

Animal rescuers race to save abandoned pets in Kerala, K'taka

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG 21 /- With floods ravaging Kerala and Coorg in Karnataka, animal rescuers are being inundated with distress calls from desperate people who were forced to evacuate their homes without their pets. The Hyderabad-based Humane Society International/India has set up an emergency helpline to coordinate animal rescue throughout Kerala. It is collaborating with Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA), based in Bangalore, for rescue efforts in Karnataka's hill district of Coorg. Many rescue boats in the early days of the disaster in Kerala refused to take animals, leaving behind hundreds of dogs and cats to fend for themselves, especially in areas such as Kochi, Kottayam and Alappuzha where the pet population is high. "People are desperately worried about their pets and our Kerala helpline is ringing day and night with pleas

for animal rescue," said Rahul Sehgal, HSI India's senior director of Companion Animals & Engagement. "Many of the animals have now starved for several days so although they are traumatised, they are visibly relieved to hear a human voice," Sehgal added. "There is still a huge rescue operation taking place, but once the water subsides we will start to reach animals who have been completely cut off, and we predict we will see large numbers needing treatment for skin disease, tick fever, distemper and thousands displaced on the streets," he said. HSI India is working with a network of other Indian animal protection groups in each district across the state. Pet owners are using WhatsApp to send photos of their animals and the location of

their near-submerged houses so that HSI India can get rescuers to the scene to save the stranded pets, a spokesperson said. Teams are being sent to Kerala and Coorg, which borders Kerala, to help cope with the scale of the rescue. HSI India is working with local groups to reach as many animals as possible and also distributing vital life-saving equipment such as inflatable boats, veterinary medicines and food for starving animals. "We are urging Kerala's humanitarian rescue teams to allow families to bring their pets, but if people are forced to leave them behind, they must be unchained or receive help by responding to hundreds of distress calls and

Instagram posts and assigning them to local groups in the relevant areas. According to Sally Varma, HSI India's education and awareness officer, reports have come in of vast numbers of animals drowning in the disaster. One woman in Thrissur refused to leave her home without help to rescue her 25 dogs, so HSI India's team arranged for their shelter at a nearby veterinary hospital. While the waters are abating in some parts of Kerala, where more than 200 people have died and about 10 lakh people displaced, Coorg is also badly affected. Torrential rains in the district has left a trail of destruction and claimed at least 12 lives. CUPA has deployed animal rescuers and veterinarians to assist rescue efforts in the area. Animal rescuers are asking for relief materials such as dry food, medicines, bedding and crates to be sent to Kerala and as well as Coorg. (PTI)



A woman cleans the mud from the entrance of her house following floods in Paravur in Kerala

Kerala deluge: LIC relaxes claim settlement process

MUMBAI, AUG 21 /- State-run Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has relaxed the claim settlement and documentation process for the flood victims in the deluge-ravaged Kerala, including waiving off death certificates and delayed premium payment fees. The rain fury, the worst since 1924, began on August 8 and has left 223 dead as of today and forced over one million out of their homes. Between August 8 and 18, the state received almost four times more rainfall than the normal. Since the beginning of the monsoon season late May, more than 370 people have lost their lives. Most of the casualties happened in the rich central Kerala districts and still rescue operations are on in the central district of Pathanamthitta where tens of thousands are still marooned.

Announcing a slew of measures to ease the claim settlement process, LIC in a statement today said, "Our zone, division and branch authorities are in full alert and in touch with state and district authorities for settlement of claims reported due to the deluge." The measures include removing the otherwise mandatory submission of the death certificate. "LIC will accept a certificate from any authorised government official or a proof that the claimant has received ex gratia from government as alternate proof of death. In deserving cases, a certificate issued by the agent concerned will also suffice, subject to certain conditions or a confirmed development officer can also certify the death," the national insurer said. Accordingly, the corporation has also done away

claim investigation irrespective of the duration of the policy. It has also waived off the late fee on premium due for 30 days from the date of declaration of calamity. The corporation is also working with partner banks for expeditiously settling the claims coming under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana. It will also set up special help desks at divisional and branch offices to respond to policy enquiries and assist in expeditious settlement of claims reported due to the deluge. "A special task force has been created to ensure that concessions and benefits are reaching the needy policyholders," it said, adding the corporation also appointed nodal officers for each of the 14 districts and also for Mabe for the public to seek support. (PTI)



