.

Piyush Goyal's comments are the latest sign of New Delhi's discontent with the two U.S. e-commerce giants, which have for years faced allegations of bypassing Indian laws to run their businesses and hurting smaller retailers.

Last Monday, the Supreme Court pulled up Amazon and



India's commerce minister welcomed on Tuesday a Supreme Court decision that Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart should face investigations into alleged anti-competitive behaviour, saying their trading practices would be looked into.

Flipkart for trying to stall investigations ordered in 2020 by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), saying big organisations like theirs should volunteer to assist in any inquiry.

Goyal welcomed the court's decision while speaking in the

Indian parliament, where he invoked the "Quit India" campaign - a movement launched in 1942 by India's iconic freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi demanding an end to British rule.

"These companies used legal tactics to stall the investigation ...

I am happy to tell you that yesterday, on the day of the Quit India Movement, all the efforts of these companies failed," Goyal told Indian lawmakers.

"The top court decided that CCI should probe the allegations of fraudulent, unfair trade practices that they engage in," Goyal added.

Amazon and Flipkart did not respond to a request for comment.

The two companies face an increasingly tough regulatory environment in India, where they are also grappling with the prospect of tougher e-commerce rules and investigations by the country's financial crime agency for alleged violation of foreign investment laws.

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CARRIER, BRYANT, COMFORTMAKER, LENNOX, ETC. FOR FURNACE INSTALLATION

India's minister faces heat for criticism of businesses including Tata

By Abhirup Roy
and Aditya Kalra

NEW DELHI - India's commerce minister faced heat on social media last Saturday for his remarks that many big domestic businesses had overlooked national interests and that \$106 billion Tata Group's objections to proposed policy changes for e-commerce had upset him.

At an event organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) last Thursday, Minister Piyush Goyal criticised Tata and more broadly said local businesses should not just focus on profits or think of bypassing local laws, according to media reports and a source who attended the event.

The comments caught public attention and stoked a debate on social media after The Hindu

newspaper reported last Saturday the government had asked the CII to block videos with Goyal's comments.

Two links to those videos on Goyal's speech shared with journalists were now marked private and blocked.

The CII and Goyal's office did not respond to a request for comment.

"The kind of language used



Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Railways and Minister of Commerce and Industry, attends a session at the 50th World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland on January 21, 2020.

Twitter India chief moves to new U.S. role after criticism over compliance

MUMBAI - Twitter Inc's India chief, Manish Maheshwari, will take up a new internal role in the United States, the company said last Friday, a move that comes after months of tussle between the U.S. giant and the Indian government over compliance issues.

Maheshwari will become Twitter's senior director of revenue strategy and operations focused on new market entry, based out of San Francisco, the company said in a statement.

Though Twitter gave no reasons for Maheshwari's move in the statement, an internal staff memo seen by Reuters thanked him for

his work during "extraordinarily challenging times" in India, without elaborating. Twitter declined to comment on the memo.

New Delhi has repeatedly criticized Twitter in recent months for not swiftly complying with the country's new IT rules that required it to hire compliance officers by May. The U.S. firm completed the required hiring and complied with the new rules this month, the government has said.

The new rules, which became effective end-May, are aimed at regulating content on social media and making firms act

more swiftly on legal requests to remove posts.

Twitter also faced several ongoing police cases, with some naming Maheshwari, for allegedly hurting sentiments and promoting child pornography. He also had to seek court relief in at least one case where he was asked to appear for police questioning in northern Uttar Pradesh state.

The internal staff memo said that "instead of a single country director, our wonderful India leadership council will guide and support you all as a team moving forward."

against industry captains & calling their work against nation's interest is shameful... CII should demand an apology instead of helping him by pulling down the video," said Priyanka Chaturvedi, a lawmaker and opposition leader.

A spokeswoman of India's main opposition Congress Party, Supriya Shrinete, said on Twitter Goyal's remarks were

"undignified".

Goyal's comments on Tata came after Reuters last month reported the conglomerate was among most vociferous in telling the government in a July meeting that proposed e-commerce rules will have a major impact on its business and bar its joint venture partners like Starbucks from selling goods on Tata's shopping websites.

Mayor Lightfoot and CTA announce the return of 'First Day, Free Rides' program for Chicago area students (K-12) returning to in-person classes

CTA's popular free rides program sponsored by Chicagoland based Butcher Boy Cooking Oils helps encourage student attendance and academic success

As Chicago students return to the classroom for the 2021-2022 school year, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) announce the 'First Day, Free Rides' program for K-12 students. The CTA has partnered with Butcher Boy Cooking Oils to provide free CTA bus and train rides to all Chicago-area elementary and high school students, as well their accompanying adult, on the first day of the Chicago Public Schools' school year - Monday, August 30.

