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- Nod for the trial of Covaxin in 2-18 age group



App to view SC proceedings launched

News: Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said he was “actively considering” the proposal to telecast live the proceedings of the Supreme Court.

Highlights:

1. The CJI, however, said concrete steps in this regard would be taken only after seeking a general consensus among his colleagues in the Supreme Court.
2. Chief Justice Ramana made the announcement in a virtual address while launching a mobile app that would allow media persons to view the Supreme Court’s virtual proceedings live on their mobile phones.
3. Transparency is a time-honoured principle when it comes to the judicial process in our country. Hearing of cases has always taken place in public courtrooms, with access being allowed not only to lawyers and litigants in a particular case but also to the general public.

Role of media

1. The CJI said public access to court hearings was important as the rulings of courts, more particularly the Supreme Court, had an impact on the lives of people across the country.
2. “The role of the media assumes importance in the process of disseminating information,” Chief Justice Ramana underlined.
3. The CJI said the initiative to launch the mobile app for journalists came after he heard that the Press was depending on lawyers for video links of virtual hearings.
4. The CJI said media persons should remain safe while working amid the surge of infection in the second wave of the pandemic. The Chief Justice said he had received requests to create an independent mechanism for journalists to access court hearings without endangering their health.
5. The CJI also launched a new feature in the Supreme Court’s official website called ‘Indicative Notes’, aimed at providing concise summaries of landmark judgments in an easy-to-understand format.
6. “This will serve as a useful resource for media persons and the general public who wish to be better informed about the rulings of the court,” Chief Justice Ramana explained.
7. With regard to granting accreditation to media persons, the CJI said he had given directions to further rationalize the policy.



OCIs stung by Home Ministry notification

Long delay: A portal that was to come up for OCIs to notify the government is not operational yet.

Highlights:

1. The Home Ministry's March 4 order that required professional Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs), such as journalists, engineers and researchers, to notify the Ministry about their activities in India has left them in the lurch.
2. A portal that was to come up for the purpose is not operational yet. The official said the OCIs could intimate the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) through e-mail till the portal is activated.

NRI quota seats

1. The Ministry issued a gazette notification that OCI cardholders could claim "only NRI (Non-Resident Indian) quota seats" in educational institutions.
2. It specified that OCIs could only pursue the following professions — doctors, dentists, nurses and pharmacists, advocates, architects and chartered accountants, and the rest would require "special permission".
3. OCIs are of Indian origin but hold foreign passports. India does not allow dual citizenship but provides certain benefits under Section 7B(I) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 to the OCIs. So far, 37.72 lakh OCI Cards are said to have been issued.
4. The notification said that OCIs shall be required to obtain a "special permission or a special permit" from the competent authority or the FRRO or the Indian mission "to undertake research, missionary or Tabligh or mountaineering or journalistic activities or internship in any foreign diplomatic missions".
5. "The notification does not mention IT professionals, a large number of OCIs are engineers; so will they have to apply for an employment visa?"
6. It says permission required to conduct research, this will place an undue burden on scientific, pharmaceutical, medical, biotechnology and other research fields.



Relax FCRA norms, ease relief flow, says Nasscom

News: Infotech industry association Nasscom has urged the Prime Minister to temporarily relax stringent Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) norms so as to ease the flow of overseas COVID-19 relief into the country and grant emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines in view of domestic vaccine shortages.

Highlights:

1. Terming the devastating economic and social impact of the second wave of COVID-19 that is 'being felt across the country' as unprecedented', Nasscom's missive to the PM listed three 'critical asks' to enable the industry to act faster to help the country navigate the second wave and better prepare for future waves of the pandemic.
2. "Times like this call for greater partnership and collaboration across industries and the government," it pointed out.
3. "Many countries and global companies are providing aid to India and are helping the healthcare infrastructure deal with the surge. However, the amended provisions of the FCRA Act 2020 are proving to be a deterrent," it said in the letter.
4. "Given the humanitarian crisis, we would request the government to grant a temporary waiver to the FCRA Act and the 2020 amendments. This will enable NGOs to transfer funds between FCRA-approved NGOs and non-FCRA approved NGOs," it said.

