

June 3rd news:

International:

Uganda imposes tax on WhatsApp, Facebook users

Uganda has imposed a controversial tax on people using social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber and Twitter in a move to curb "gossip" and raise revenue

According to the new Excise Duty (Amendment) Bill, to be in effect from July 1, a fine of 200 shilling (\$0.05) daily would be imposed on people using these platforms

The country's President Yoweri Museveni who had pushed for the changes in the social media law back in March argued that social media encourages gossip.

In a letter to finance minister Matia Kasaija, Museveni insisted that the revenue collected by the social media tax would help the country "cope with consequences of olugambo (gossiping)".

The revenue raised is also intended to help pay off of the country's growing national debt. The government is struggling to ensure all mobile phone SIM cards are properly registered

The new law will also impose various other taxes, including a 1% levy on the total value of mobile money transactions

US vetoes UN resolution denouncing violence against Palestinians

The United States on 1st June vetoed an Arab-backed UN draft resolution calling for measures to protect the Palestinians after more than 100 were killed by Israeli fire during protests at the border with Gaza.

Ten countries including China, France and Russia voted in favor of the draft put forward by Kuwait on behalf of Arab countries at the Security Council. Four countries - Britain, Ethiopia, the Netherlands and Poland - abstained.

A draft resolution requires nine votes to be adopted in the 15-member council and no veto from the five permanent members - Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States

The Kuwait-drafted text had called for "measures to guarantee the safety and protection" of Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, and requested a UN report to propose an "international protection mechanism."

Ahead of the vote, a young Palestinian woman was shot dead by Israeli soldiers near the Gaza border fence, bringing the death toll of Gazans killed by Israeli fire since the end of March to 123.

It was the second time that Haley has resorted to US veto power to block a UN measure on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In December, Haley vetoed a draft resolution that rejected President Donald Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem after all 14 other council members supported it.

The council has been deadlocked over how to respond to the recent violence, even as UN envoy Nickolay Mladenov warned this week that Gaza was "close to the brink of war."

A barrage of rocket and mortars into Israel from Gaza was followed by Israeli strikes on 65 militant sites in the Gaza Strip in the worst flareup since the 2014 war.

Israel has fought three wars in Gaza against Hamas, which the United States considers a terrorist organization

National:

Indian Institute of Science makes it to top 100 in the World Reputation Rankings 2018

The Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, made it to the top 100 universities in the Times Education World Reputation Rankings 2018. IISc Bangalore is the only Indian institution to make it to the top 100.

The university has been placed in the 91 to 100 rank banding. The top five universities in the list are Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, Cambridge and Oxford.

This is the first time an Indian university has made it to the top 100 since 2011. The United States has 44 universities in the list, up from 42 last year. The United Kingdom however, has only nine universities in the top 100, down from 10 last year.

Times Higher Education says the World Reputation Rankings have been compiled from a "globally representative survey of more than 10,000 senior academics". It says the rankings were established through the world's "largest invitation-only academic opinion survey"

Centre Sets Up Cauvery Water Management Authority

The Centre on 1st June notified by means of a Gazette Notification that it had constituted the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) to solve the dispute between the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and the union territory of Puducherry.

The Supreme Court in its 16 February order had directed the Centre to set up the body within six weeks while increasing Karnataka's share marginally. The Centre had then sought an extension keeping the Karnataka elections in mind.

The Gazette notification said that Ministry of Water Resources had framed the scheme to constitute a Cauvery Management Authority and Cauvery Water Regulation Committee to act on the orders of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal.

The authority would be headed by a chairman, followed by a secretary and eight members of which two would be full time, two would be part time and the remaining four would be part time members from the states.

The chairman would need to either be a 'senior and eminent engineer' or an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer experienced in the management of water resources and interstate disputes. The term of office would be five years or till the age of retirement at 65, whichever is earlier

Govt forms executive committee for Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary celebrations

The government on 2nd June set up an executive committee (EC) under the chairpersonship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "spread Mahatma Gandhi's legacy" among the people at the national and international level.

The committee comprises senior cabinet ministers, the leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha, renowned Gandhians, social activists and noted public figures

The panel was formed after the first meeting of the National Committee (NC) under the chairmanship of the President to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in which it was decided to form a sub-committee to consider policies and lay down guidelines for the celebrations.

The NC has 125 members, of which 116 are from India. The others are acclaimed foreign members. The latest addition to the list of foreign members is A T Ariyaratne, Founder, and President of Sarvodaya Shramdana Movement in Sri Lanka.

Economy:

IMD's monsoon, weather forecasts get up close and personal

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) started using two models that will enable it to forecast severe weather conditions up to the sub-district or block level.

Till now, the IMD used to make real-time rainfall forecasts using models that had a grid area of 530 sq km. The grid area will now shrink to 144 sq km. With the new model, the IMD will monitor weather using 20 parameters that include wind speed, temperature, rainfall, and humidity.

These forecasts will be made 6-7 days before the actual event, providing time to the district authorities, farmers and firemen to prepare for any adverse weather condition.

Rainfall forecasts for around 6,500 blocks in the country will be possible, helping farmers to plan sowing and harvesting schedules. The facility, which was launched ahead of the monsoon season, will initially predict rainfall but can be scaled up to predict extreme temperature conditions.

For predicting thunderstorms or squalls over small areas, the IMD said it had constituted a panel to examine whether such block-level forecasts could be made.

Most global weather agencies use such a model for long-range forecasts, but the IMD will use it for short and medium-range forecasts. With this, the IMD has become the second global weather forecasting agency to provide short-range rainfall forecasts over such small areas.

The European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) provides rainfall forecasts within a grid of 81 sq km. The IMD now plans to develop models that can forecast severe weather conditions within a grid range of 1-3 km.

The IMD was assisted by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, and the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, Noida, which developed the forecasting models. The models were prepared using supercomputers having computing speeds of 8 petaflops per second. The supercomputers, Mihir and Pratyush, were commissioned by the central government in January. Installed at a cost of Rs 4.5 billion in Pune and Noida, these two supercomputers are set to fundamentally alter the weather forecasting scenario in India.