

NEWS ALERT

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AGRICULTURE

PIONEER, FEB 21, 2019

India's sugar production rises by 8.07% to 21.93 MT

The country's sugar production rose by 8.07 per cent to 21.93 million tonnes (MT) till February 15 in the ongoing marketing year 2018-19 from the year-ago period. However, the overall sugar output is pegged lower at 30.7 MT for the current marketing year (October-September) compared to 32.5 MT during 2017-18. India is the second largest sugar producer after Brazil. Its annual consumption is around 26 MT.

According to the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), the recent hike in minimum selling price of sugar by Rs 2 per kg to Rs 31 will "generate additional revenue for the sugar mills and help them in payment of cane price arrears."

Cane arrears have touched over Rs 20,000 crore this year and the government raised the minimum selling price of sugar to improve the liquidity of cash-starved mills and enable them to clear the mounting cane dues.

Sharing the production update, ISMA said mills have manufactured 21.93 MT of sugar till February 15, higher than 20.35 MT in the year-ago period.

"Higher production this year is mainly because Maharashtra and Karnataka sugar mills started their crushing earlier this year. Overall, the country is expected to produce less sugar this season as compared to last season," it said.

BACKWARD CLASSES

PIONEER, FEB 20, 2019

Will hear fresh plea against ammendments in SC/ST Act: SC

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it will hear afresh the Centre's review plea against its verdict along with the new petitions filed against the amendments to the SC/ST Act as the old bench has now changed.

The top court listed all the matters on March 26 and said it will hear them continuously for three days.

The Centre has filed the review petition against the last year's March 20 verdict by which the top court, taking note of rampant misuse of the stringent SC/ST Act against government servants and private individuals, had diluted the arrest provisions.

A bench of Justices UU Lalit and Indu Malhotra said that since the old bench which comprised Justice (retd) Adarsh Goel has changed, all the matters will now be heard afresh.

“The old bench comprising Justice Goel, which heard the Centre's review petition for quite some time has changed due to the retirement, it would be appropriate if all the petitions are heard de novo (afresh). List the matter on March 26,” the bench said.

It clarified that the hearing will continue for three consecutive days and if need arises then it can be taken over for one or two days more.

PIONEER, FEB 20, 2019

‘Identify those who use caste discrimination in self-interest’

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday invoked poet-saint Guru Ravidas on his birth anniversary, urging people to end caste discrimination and identify those who promote it in their "self interest".

Modi addressed two meetings and launched development projects worth Rs 3,000 crore during the visit to Varanasi, the second in a month to his Lok Sabha constituency ahead of the parliamentary elections.

He hit out indirectly at Congress president Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav for “mocking” the high-speed Vande Bharat train from Varanasi to Delhi after it developed a snag, saying they had insulted the engineers involved in the project.

Laying the foundation stone for the Ravidas Janmasthan area development project here, Modi said caste discrimination is an impediment in achieving social harmony.

"Guruji had said that there should be no discrimination on the basis of caste. Till caste discrimination is there, people cannot connect with each other, social harmony is not possible and equality cannot be ensured," Modi said.

"Identify those who in their self-interest, create caste discrimination and promote it," he urged, without taking any names.

The prominent saint from the Bhakti movement of the 15th and the 16th centuries was born in Varanasi. His hymns often addressed caste issues.

"He dreamt of a society where all are taken care of. We have tried to follow this tenet during the past four and a half years with 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas' (inclusive development)," the Prime Minister said.

"My Government focused on 'panchdharma' — education, income, medicine, irrigation and addressing public grievances — irrespective of caste, creed and other factors," he said.

"Unfortunately, caste discrimination has not been removed till now. The New India will witness this change with the help of the youth," he said.

Modi also paid homage to Varanasi's Ramesh Yadav, one of the soldiers killed in the recent terror attack in Kashmir's Pulwama.

"The entire country will be forever indebted to the families of the soldiers who laid down lives for the country," he said.

Modi referred to attempts to fight back money and corruption in property deals, and hit out against complacency.

"A 'chalta hai' mentality had crept in. My Government tried to change it," he said.

"Those who looted public money are being brought to book and honest people are being honoured," he said.