Vaccine options

1. Making a strong pitch for liberalising vaccine imports, Nasscom said the availability of vaccines particularly for the private sector 'continues to be very challenging' though firms are attempting to source them.
2. NASSCOM requested the government to provide emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines — Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, and others that have gone through stringent approval process globally — to ensure there is no vaccine divide in the country.
3. The statement assumes significance as States are struggling to source vaccines, and several of them are in the process of floating global tenders to import vaccines. Nasscom also requested the PM to use data more effectively to manage the pandemic and improve the government's response.



'HNIs invest in stocks, stay off a fixed income, real estate'

Highlights:

1. Despite the current uncertain economic environment precipitated by the surge in COVID-19 cases, wealthy Indians and family offices are investing in blue-chip stocks in India and abroad as well as in tech start-ups to maximise returns, according to wealth managers.
2. They have mostly moved away from investing in low-yielding fixed instruments such as fixed deposits and bonds, and real estate, even as they invest about 5% of their funds in gold which has emerged as a hedge against rupee depreciation, the analysts said.
3. In addition, there are about 100 listed companies that are attracting investments from this class, they said.
4. The equities market in India is a great growth engine and has performed well over a long time.
5. Investing in the fixed-income market has become challenging. Yields have fallen to a level where they are lower than the inflation expectation, giving negative real interest rates.

Sputnik-V shots to be available in India next week says govt.

News: The Sputnik-V vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya National Centre of Russia, will be available in India from early next week.

Highlights:

1. The government is also proactively engaging with foreign vaccine manufacturers like Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson, asking them to apply for emergency use authorisation in India so that these vaccines can be easily imported and made available in India.
2. Simultaneously, we, along with other like-minded countries, are stressing on IPR waiver for the COVID-19 vaccines. These two interventions, taken in conjunction, will ensure easy availability of vaccines not only in India but globally too.
3. Stating that overall, 216 crore doses of vaccines could be available in India between August and December.
4. Central Government in its new liberalized strategy, has made specific provisions that vaccines for COVID-19, which have been developed and are



being manufactured in foreign countries and which have been granted emergency use authorization by National Regulators of United States, European Medicine Agency (EU), United Kingdom, Japan or which are listed in WHO (Emergency Use Listing), will be granted emergency use approval in India.

5. The Ministry added that it also provides for post-approval parallel bridging clinical trial in place of conduct of prior local clinical trial as per the provisions prescribed under Second Schedule of the New Drugs & Clinical Trials Rules 2019.
6. Liberalized Pricing and Accelerated National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy aims at liberalised vaccine pricing and scaling up of vaccine coverage to incentivise vaccine manufacturers to rapidly augment their production and to attract new vaccine manufacturers.
7. It would make pricing, procurement and administration of vaccines more flexible and ensure increased vaccine production as well as wider availability of vaccines in the country.

Covishield second dose now after 12-16 weeks

News: The Union government has accepted the recommendation for the extension of the gap between the first and second doses of the Covishield vaccine to between 12 and 16 weeks. The present gap is six to eight weeks.

Highlights:

1. The Union Health Ministry said the decision was based on available real-life evidence, particularly from the U.K. The COVID-19 working group recommended increasing the interval to 12-16 weeks while suggesting no change in the interval of Covaxin doses.
2. The panel had also recommended that those infected with COVID-19 should be administered a vaccine after six months and people who had received plasma during treatment should get vaccinated at least after 12 weeks.



At least 18 elephants killed in lightning strike in Assam

Mammoth tragedy: The incident happened in Kandali Proposed Reserve Forest

Highlights:

1. A bolt of lightning is believed to have killed a herd of at least 18 elephants in central Assam's Nagaon district.
2. The incident happened in the hilly Kandali Proposed Reserve Forest.
3. An official team will examine if there are other reasons behind the death of the elephants.
4. The district has had cases of man-animal conflicts in the past.

Nod for the trial of Covaxin in 2-18 age group

News:

1. The Drugs Controller General of India has accepted the recommendation of the Subject Expert Committee (SEC) and accorded permission to conduct the Phase II/III clinical trial of Covaxin in the 2-18 age group to Bharat Biotech.
2. A release issued by the Health Ministry on Thursday said the trial would be conducted on 525 healthy volunteers. In the trial, the vaccine will be given by intramuscular route in two doses on day 0 and day 28.