



An autorickshaw drives past a billboard advertisement of the latest James Bond movie "No Time to Die" in Bangalore on Sept 30, 2021. — AFP



A London red bus is seen with a poster of the latest James Bond film "No Time to Die" in London on Monday. - AFP photos

NEW BOND FILM SMASHES FRANCHISE TAKINGS RECORD

The new James Bond film, "No Time to Die", broke the franchise record for opening-weekend takings, Universal Pictures said yesterday, with Daniel Craig's last outing as the eponymous hero netting £25 million (\$34 million). The movie opened in Britain and Ireland on Thursday, and achieved

Bond's best-ever three-day domestic opening in its 60-year history. It is already Britain's biggest film release since the pandemic hit in early 2020, despite only being open for four days, sparking optimism of a revival for the beleaguered industry. It has so far opened in 54 countries, including

Germany, Spain, Brazil and Japan, grossing \$121 million, said Universal, making it the first Hollywood release to break \$100 million without counting China among its opening markets. The movie, which also stars Rami Malek, Lashana Lynch and Ana de Armas, launches in the United States on Friday.

Fans in Britain flocked to cinemas across the country over the weekend to catch the latest 007 adventure, 18 months later than planned, but to a host of positive reviews. "It's better than good. It's magnificent," The Times newspaper's film critic Kevin Maher gushed, giving it a maximum five stars. "Craig is a towering

charismatic presence from opening frame to closing shot, and he bows out in terrific, soulful, style." However, the praise from critics was not universal and others disagreed about its length of two hours and 43 minutes. — AFP

Russian crew docks at ISS to film first movie in space

Russian actress and director yesterday arrived at the International Space Station (ISS) in a bid to best the United States and film the first movie in orbit. The Russian crew is set to beat a Hollywood project that was announced last year by "Mission Impossible" star Tom Cruise together with NASA and Elon Musk's SpaceX. Actress Yulia Peresild,

and film director Klim Shipenko, 38, took off from the Russia-leased Baikonur Cosmodrome in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan as scheduled. But they belatedly docked at the ISS at 1222 GMT after veteran cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov switched to manual control. "Welcome to the ISS!" Russia's space agency Roscosmos said



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on Twitter. The crew travelled in a Soyuz MS-19 spaceship for a 12-day mission at the ISS to film scenes for "The Challenge". The movie's plot, which has been mostly kept under wraps along with its budget, was revealed by Roscosmos to centre around a female surgeon who is dispatched to the ISS to save a cosmonaut. Shkaplerov and two other Russian cosmonauts aboard the ISS are said to have cameo roles in the film. The ISS crew, which also includes a French, a Japanese and three NASA astronauts, will welcome the newcomers when the hatch opens at around 1410 GMT.

'It was difficult'
"It was difficult psychologically, physically and emotionally... but I think when we reach our goal all the challenges won't seem so bad," Peresild - who was selected out of 3,000 applicants for the role - said at a pre-flight press conference on Monday. True to a pre-flight tradition religiously observed by cosmonauts, the crew said that on Sunday they watched the classic Soviet film "The White Sun of the Desert".

Shipenko and Peresild are expected to return to Earth on October 17 in a capsule with cosmonaut Oleg Novitsky, who has been on the ISS for the past six months. "Space is where we became pioneers, where despite everything we maintain a fairly confident position," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters yesterday. If successful, the mission will add to a long list of firsts for Russia's space industry. The Soviets launched the first satellite Sputnik, and sent the first animal, a dog named Laika, the first man, Yuri Gagarin, and the first woman, Valentina Tereshkova, into orbit.

But compared with the Soviet era, modern Russia has struggled to innovate and its space industry is fighting to secure state funding with the Kremlin prioritizing military spending. Its space agency is still reliant on Soviet-designed technology and has faced a number of setbacks, including corruption scandals and botched launches. Russia is also falling behind in the global space race, facing tough competition from the United States and China, with Beijing showing growing ambitions in the industry.

Russians 'lost interest'
Roscosmos was also dealt a blow after SpaceX last year successfully delivered astronauts to the ISS, costing Russia its monopoly for journeys to the



Cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov (bottom), actress Yulia Peresild (center) and film director Klim Shipenko (top) react during boarding Russia's Soyuz MS-19 spacecraft before blasting off to the ISS from the launch pad at the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

orbital station. For political analyst Konstantin Kalachev, the space film is a matter of PR and a way to "distract" Russians from the "problems" that Roscosmos is facing.