"Every student I've heard from is eager to get back into the classroom and offering them free CTA rides on their first day is a great way to build on their enthusiasm," said Mayor Lightfoot. "We are beyond excited to have our students back in school, focused and ready to succeed after all they and their families have endured over the past 18 months. I want to thank the CTA and Butcher Boy Cooking Oils for sharing this excitement and supporting

our young people as they kick off the new school year."

The "First Day, Free Rides" program is an esteemed back-to-school tradition for Chicago students. In 2019, the program provided approximately 106,000 free rides to students and their parents or guardians. Since the program's debut ten years ago, more than 1.1 million free rides have been provided for Chicago area students.

"We are excited to help Chicago students return safely to the classroom and we greatly appreciate Chicagoland-based Butcher Boy Cooking Oils for their partnership with this program," said CTA President Dorval R. Carter, Jr. "It's important that our students know that they can still rely on CTA for a reliable, comfortable and affordable trip to school as they come back after participating in school virtually for such a long time."

Students (and accompanying adults) are reminded that per federal mandate, properly worn masks are required at all times while on CTA buses, trains, stations/platforms - regardless of one's vaccination status. For

those who may have lost, forgotten or damaged their masks while in transit, the CTA currently provides free disposable masks on all buses and at all rail stations.

For the entire academic school year, students can take advantage of discounted fares of 75 cents on

school days, between 5:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. Beyond school hours, elementary students, ages 7-11, are eligible for reduced fares of \$1.10 for a bus ride and \$1.25 for a train ride. Students who are age 12 and older will continue to pay the full fare of

\$2.25 on buses and \$2.50 on trains. Children ages 6 and younger ride free with a fare-paying customer.

For more information about Student Reduced Fare, please visit: www.transitchicago.com/students/

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

(August 29 - September 4, 2021)

Aries (March 21 to April 20)

God himself does not propose to judge a man until his life is over. Why should you and I? The last few days, you have become a lot more judgmental than you actually are and this is something that people around you are noticing.

Taurus (April 21 to May 21)

Don't mind criticism. If it is untrue, disregard it; if unfair, keep calm; if it is ignorant, smile; if it is justified, it is not criticism, learn from it. If you can do that, you will reach your goals faster than you think.

Gemini (May 22 to June 21)

All easy problems have already been solved and if you thought that this easy life and comfort zone will take you higher in life, you are truly mistaken. It's high time you retrospect and set some higher goals and get out of this comfort zone you have been hibernating in since quite some time.

Cancer (June 22 to July 22)

One should speak little with others and much with oneself. Amidst all the chaos and people around you, you have stopped the quality conversation you used to have with yourself. This week is an opportunity to do a lot of introspection.

Leo (July 23 to August 22)

Beware of assumptions! Whatever you "assume" to be possible or impossible will have a tendency to become real for you. The pessimism that has overwhelmed your mindset has also made you assume all the wrong things in life.

Virgo (August 23 to September 23)

The road of life can only reveal itself as it is travelled; each turn in the road reveals a surprise. You have coped up with these surprises really well all these days and it's time you continue the good work.

Libra (September 24 to October 23)

Nothing marks the character of a person more than failure and the current hiccups in your life will become the stepping stones for your future success. You should be really careful about your health this week and not take any medical issue lightly.

Scorpio (October 24 to November 22)

Just stick with it. What seems so hard now will one day be your warmup. It has always been difficult for you to cope up with changes in life, but this week you will need to adjust and learn new things along the way.

Sagittarius (November 23 to December 21)

Love your enemies. It makes them so damned mad. This week, there will be a lot of animosity around you, specially at the workplace. This is the time you should keep a low profile and speak only when it can make a difference.

Capricorn (December 22 to January 20)

You can feel sore tomorrow, or you can feel sorry tomorrow. You choose. This is a tough week wherein there is no room for complacency or laziness. What you do this week will have long-term implications, so get rid of your lazy demeanour and give your best shot both at home and at the workplace.

Aquarius (January 21 to February 19)

Anger is a thief who steals away the nice moments and this is the week wherein your anger will be at its zenith. There are circumstances beyond your reach which are troubling your peace along with some people who are making it even more troublesome.