Haryana Governor Kaptaan Singh Solanki flagging off trucks carrying relief materials north over Rs one crore for the flood victims of Kerala

Kashmir civil society group to send food packets to flood-hit Kerala

SRINAGAR, AUG 21 /- A civil society group from Kashmir, which faced widespread destruction in the 2014 floods, will dispatch food packets for the flood-affected people of Kerala. "We have collected donations from local people including businessmen and are dispatching food packets to

Kerala for the flood victims," said Zahir Ahmad, the organiser of the effort. Ahmad said the volunteers have focussed their efforts on raising funds in Srinagar city but would expand their endeavours to other parts of the valley in the coming days. "These food packets will suffice for 2000 people. We will

be doing more in the coming days," he said. Ahmad said the people of Kashmir can understand the situation of the people in Kerala as they themselves had suffered due to floods in September 2014. "This is our token of concern for the people affected by the floods in Kerala," he added. (PTI)

NOTA cannot be permitted in Rajya Sabha polls: SC

NEW DELHI, AUG 21 /- The Supreme Court today quashed an Election Commission notification introducing the 'None of the Above' (NOTA) option in the Rajya Sabha elections, saying it would encourage the "Satan" of defection and corruption. A bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra said the NOTA option was meant only for direct elections and not polls held by the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote. "When one analyses the exercise of choice of NOTA in the voting process of the Council of States, where open ballot is permissible and secrecy of voting has no room, and further where the discipline of the political party/parties matters, it is clear that such choice will have a negative impact. An elector, though a single voter, has a quantified value of his vote and the surplus votes are transferable. There is existence of a formula for determining the value of the vote. The concept of vote being transferable has a different connotation. It further needs to be stated that a candidate, after being elected, becomes a representative of the State and does not represent a particular constituency" the bench, which also comprised justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud, said.

The apex court said if NOTA was allowed in the election of the members to the Council of States, the aspect of defection would "indirectly usher in with immense vigour". "We may immediately add that the option of NOTA may serve as an elixir in direct elections, but in respect of the election to the Council of States, which is a different one as discussed above, it would not only undermine the purity of democracy but also serve the Satan of defection and corruption," the bench said. The judgement came on a plea of Shailesh Manubhai Parmar, who was the Congress chief in the Gujarat assembly during the last Rajya Sabha polls, in which the party had fielded sitting MP but in respect of the election to the Council of States, he challenged the poll panel's notification allowing the NOTA option in ballot papers. The Gujarat Congress leader had alleged that if the Congress chief allowed in the Rajya Sabha polls, it would encourage "horse-trading and corruption".

The bench today said the provision for introduction of NOTA, as conceived by the Election Commission, was absolutely erroneous. "We are disposed to think that the decision could not have also said so, having regard to the constitutional provisions contained in Article 80 and the stipulations provided under the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution (PTI)

Sex workers donate Rs 21,000 for Kerala flood victims

AHMEDNAGAR, AUG 21 /- Sex workers in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district have donated Rs 21,000 for Kerala flood victims and they will be raising another Rs 1 lakh by the end of this month. A group of sex workers presented a cheque of Rs 21,000 drawn in favour of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for Kerala to Maharashtra Resident Deputy Collector Prashant Patil here yesterday, said a functionary of an NGO working for them. Dipak Buram of the city-based NGO Snehalaya said sex workers will raise another Rs 1 lakh by the month-end for Kerala flood victims. Buram is coordinator of

