

Daily News Monitor: 14 July 2020

1. Google commits \$10-billion investment to expedite digitisation in India

Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))

Google will invest close to \$10 billion (around Rs 75,000 crore) in India over the next five to seven years through a “Google for India Digitisation Fund”. Announcing this on Monday at the sixth edition of the company’s “Google for India” event, Sundar Pichai, chief executive officer of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google, said the firm was committed to empowering small businesses and building products suited to the country’s needs. “We will do this through a mix of equity investment, partnership, and operational, infrastructure and ecosystem investments,” Pichai said at the event, conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronic and Information Technology (MeitY) and live-streamed using Google India’s YouTube channel. “This is a reflection of our confidence in the future of India and its digital economy.” This is the largest investment in India by Google, headquartered in California.

2. Biocon eyes international markets to supply Itolizumab for Covid-19 therapy

Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))

While Biocon has received the Drugs Controller General of India’s (DCGI) approval to market its novel biologic drug Itolizumab in India for treatment of patients with moderate to severe Covid-19 complications, its partner Equillium is planning to carry out a clinical trial in the US, which could lead to huge spike in demand for the product. While the US has over 3 million cases, it has reported more than 132,000 deaths to date in the country. Currently, there are more than 280,000 active cases in India. According to the World Health Organization, 80 per cent cases are mild, 15 per cent are severe that require oxygen support and 5 per cent are critical which require ventilation. “By that estimate, the patient pool would range from 42,000-56,000 for Itolizumab, which would translate into an addressable market of Rs 39 crore not incorporating the international market,” according to an ICICI Securities estimate.

3. Thomas Cook India, SOTC offer premium, chauffeured tours across 32 countries

Source: Livemint ([Link](#))

Aimed at ensuring the health and safety of its customers, Thomas Cook (India) along with group company SOTC Travel Ltd on 14 July announced the launch Private Journeys. The premium offering will provide chauffeured van tours, strategically designed for smaller

groups of family or friends. Private Journeys covers more than 32 countries, for travel from September at a starting price of ₹25, 800. Curated by experts, the companies said these exclusive private experiences include both sightseeing and food. Destinations include, France, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, Russia, Romania, Kenya, South Africa, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Thailand and Vietnam, among others. A guest will have access to premium, private vehicles with English speaking driver, centrally located four-star hotels. It comes with zero cancellation charges up to 15 days prior to departure, and a medical insurance cover that includes covid-19-related hospitalisation and EMI payment option.

4. Atmanirbhar Bharat's first boost to be made in China; 5 new urea plants to make India self-reliant

Source: Financial Express ([Link](#))

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues to push for Atmanirbhar Bharat, the country's first boost towards self-reliance may be achieved in urea. India has commissioned four new plants before 2021 as it looks to reduce its dependence on imports from China. In fact, one more urea plant, which will take the total tally to five, is expected in 2023, The Indian Express reported. However, the lump-sum turnkey execution contract has been awarded to Chinese state-owned firm Wuhuan Engineering. In 2019-20, India's total urea imports from China stood at over 2.9 million tonnes (MT), worth \$854.56 million. This was out of a total 11 million tonnes of urea imported by the country in the same period.

5. FTAs with EU, US, UK, Australia, Canada to help double apparel exports in 3 years: AEPC

Source: Financial Express ([Link](#))

Implementation of free trade agreements with the US, UK, European Union, Australia and Canada would double apparel exports from the country in three years, AEPC said on 13 July. In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Apparel Export Promotion Council of India (AEPC) Chairman A Sakthivel said that the industry has been very badly impacted in India's principal export markets of the US, UK and Europe due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and free trade agreements (FTAs) with these regions would give a significant boost to the sector. Although the government is taking steps to revive exports, "an important area that can supplement your efforts in this direction is improving export competitiveness through a comprehensive review of India's trade agreements through a fast-tracked mechanism with the EU, UK, US, Australia and Canada", he said in the letter.

6. PM Modi takes stock of financial sector, reviews progress of Rs 20 lakh crore stimulus package

Source: Money Control ([Link](#))

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 13 July took stock of the financial sector which has been hit hard by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. He also reviewed the progress of a host of measures announced under the Rs 20-lakh crore Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package to stimulate the economy and help the MSME sector and poor sections of society. According to sources, the Prime Minister has been taking review meetings on various aspects of the economy. As part of this exercise, sources said, he had a meeting on the financial sector of the economy which is an important pillar in reviving growth and demand.

7. India-EU Summit may take a fresh look at long-pending FTA

Source: The Hindu, Business Line ([Link](#))

India and the EU may take a fresh look at the long-pending bilateral Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) and see if a meeting ground could be reached and the talks taken forward when leaders meet at the India-EU Summit on 15 July, an official source has said. “With new leadership taking charge of the European Council and the European Commission, there is a renewed interest in the bilateral free trade agreement. This may get translated into the talks re-starting,” the source, aware of the agenda for the meeting, told BusinessLine. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will represent India at the summit, to be held via video-conference, while the EU will be represented by European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

8. Alcohol-based hand sanitisers to attract GST at the rate of 18 per cent, says AAR

Source: The Hindu, Business Line ([Link](#))

Amidst debate on GST rate on alcohol-based hand sanitiser, an Authority for Advance Ruling (AAR) has said that this hygiene product will attract GST at the rate of 18 per cent.. The applicant, Springfields (India) Distilleries, moved to Goa AAR with two queries. First, the classification of hand sanitiser and second, as the Consumer Affairs Ministry has classified hand sanitiser as an essential commodity, will this be exempted from GST. The applicant believes that hand sanitisers are covered under HSN 30049087 and to be taxed at 12 per cent under GST. AAR heard this matter at a time when GST administration is investigating into the allegation of some manufacturers, including alcohol-based hand sanitiser makers, resorting to tax evasion/non-payment of GST by misclassifying the product.