Pisces (February 20 to March 20)

A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel so good. The week is amazing in every sense of materialism, but there is something lacking in your life. Do not hesitate to apologise to someone you hurt, rather than leaving it as is, as the burden of guilt will only grow with time.

Two men admit receiving over \$500,000 in global robocall scam that defrauded elderly victims

CAMDEN, NJ - Two Indian nationals admitted to conspiracy to commit wire fraud by accepting illegally obtained wire transfers from victims across the country totaling over \$600,000, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced.

Zeeshan Khan, 22, and Maaz Ahmed Shamsi, 24, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Joseph Rodriguez in Camden federal court to an information charging each with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

As part of an international fraud scheme, criminal India-based call centers utilized automated robocalls to victims with the intent of defrauding U.S. residents, particularly the elderly. After establishing contact with victims through these automated calls, other members of the conspiracy would coerce or trick the victims into sending large sums of cash through physical shipments or wire transfers to other members of the conspiracy, including Shamsi and Khan. These conspirators used a variety of schemes to convince victims to send money, including imper-



Two Indian nationals admitted to conspiracy to commit wire fraud by accepting illegally obtained wire transfers from victims across the country totaling over \$600,000, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced.

sonating government officials from agencies such as the Social Security Administration, or impersonating law enforcement officers from the FBI or Drug Enforcement Administration, and threatened victims with severe legal or financial consequences if they did not comply. Another method utilized by the callers involved convincing the victims they were speaking with someone from a tech support company and coercing the victims into granting the caller remote access to their personal computers, and

through that, to the victims' bank accounts. By manipulating the victims' bank accounts, the caller would convince the victims that an overpayment was made to the victims and ultimately instruct them to send money by way of mail or wire transfer to other members of the conspiracy, including Shamsi and Khan.

As part of this scheme, Shamsi and Khan are charged with receiving fraudulent wire transfers from 19 victims across the country totaling approximately \$618,000.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

NIA begins probe into tiffin bomb dropped by drone in Punjab

NEW DELHI - The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has launched an investigation into the delivery of a sophisticated tiffin bomb along with hand grenades and 100 pistol cartridges using a drone by Pakistan backed Khalistani terrorists earlier this month, people familiar with the development said.

The consignment was dropped on August 9 near a drain at Daleke village in Lopoke subdivision of Amritsar district, Punjab, just ahead of the Independence Day, following which the state was put on high alert.

This is NIA's fourth drone related probe in past year and half.

The tiffin bomb, thus named because 2-3 kg of RDX was packed in a children's lunch box, was sophisticated enough for Punjab director general of police Dinkar Gupta to say at the time of its recovery that it seemed to be straight off an "assembly line". There may be more of such tiffin boxes, which would be coming, or might have come and we don't know yet".

The lunch box, five hand grenades and ammunition for a 9mm pistol were packed in a bag and dropped off by a drone.

Officials in security agen-

cies investigating drone activity from across the border said that all anti-India groups, be it Islamic terrorists such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, or Hizbul Mujahideen, Khalistani terrorists, and drug smugglers are increasingly using drones to deliver arms, explosives, and drugs to avoid capture.

NIA recently took over investigation into the dual bombing of the Jammu air force station on June 27 by LeT using drones, which travelled almost 14 km from across the border. The investigators examined several villagers on the possible route taken by the two drones used in the attack but there has been no breakthrough in the case as of now.

Apart from the federal anti-terror agency, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir police are also investigating multiple drone related incidents, which have posed a challenge for the security and intelligence agencies.

The Khalistani network, particularly Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) and Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), are extensively using Chinese drones with the help of Pakistan's spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), with a purpose to

arm a movement to destabilize Punjab.

Multiple assessments by Indian security agencies and the Border Security Force (BSF) have highlighted that the use of commercial drones (or quadcopters) by the Pakistan army, ISI and terror groups is a serious threat considering the size of the border, which is difficult to man physically round the clock.

Union home minister Amit Shah said recently that the government will soon have an anti-drone technology in place to combat the threat.

"Smuggling of drugs, arms and explosives through tunnels and drones is a major challenge. Today, it is very important for us to deal with these challenges at the earliest. I am confident that we will soon increase our presence at the borders with Swadeshi (made-in-India) anti-drone technology," Shah said on July 17.

Bureau of Police Research and Development, as reported by HT last month, has already formulated detailed specifications and guidelines for anti-drone technologies and submitted the same to the ministry of home affairs (MHA).

Who is eligible for a third COVID-19 vaccine dose in the U.S.?