Snehalaya, a project run by Snehalaya, which is working for the welfare of sex workers for the last 30 years. In the past too, sex workers have contributed for helping the victims of natural calamities in various parts of the country, he said. In December 2015, they had donated Rs 1 lakh for relief work in rain-ravaged Chennai, Buram said. "Till date, they have contributed nearly Rs 27 lakh for various causes, including for the victims of earthquake in Gujarat (2001), tsunami (2004), Kashmir and Bihar floods, drought relief in Maharashtra and families of Kargil war heroes, he said. (PTI)

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89,540 tonne foodgrains, 100 tonne pulses to be supplied to flood-hit Kerala: Paswan

NEW DELHI, AUG 21 (PTI) Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan today said 89,540 tonne of foodgrains and 100 tonne of pulses will be supplied for free to flood-hit Kerala for distribution among those who are not covered under the food security act. The Centre allocates 1.18 lakh tonne of foodgrains monthly to the state. About 52 per cent of the state population is already covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) under which highly subsidised grains are distributed via the Public Distribution System (PDS). "We have taken a decision to provide 89,540 tonne of foodgrains to the state for distribution to those who are not covered under NFSA. The allocation will help the state to cover most of its population," Paswan told reporters here.

That apart, 100 tonne of pulses (dals) have been allocated to the state. The ministry has also decided to provide to the state 80 tonne of pulses on a daily basis to ensure adequate supply and check price rise, he said. The foodgrains and pulses are being provided free of cost. An order in this regard has been approved. The state had demanded foodgrains of 1.18 lakh tonne from the Centre, he added. Paswan said this is an initial allocation. "My department is ready to help the state if more is required," he added. Rains, floods and landslides in Kerala have killed 373 people since May 30, according to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). About 10.78 lakh people, including 2.12 lakh women and one lakh children under 12, have been sheltered in 3,200 relief camps, officials said. (PTI)

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Navi Mumbai Shiv Sena corporator booked for molestation

MUMBAI, AUG 21 /- A Shiv Sena corporator from Navi Mumbai has been booked on charges of molesting a 19-year-old college student after promising to help her financially, said police today. Nameed Bhagat, a Shiv Sena member of the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMCC), allegedly molested the woman at his farmhouse in Dighode village near the coastal town of Uran in adjoining Raigad district on Sunday last, a police official said. Bhagat, a corporator, who is also a member of the NMCC standing committee, had called the victim to his farmhouse on the pretext of helping her financially, he said. The woman filed a complaint after which an officer under IPC section 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) was registered against the corporator yesterday at the Uran police station, the official said. Bhagat is absconding, he said, adding further probe is underway. (PTI)

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Now, a dedicated marriage portal for HIV-infected people

AHMEDABAD, AUG 21 /- People with HIV infection can now look for a marriage partner on a web portal specially designed for them. The portal matrimonial.gsnppplus.org was launched today at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) to address the confidentiality concerns of people infected by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). The online platform has been created by Gujarat State Network of Positive People (GSNP+), a non-profit organisation, with the technical support of the IIMA's Centre for Management of Health Services.

The Surat-based Sri Rama Krishna (SRK) Knowledge Foundation has offered financial support. Daksha Patel, the president of GSNP+, said the concern of such people is how to approach a matrimonial platform without disclosing their health status. "When we met HIV positive people, we found some of them had no families and social support. It was difficult for them to find a life partner," she said. This led to the NGO earlier launching a marriage bureau for HIV-positive people, with the help of which 245 couples have so far tied the knot, she claimed. The

web portal is the outcome of the NGO's experience with the marriage bureau. Patel said. IIMA Director Errol D'Souza termed it as a "very progressive step". He said the field surveys reveal that the number of people infected by HIV is higher than the official estimates. "A research is needed on what is possible to contain the diseases and social support. It is a very progressive step. We should treat these people as normal human beings," he said. (PTI)

