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States paid for Shramik Special trains, admits Centre

Priyansha

Minister of Railways, Piyush Goyal informed in the Rajya Sabha on Friday that the Indian Railways had allowed the booking of Shramik Specials through state governments, who collected the ticket fares at full tariff rates which included normal fare for both directions, service charge, empty haulage charge, detention charge, etc.

The railway minister said in writing to a question: "Indian Railways operated 4,621 Shramik Special trains between May 1 and August 31 to help them in reaching their respective home states. Railways collected fare for Shramik Special trains from State Governments or their authorized representatives."

This means that while on one hand migrant labourers received no help when going home as the pandemic-induced lockdown began, they also had to pay full fare when returning to their jobs.

Speaking of the meals provided to the migrant workers, the minister said, "The state government and Indian Railways served food and water free of cost. In all, the Railways have served 1.96 crore meals and over 2.19 crore packaged drinking water bottles."

WHO will send vaccines to Africa in Feb

Nishitha Rachel

BENGALURU: The joint UN-led COVAX initiative aims to dispatch millions of Covid-19 vaccine doses to Africa in February, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, said on Thursday, February 4.

The continent will receive about 320,000 doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, in addition to the 670 million vaccine doses, in what will be its largest mass vaccination campaign.

"Africa has watched other regions start Covid-19 vaccination campaigns from the sidelines for too long. This planned rollout is a critical first step to ensuring the continent gets equitable



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access to vaccines", said Moeti.

"Amid the surging demands for Covid-19 vaccines, the final shipments will be based on the production capacities of the vaccine manufacturers and the readiness of the country," WHO added.

The initial 90 million doses

will support countries to immunise 3 percent of the African population who are most in need of protection, including health workers and other vulnerable groups, in the first half of 2021.

The aim is to vaccinate at least 20 percent of Africans by providing up to 600

million doses by the end of 2021.

Moeti said the move will allow African nations to be prepared and plan for Covid-19 immunisation campaigns, and called on the countries to finalize their immunisation plans.

"We urge African nations to

ramp up readiness and finalise their national vaccine deployment plans. Regulatory processes, cold chain systems and distribution plans need to be in place to ensure vaccines are safely expedited from ports of entry to delivery", she said. "We can't afford to waste a single dose."

The African Union, to complement COVAX efforts, has secured 670 million vaccine doses for the continent, to be distributed in 2021 and 2022 as countries secure adequate financing, according to WHO.

The 320,000 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines have been allocated to four African countries: Cabo Verde, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tunisia.

Howrah decries waterlogging

Megha Bhattacharjee

HOWRAH: Howrah residents are hitting the panic button because unseasonal showers are predicted in the area, as such rain usually leads to waterlogging there.

"We already have the pandemic. We don't need more diseases due to stagnant water," said local resident Atrayee Bhattacharjee.

The fears are not unfounded. All major roads in Howrah got inundated last monsoon, leaving the city life jeopardised for at least a couple of days.



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Low-Lying areas like Ramrajatala, Belgachia and Ghusuri were the worst hit.

The fear of waterborne diseases, thus, looms large. Didn't anyone try to fix it?

And what are the authorities doing? "Even after repeated cautions Howrah Municipal Corporation still hasn't taken action," said Shibpur MLA Jatu Lahiri.

Re-training and attention aid to pets' distress

Akshara DM

BENGALURU: Veterinary doctors and pet owners say retraining and undivided attention are two coping strategies that helped pets reduce stress caused by the lockdown.

Apart from being cooped up at home, pets and pet owners experienced stress also due to the disruption in routine activities of pets.

Rajesh Natraj, an animal welfare activist who houses 50-odd pets, including birds, turtles, guinea pigs, cats and dogs, said, "Sourcing food was one of the major problems which pet owners including him had to face."

He added, "We humans

have different routines and cycles, but when it comes to pets it is fixed or set for a particular time and it became more hard on their part to get adjusted with lockdown implications."

Rajesh further said, "Retraining pets to cope with the new routine is necessary as they find it hard to adjust to the changes happening due to lockdown."

Their group of animal welfare activists visited the houses of pet owners and re-trained them to cope with the new normal and also requested the animal husbandry authorities to pass an ordinance to take their pets for a walk within set boundaries.



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Malayalam litterateurs, legends now on YouTube

Athul Krishna

THRISSUR: Malayalam literature enthusiasts can now listen to late prominent writers such as EMS Namboodiripad and Uroob, talk about various issues through the new video series released by Kerala Sahitya Akademi (KSA).

The recordings, published on YouTube and Facebook, also contain snippets about the writers.

KSA's voice record collection consists of more than 70 prominent writers' voices, and as of now they have published voice records of 11 writers: EMS



Kerala Sahitya Akademi

Facebook

Namboodiripad, P Padmarajan, Uroob, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Vayalar Ramavarma, Edasseri Govindan Nair, NP

Mohammed, Joseph Mundassery, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, and Geetha Hiranyan. "All these voice records of

the late prominent writers, who made the foundation of Malayalam literature, is the most precious collection of Kerala Sahitya Akademi. By publishing these voice records on public platforms, our idea is to share their value among the public," said Nayana Thara, the sub-editor of KSA's periodical publication.

Marykutty Joseph, a Malayalam-language teacher from Kannur, said, "Listening to the voice of prominent writers of Malayalam literature from the 1970s is great for me. And this kind of action from KSA is greatly appreciated."