By Deena Beasley

U.S. health officials have authorized a third dose of COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc for people with compromised immune systems, based on evidence that the standard two shots offered less robust protection in such populations.

Here's what we know about who will be eligible for the

additional shots:

HOW IS IMMUNOCOMPROMISED DEFINED?

The Food and Drug Administration updated the emergency use authorization given to the shots from Pfizer, developed with German partner BioNTech, as well as the vaccine from Moderna to allow a third dose for

people who have received organ transplants, or those with a similarly weakened immune system.

Health officials have estimated that less than 3% of American adults would be candidates for a third dose.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said a third dose is recommended for people who are moderately or severely immunocompromised.

Children hospitalized with COVID-19 in U.S. hits record number

By Gabriella Borter

The number of children hospitalized with COVID-19 in the United States hit a record high of just over 1,900 last Saturday, as hospitals across the South were stretched to capacity fighting outbreaks caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant.

The Delta variant, which is rapidly spreading among mostly the unvaccinated portion of the U.S. population, has caused hospitalizations to spike in recent weeks, driving up the number of confirmed and suspected pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations to 1,902 last Saturday, according to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Reuters includes confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases for hospitalization, case and death data.

Children currently make up about 2.4% of the nation's COVID-19 hospitalizations. Kids under 12 are not eligible to receive the vaccine, leaving them more vulnerable to infection from the new, highly transmissible variant.

"This is not last year's COVID. This one is worse and our children are the ones that are going to be affected by it the most," Sally Goza, former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, told CNN last Saturday.

The numbers of newly hospitalized COVID-19 patients aged 18-29, 30-39 and 40-49 also hit record highs this week, according to data from the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The spike in new cases has ramped up tension between conservative state leaders and local districts over whether school children should be required to wear masks as they head back to the classroom this month.

School districts in Florida, Texas and Arizona have mandated that masks be worn in schools, defying orders from their Republican state governors that ban districts from imposing such rules. The administration of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has threatened to withhold funding from districts that impose mask requirements, and Texas Governor Greg Abbott is appealing to the state Supreme Court to overturn Dallas County's mask mandate, the Dallas Morning News reported last Friday.

A fifth of the nation's COVID-19 hospitalizations are in Florida, where the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients hit a record 16,100 last Saturday, according to a Reuters tally. More than 90% of the state's intensive care beds are filled, according

to data from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The nation's largest teachers union, the National Education Association, came out in support of mandatory vaccination for its members this week. NEA President Becky Pringle said last Saturday that schools should employ every mitigation strategy, from vaccines to masks, to ensure that students can come back to their classrooms safely this school year.

"Our students under 12 can't get vaccinated. It's our responsibility to keep them safe. Keeping them safe means that everyone who can be vaccinated should be vaccinated," Pringle told CNN.

The U.S. now has an average of about 129,000 new COVID-19 cases per day, a rate that has doubled in a little over two weeks, according to a Reuters tally. The number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients is at a six-month high, and an average of 600 people are dying each day of COVID-19, double the death rate seen in late July.

Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oregon have reported record numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations this month, according to a Reuters tally, pushing healthcare systems to operate beyond their capacity.



U.S. health officials have authorized a third dose of COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc for people with compromised immune systems, based on evidence that the standard two shots offered less robust protection in such populations.

They included people who are receiving treatment for solid tumor cancers and cancers of the blood, such as lymphoma or leukemia; patients who have undergone within the last two years a bone marrow transplant or are still taking drugs to suppress their immune system; and patients with advanced or untreated HIV infection.

The CDC guidance also includes people who are currently taking high-dose steroids and immune system-suppressing biologic drugs, including medicines for Crohn's disease, rheumatoid arthritis and plaque psoriasis.

The CDC said last Friday that people seeking a third vaccine dose will not need a prescription or recommendation from a healthcare provider. They would self-attest that they are eligible at a vaccination site.

The vaccines themselves have been purchased by the federal government and are being distributed free of charge, but hospitals, pharmacies and other providers can bill insurers for administration costs. People covered by Medicare, the govern-

ment health plan for people over the age of 65, who qualify for an additional vaccine dose can receive it at no charge. Medicare will continue to pay vaccine providers an average of \$40 for each administration of a COVID-19 vaccine.

America's Health Insurance Plans, the trade group representing most private health insurers, said health insurance providers will continue to cover all administrative costs for COVID-19 vaccines as required.

WHAT ARE OTHER COUNTRIES DOING?

A growing number of countries have begun to offer a third vaccine dose to vulnerable populations based on evidence that vaccine protection may wane over time or may not be robust enough against the fast-spreading Delta variant.