Make beaches secure before Ganesh festival starts: Bombay HC tells Maha govt

MUMBAI, AUG 21 /- The Bombay High Court today asked the Maharashtra government to take all necessary steps to ensure safety on beaches in the city ahead of the Ganesh Chaturthi festival. "Thousands of people through the beaches in Mumbai on the last day of the festival, which will commence on September 13, for immersion of Ganesh idols. A division bench, Justices S M Kemkar and S V Kotwal was hearing a public interest litigation filed by NGO Janhit Manch on the issue of beach safety. The PIL was filed in 2016 after 14 college students drowned at the Murud-Janjira beach in

the neighbouring Raigad district. "The state government must coordinate with local authorities and ensure that all necessary steps are taken to safeguard beaches ahead of the Ganesh festival," the court said. The court also directed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to seek permission from the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority (MCZMA) to erect temporary watch towers at the Girgaum Chowpatty beach in south Mumbai. (a) decision on 14 September 10. The BMC shall also seek permission to erect per-

manent watch towers which the MCZMA shall decide expeditiously," the court said. The BMC lawyer informed the court that the civic body had recently appointed over 90 lifeguards who will be deployed on the beaches. Besides, there would be patrolling jeeps, he said. "The jeeps should not be stationary. They should be moving up and down the beach. Haven't you watched Baywatch?" Justice Kemkar asked, referring to the popular American TV series. "Use modern means," he added. The court posted the petition for further hearing on October 16. (PTI)

Ayyappa devotees asked not to go to Sabarimalashrine

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG 21 /- Ayyappa devotees wishing to go to the hill shrine of Sabarimala for the Onam festival have been advised by authorities not to go there as flood waters in the Pampa river at the foothills have not receded. Besides, roads in nearby areas of Pampa have been damaged and several trees en route to the shrine uprooted under the impact of the heavy rains, the Travancore Devaswom Board, which manages the shrine, said. The path to the shrine was also filled with mud and this would make trekking to the shrine very dangerous, the TDB said in a release. The temple will open for Onam poojas on August 23 and close on August 28. The devastating deluge in Kerala has left 223 dead in a fortnight and forced over 10 lakh people out of their homes. (PTI)

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Kerala mulling 10 pc cess on GST, introduction of special lottery

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG 21 /- As Kerala struggles to raise resources for rehabilitation in the wake of devastating floods, the state government today demanded that it should be allowed to impose a 10 per cent cess on the GST and also introduce a special lottery. This decision was taken at a state Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan here today. The flood-ravaged state has asked for the GST council's permission to introduce 10 per cent cess on the GST as part of its efforts to mobilise more resources for rehabilitation, besides planning to introduce a special lot-

tery, a government press release said. The Cabinet also decided to accept the materials supplied by individuals and voluntary organisations outside the state and distribute the same in relief camps. In view of the flood situation, all plantation workers will be given 50 kg of free ration. Fire department personnel, police and revenue officials as also fishermen who took part in the rescue operations will be given a certificate of the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority in recognition of their services, it said. The devastating deluge has left 223 dead and over 10 lakh people homeless over the last fortnight. (PTI)

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Left party activists staging a protest against autonomous status of the MNJ Cancer Hospital, at Director of Medical and Health Office, in Hyderabad

Maha to set up study chairs in 13 varsities after Vajpayee

MUMBAI, AUG 21 /- The Maharashtra government will set up a study chair in the name of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in each of the 13 universities in the state. Ramesh Prakash, Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra BJP chief Ramesh Danve will arrive with a urn containing ashes of Vajpayee in a flight tomorrow. The urn will be taken to the NCPA (Na-

lional Centre for the Performing Arts) in south Mumbai where tributes will be paid to the BJP patriarch at a function being organised by the state BJP. Leaders of other parties can also join us in offering their tributes to Atalji," the minister said. Mungantiwar said the ashes of Vajpayee will be immersed into 11 rivers in

13 cities including Mumbai and Pune across Maharashtra in coming days. The ashes will be immersed while adhering to the norms of the National Green Tribunal, the minister said. He said the state government has created a corpus of Rs 20 crore for setting up the study chair in the name of Vajpayee in 11

state universities and two private varsities. Mungantiwar said the state unit of the BJP has also decided to fund research on the life and works of Vajpayee by paying Rs 3 lakh each to ten students who wish to pursue a doctorate on the former premier. The students can pursue their doctorate in any university, he added. (PTI)

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