"This is supposed to inspire Russians, show how cool we are, but I think Russians have completely lost interest in the space industry," Kalachev told AFP. In a bid to spruce up its image and diversify its revenue, Russia's space program revealed this year that it will be reviving its tourism program to ferry fee-paying adventurers to the ISS. After a decade-long pause, Russia will send two Japanese tourists - including billionaire Yusaku Maezawa - to the ISS in

December, capping a year that has been a milestone for amateur space travel.

Last month, SpaceX completed the first all-civilian mission to space that took four untrained astronauts on a three-day loop around the Earth's orbit. The trip followed billionaire Richard Branson's several minutes in weightlessness in July, with Amazon founder Jeff Bezos completing a similar mission days later. Later this month, 90-year-old actor William Shatner, known for his portrayal of Captain Kirk in the Star Trek series, will fly to space on a mission with Bezos's Blue Origin. — AFP

Minister moots musical toots for noisy Indian roads

India's transport minister is mulling a law that would seek to replace the country's constant car-horn cacophony with the sound of music. "I am studying this and soon planning to make a law that the horns of all vehicles should be in Indian musical instruments so that it is pleasant to hear," Nitin Gadkari told local media on Monday. The horns could blast sounds made by the flute, tabla, violin, mouth organ or harmonium, he added.

Gadkari also said he wanted to replace the "irritating" sirens used by ambulances and police vehicles with soothing tunes. India is home to some of the noisiest cities in the world, as rickshaws, buses, taxis, weaving motorbikes and private cars fight for space on the traffic-clogged roads.

The horn is deemed almost as important as the gas pedal - and more so than wing mirrors - and is used by drivers more to alert other road-users to their presence rather than to rebuke. India's colorful trucks often have messages painted on their backs aimed at overtaking drivers such as "Horn OK Please" or "Blow Horn". The World Health Organization says noise pollution can cause hearing loss, cardiovascular problems, cognitive impairment, stress and depression. — AFP

African cinema could create 20 million jobs

Africa's film industry is thriving and could create many millions of extra jobs if its potential was fully exploited, the United Nations said yesterday. In a report, the UN cultural organization UNESCO said that an estimated five million people currently work in Africa's film industry, which contributes \$5 billion to the continent's GDP.

Nigeria's film industry is the continent's biggest, churning out 2,500 movies per year. Despite the numbers, UNESCO said the industry has much potential that remains largely untapped. Affordable digital film equipment and new online distribution platforms have given new opportunities to content creators, but the report said that Africa has fewer screens per capita than any other continent.

Piracy is another big issue, with the report estimating "that piracy waylays 50 percent to over 75 percent of the film and audiovisual industries' revenue". Only 19 African countries out of 54 offer any financial support to filmmakers, the report also found. If all these challenges were fully addressed, the sector could create over 20 million jobs and contribute \$20 billion to the continent's combined GDP, UNESCO said. The report also identified a lack of freedom of expression as hindering the film industry's progress, with professionals in 47 countries reporting limitations on the issues that they are able to handle in their creative work. In a statement, UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay called for a strengthening of international cooperation "to enable all countries, in particular developing countries, to develop cultural and creative industries that are viable and competitive both nationally and internationally". —AFP

HBO Max unveils Europe rollout

HBO Max-home to cultural touchstones from Batman and Harry Potter to The Sopranos and Friends-detailed the rollout of its streaming service across Europe yesterday. The

company used the event to offer a teaser of Game of Thrones prequel, "House of the Dragon", which is due next year. It also announced that the follow-up to "Sex and the City", which is titled "And Just Like That", will air from December. As the streaming service for WarnerMedia, HBO Max will also get new Warner Bros movies 45 days after their release in cinemas, the company said. That is potentially controversial since filmmakers have sometimes reacted angrily to the increasing shift towards home viewing for new blockbusters.

"Dune" director Denis Villeneuve has vilified Warner for choosing to release his film simultaneously in theatres and

on HBO Max in the US this month, saying it showed "no love for cinema, nor for the audience". Scarlett Johansson is suing Disney for doing the same thing with her blockbuster "Black Widow" this summer, saying it cut into her profits. HBO Max launched in the US last year and has expanded across Latin America and the Caribbean. It will launch in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Spain and Andorra on October 26. It will then expand to 27 European territories in 2022.

That will not include several key markets, including Britain, France, Germany and Italy, where HBO and Warner have distribution deals with local providers that

have a few more years to run. But the company said it plans to expand globally to reach 190 territories by 2026. WarnerMedia owns the rights to a vast back-catalogue of films, including classics such as "Singing in the Rain" and "The Shining" through to blockbusters such as "The Matrix" and "Justice League". It also has some huge TV titles, including "Friends", "The Big Bang Theory" and "Two and a Half Men", which have proved perennial favorites on streaming platforms. — AFP