Israel began offering a third shot of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to people aged over 60 in July. Last Friday, the country lowered that age limit to 50 and said it will also offer an additional dose to health workers.



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As Delta spreads, some travelers double up on COVID-19 vaccine in U.S.



Vials labelled "Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine" are seen in this illustration picture taken on May 2, 2021.

By Ahmed Aboulenein

WASHINGTON - Alison Toni felt lucky to get Sinovac's COVID-19 vaccine in Chile earlier this year. A month later, she was in Minnesota getting vaccinated again.

Toni, an American living in Chile, was visiting her parents in Minneapolis in April when she got her first Pfizer shot at a CVS pharmacy. She traveled back for the second dose in June. She did not disclose being previously vaccinated.

"They didn't ask, and I didn't tell," said Toni, 55. She took that step after reading that China's Sinovac vaccine had a lower efficacy than the Pfizer Inc shot, developed with German partner BioNTech, and the Moderna Inc shot, both widely available in the United States. She also consulted with her doctor beforehand.

Toni is among the group of people coming from abroad who have been vaccinated a second

time, or plan to do so, in the United States.

Their reasons range from concerns that the vaccines immediately available to them were not effective enough, fears that they require extra protection against the fast-spreading Delta variant, or a need to meet specific requirements for work or travel. Some are seeking medical advice, others are relying on their own research.

A few countries are also beginning to offer a third booster dose to their citizens based on evidence that the initial protection from vaccines wanes over time, or that an extra shot may help prevent infection against Delta, particularly for older people or those with weak immune systems.

Public health officials have not determined if booster doses are needed for the general population, and there is not yet much data on the relative risks and benefits of complete revaccination.

"It is probably more than is needed," said Jason Gallagher, an infectious diseases expert at Temple University's School of Pharmacy. "A fourth dose is probably a waste; a third dose is probably unnecessary for a lot of people."

The World Health Organization (WHO) has urged countries to hold off on boosters while many people worldwide wait to receive their first doses.

Thirty-six-year-old Chilean engineer Ricardo Dayne, who first received Sinovac's vaccine at home in April got his first Pfizer shot in New York in June.

"Everyone was also talking about the need to have a booster, so I decided to have it."

'PROCESS NEEDS TO BE FIXED'

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last week authorized a third vaccine dose for immunocompromised people. Government health officials have estimated that would apply to less than 3% of the adult U.S. population, but have said that eventually, boosters may be required more broadly.

In the meantime, a surplus of vaccines in the United States, along with a decentralized healthcare system, has made it easier for people to show up at pharmacies and vaccination centers for extra doses. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that over

1.2 million Americans have already received at least one extra dose following their initial inoculation.

When asked about travelers doubling up on vaccines, Moderna told Reuters its vaccine is not authorized for this purpose and J&J directed Reuters to the FDA and CDC. Pfizer did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A CVS Health Corp spokesperson said the company's policy is to turn away patients who have been fully vaccinated at one of its pharmacies, or who disclose that they have been fully vaccinated elsewhere. A Walgreens spokesperson said its pharmacies ask patients if they have been vaccinated during the appointment process and have alerts in place to check.

Graduate student Jing Wu, 22, said he had no choice. Wu received the Sinovac vaccine in December while in China before moving to the United States to attend Princeton University.

He heard Princeton was planning to require proof of an FDA-approved vaccine. The university's health service urged him to get vaccinated again and said it would be safe.

He was not reassured.

"I was nervous and stressed about it, but in April I got vaccinated (again)," he said, this time with the Johnson & Johnson shot.

Princeton announced the policy on April 20 but later decided to accept any WHO-approved vaccine, including Sinovac. The university's health website still states that "there is no known harm from taking additional" vaccines.

The university follows CDC guidance on the efficacy of vaccines available globally and worked to address the concerns of international students, a Princeton spokesperson said.

"If I knew back then the Chinese vaccine would be enough, I wouldn't have done it," Wu said.

The United States is developing a plan to require nearly all foreign visitors be fully vaccinated, potentially creating similar issues for many people inoculated with vaccines not approved by the FDA.

Britain and the European Union's lists of approved vaccines do not include shots made in Russia or China, which have been used in many countries.

Governments should standardize their definition of fully vaccinated to include shots that may not be approved in their countries, but which are still effective, said Dr Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

"This whole process needs to be fixed, otherwise, as we get more vaccines and more people traveling, this will only happen more," Adalja said.

New York orders all healthcare workers to get COVID-19 vaccine



By Jonathan Allen

NEW YORK - All healthcare workers in New York state must be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they have a medical or religious exemption, Governor Andrew Cuomo said in a new mandate issued on Monday.

They must have received at

least one dose of a vaccine by Sept. 27, he said in a statement.

Cuomo previously ordered all patient-facing workers in state hospitals to get vaccinated in a mandate issued in July.

About 75% of the state's roughly 450,000 hospital workers are fully vaccinated, according to the statement.

U.S. plans to begin administering COVID-19 booster shots in September says source

The Biden administration plans to begin administering COVID-19 booster shots to Americans as early as mid or late September, pending authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, a source familiar with the discussions told Reuters late on Monday.

Health officials in U.S. President Joe Biden's administration gathered round the view that most people should get a booster shot eight months after they completed their initial vaccination, the source said.

According to the New York Times, which earlier reported the development, officials are planning to announce the administration's decision as early as this week, with the first boosters likely to go to nursing home residents and health care workers, followed by other older people.

Last week, U.S. regulators authorized a third dose of



The Biden administration plans to begin administering COVID-19 booster shots to Americans as early as mid or late September, pending authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, a source familiar with the discussions told Reuters late on Monday.

COVID-19 vaccines by Pfizer Inc and its German partner BioNTech SE and Moderna Inc for people with compromised immune systems who are likely to have weaker protection from the two-dose regimens.

The administration's goal is to let those who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vac-

cines know that they will need additional protection against the Delta variant of the coronavirus, NYT said.

The newspaper added that officials also expect recipients of the vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, which was authorized as a one-dose regimen, will also require an additional dose.

Bayer takes legal battle over Roundup cancer claims to Supreme Court

FRANKFURT - Bayer, trying to contain billions of dollars in legal costs, filed a petition with the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse an appeals court verdict that upheld damages to a customer blaming his cancer on the German group's glyphosate-based weedkillers.

Bayer last week lost a third appeal against verdicts that sided with users of glyphosate-based Roundup, awarding them tens of

millions of dollars each, leaving the drugs and pesticides group to pin hopes for relief on the United States' top court.

Bayer on Monday asked the Supreme Court to review one such verdict by the federal 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that found in favour of California resident and Roundup user Edwin Hardeman, it said in a statement.

The maker of aspirin, Yasmin

birth-control pills and stroke prevention drug Xarelto has repeatedly argued that the cancer claims over Roundup go against sound science and product clearance from the federal environmental regulator.

"The Ninth Circuit's errors mean that a company can be severely punished for marketing a product without a cancer warning when the near-universal scientific



Bayer unit Monsanto Co's Roundup is shown for sale in Encinitas, California, U.S. on June 26, 2017.

India in talks to buy 50 million doses of Pfizer vaccine - WSJ

India is in talks to buy 50 million doses of Pfizer Inc and German partner BioNTech SE's COVID-19 vaccine, the Wall Street Journal reported last Wednesday, citing people familiar with the matter.

A Pfizer spokesperson said it was in talks with the government to supply vaccines, but declined to provide further details. The Indian health ministry did not immediately respond to Reuters request for comment.

To be sure, the drugmaker has not yet sought permission for use of its vaccine in India.

India rolled out one of the world's largest vaccination drives

earlier this year and has been relying heavily on the AstraZeneca vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India and a home-grown shot produced by Bharat Biotech.

While the coronavirus cases in the country have eased from a devastating peak in April and May, government officials have said the second wave is not over.

Experts have said that large-scale vaccination is India's best bet against the fast-spreading Delta variant of the coronavirus.

The country has fully vaccinated more than 115 million people, which is about 12% of its estimated 944 million adults, accord-

ing to latest government data. The government aims to vaccinate the entire adult population by December.

Authorities are also in an advanced stage of negotiations with Johnson & Johnson, which has a deal with India-based Biological E. Ltd, to manufacture as many as 600 million doses, starting as soon as this month, the Journal reported.

Last week, the country approved J&J's one-shot vaccine for emergency use, adding to the vaccines from AstraZeneca, Bharat Biotech, Russia's Gamaleya Institute and Moderna that have been granted such approval.

U.S. reports more than 1,000 COVID deaths in single day

The United States reported more than 1,000 COVID-19 deaths on Tuesday, equating to around 42 fatalities an hour, according to a Reuters tally, as the Delta variant continues to ravage parts of the country with low vaccination rates.

Coronavirus-related deaths have spiked in the United States over the past month and are averaging 769 per day, the highest since mid-April, according to the Reuters tally.

President Joe Biden's administration confirmed on Tuesday evening it planned to extend requirements for travelers to wear masks on airplanes, trains and buses and at airports and train stations until mid-January.

Like many other countries, the Delta variant has presented a major challenge.

The Reuters tally from state data on Tuesday showed 1,017 deaths, taking the death toll from the pandemic to just under

623,000 people, the highest number of deaths officially reported by any country in the world.

The last time the United States recorded more than 1,000 deaths on a daily basis was in March.

U.S. officials have started to accelerate vaccinations in the face of the renewed threat, with the seven-day average of doses given increasing by 14% in the past two weeks, according to figures from Our World in Data.

and regulatory consensus is that the product does not cause cancer, and the responsible federal agency has forbidden such a warning," the company said.

Roundup-related lawsuits have dogged the company since it acquired the brand as part of its \$63 billion purchase of agricultural seeds and pesticides maker Monsanto in 2018.

Bayer struck a settlement deal in principle with plaintiffs last year but failed to win court approval for a separate agreement on how to handle future cases, as it intended to keep the product on the market.

Last month, it took an additional litigation provision of \$4.5 billion to cover any unfavourable ruling by the Supreme Court. That came on top of \$11.6 billion it previously set aside for settlements and litigation over the matter.

Among other measures to contain the legal onslaught, Bayer plans to replace glyphosate in weedkillers for the U.S. residential market with other active ingredients.

It will, however, continue to sell the herbicide to farmers, who rely on it heavily, and whose role in the litigation has been described as negligible by Bayer.

No need for COVID booster jabs for now - WHO

GENEVA - Current data does not indicate that COVID-19 booster shots are needed, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday, adding that the most vulnerable people worldwide should be fully vaccinated before high-income countries deploy a top-up.

The comments came just before the U.S. government said it planned to make the booster shots

widely available to all Americans starting on Sept. 20 as infections from the Delta variant of the coronavirus rise.

WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan, asked about the need for boosters to increase protection against the disease, told a Geneva news conference: "We believe clearly that the data today does not indicate that boosters are needed."

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Chopra lends golden sheen to India's best ever Games show



Neeraj Chopra

By Sudipto Ganguly

TOKYO - Neeraj Chopra's soaring javelin did not just earn India their first Olympic gold in athletics last Saturday, it also meant that the contingent will return from Tokyo with seven medals, their biggest Games haul ever.

The world's second most populous nation has been an Olympic laggard and the six medals the contingent won in London

2012 was the best outing for the nation of 1.35 billion before Tokyo.

The country's sports ministry accepted that in the past preparations had not always been ideal for athletes headed to the world's grandest multi-sport gathering.

The officials pledged full support to the participants this time, while setting the goal of improving India's Olympic medal tally to a double digit in Tokyo.

But going into the final day of competition for the team, India were not only short of fulfilling that promise but were one medal short of their London haul.

Tokyo appeared set to be just another Games where India, long starved of Olympic success, would watch its athletes return home with meagre returns.

During last Saturday's early session, wrestler Bajrang Punia's bronze in the 65kg category took India to six by winning bronze but it was not enough to lift the sagging spirits in a country left reeling by the impact of COVID-19.

The 23-year-old Chopra was their last hope and he had whetted appetites by finishing top of the standings during the heats.

He did not disappoint, sealing the title with his first two throws.

India's best-ever Olympic show came despite an underwhelming performance from their shooters - usually their most consistent athletes in recent Games.

While boxing was also expect-

ed to bring more than a single bronze medal, there were also a few near misses - the women's hockey team, Aditi Ashok in women's golf and Deepak Punia in men's freestyle 86kg wrestling finished fourth to miss out.

Particularly satisfying were their exploits in a game they once dominated with clinical ruthlessness - hockey.

The women's team were lauded as superstars with their fourth spot while a euphoric India celebrated the country's first hockey medal in 41 years, hoping the hard-earned men's bronze would help them to regain their past glory.

The most successful hockey nation in Olympic history, with eight men's titles, India had not won a medal since the 1980 Moscow Games when they topped the podium.

Chopra's gold ensured that all was not lost for the Olympians, who are dwarfed by the country's cricket stars when it comes to sponsorship and popularity.

Abhinav Bindra, whose

10-metre air rifle triumph at the 2008 Games was India's lone gold medal previously, summed up the enormity of Chopra's success.

"To win a gold at the grandest sporting event in the world, which is held once every four years, is in itself so improbable that less than 3% of the 11,707 athletes competing in Tokyo will end up with one," Bindra said in a letter to Chopra posted on social media.

"Add to it the weight of expectations from an extremely proud nation starved of Olympic success, and your achievement becomes even more memorable.

"The impact your victory will create on promoting your sport amongst the country's youth is immeasurable. You have crossed the first barrier; the gates are now firmly open.

"Budding Olympians will now look up to you as they set out to fulfil their dreams of bringing glory to the nation. Thanks to you, we have finished our Tokyo endeavour on a great high."

India's Phogat unsure of returning after Tokyo trauma



Vinesh Phogat

NEW DELHI - India's Vinesh Phogat is not sure when, if at all, she would return to the wrestling mat as she struggles to cope with the disappointment of her Tokyo Olympics campaign.

Five years after being stretched off the mat with a twisted knee in Rio, the 26-year-old was the top seed in the women's 53-kg freestyle event in Tokyo.

Belarusian Vanesa Kaladzinskaya shocked her in the quarter-finals and Phogat was accused of "indiscipline" by the Wrestling Federation of India on her return from Japan.

As celebration continues across India after the country's biggest medal haul in Tokyo, Phogat is grappling with a second Olympic disappointment.

"I knew that in India, you fall as fast as you rise. One medal (lost) and everything is finished," she wrote last Friday's Indian Express newspaper.

"I don't know when I will return (to the mat). Maybe I won't. I feel I was better off with that broken leg. I had something to correct. Now my body is not broken, but I'm truly broken."

Phogat said she continued to feel the after-effects of a concussion she had suffered in 2017 and twice contracted COVID-19 in her build-up to Tokyo.

The two-time Commonwealth Games champion also battled mental health issues and spoke to a psychologist but felt enough attention was not paid to the issue in India.

India hails 'Lord's Miracle' after Kohli's men stun England

By Sudipto Ganguly

MUMBAI - India lavished praise on Virat Kohli's test team on Tuesday with former players and local media lining up to congratulate the side after they pulled off a spectacular victory against England in the second test at Lord's.

India went into the final day on Monday, a day after the country celebrated its 75th Independence Day, simply hoping to avoid defeat but tailend batting duo Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami helped turn the match on its head.

Setting the hosts 272 for victory, India's pacemen then bowled with aggression and control to bundle England out for 120 in the last two sessions for a 151-run victory and a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

"LORD'S MIRACLE, INDIA STYLE!" screamed the headline of the Times of India, the country's biggest selling English language newspaper.

While the popularity of test cricket has waned due to the rise of the shorter T20 format, the match was a perfect advertisement for the longest form of the game, with momentum shifting one way then the other over the five days.

"That was some test match #TeamIndia! Enjoyed watching



Virat Kohli celebrates winning the second test with teammates after Mohammed Siraj took the wicket of England's James Anderson.

every moment of it," India batting great Sachin Tendulkar said on social media.

"The resilience and grit that the team displayed in difficult situations is something that stood out for me. Very well played!"

Former skipper Sourav Ganguly, the current president of the cricket board, was at Lord's with other BCCI office-bearers and lauded the team's "character and guts".

Former India wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik, who was also at the venue working as a TV pundit, said the final day had been riveting.

"From survival to revival, the final day at Lord's was no less than a binge-worthy thriller," he

said on Twitter.

Kohli said the win had come a day late, missing the Independence Day celebrations back home, but it was the "best gift" they could give to the people of India and Indians living in England.

And he promised there would be no let up in intensity from his team for the remainder of the series.

"Our aim is five test matches," he said during the presentation ceremony. "We are not going to sit on the laurels after this match and just take it easy.

"If at all, we are going to get more intense and more precise in what we do in the next three games."

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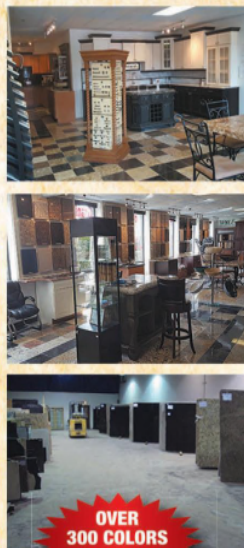
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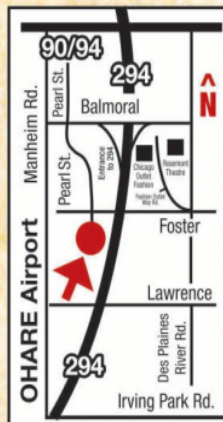
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