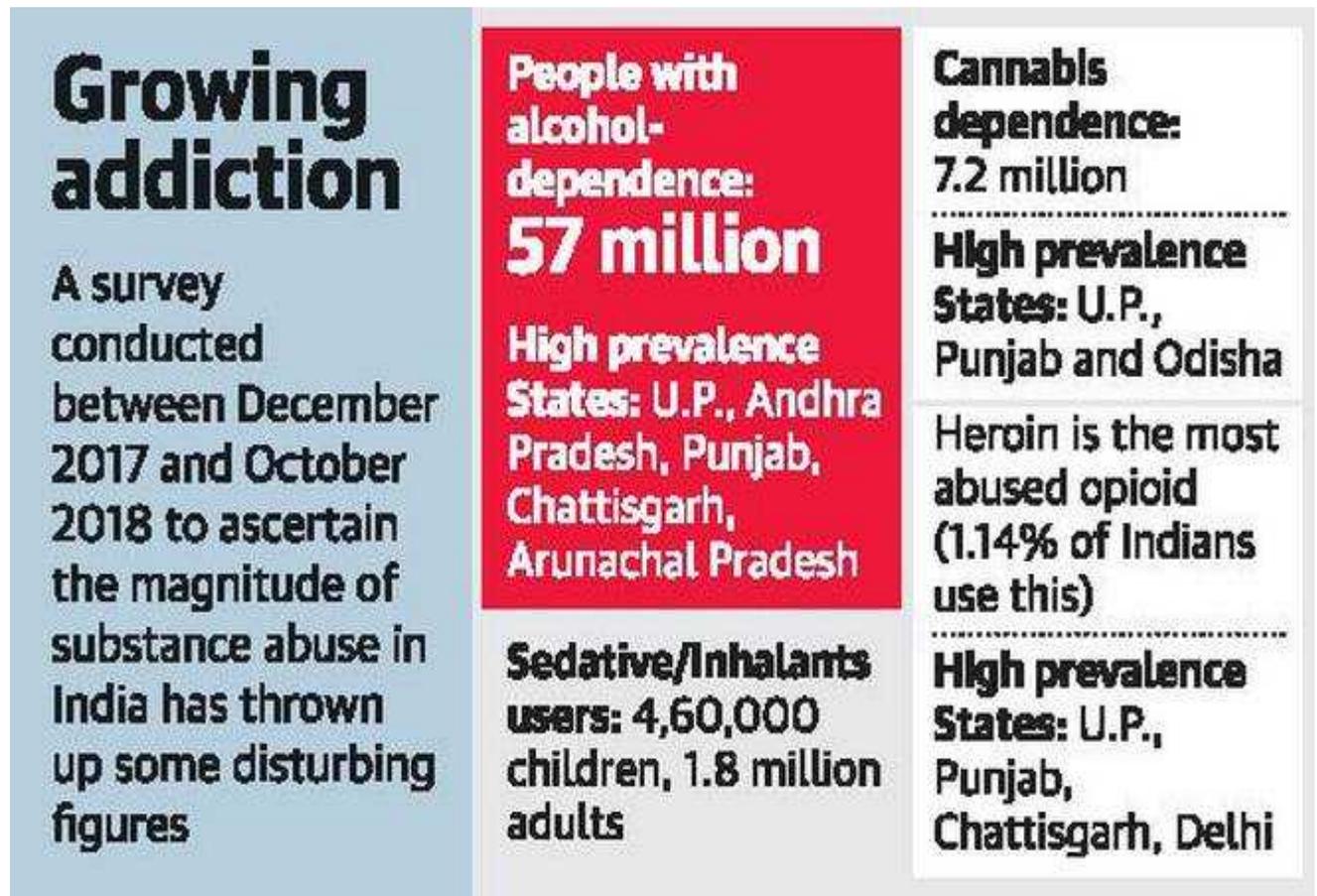
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath called Modi "Kashiputra", or a son of Varanasi.

Hitting out at political rivals for making farm loan waivers an issue before the polls, the Prime Minister said Rs 7.5 lakh crore will reach the farmers' accounts directly over the next few years under his Government's schemes. He said while emphasising on developing infrastructure, his Government was also focusing on making life better for the poor, the farmers and the middle class.

CHILD WELFARE

HINDU, FEB 20, 2019

More than 4 lakh children are inhalant addicts: survey



5.7 crore people suffer from alcohol dependence

Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Chattisgarh and Arunachal Pradesh have emerged front runners in alcohol abuse and health

complications arising due to the addition, according to a survey conducted by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi.

The survey, which was submitted to the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on Monday, noted that 5.7 crore people in the country suffered from alcohol related problems. Also of the 16 crore people who consumed alcohol across the country, prevalence of alcohol consumption was 17 times higher among men than among women.

More than four lakh children and 1.8 million adults needed help for inhalant abuse and dependence, the report said.

The survey, conducted to ascertain the magnitude of substance abuse in the country, was carried out between December 2017 and October 2018. It covered 4,73,569 individuals in the 10-75 age group. High prevalence of consumption of alcohol was also reported in Tripura and Chhattisgarh.

Cannabis use

The survey also revealed that about 3.1 crore individuals consumed cannabis, with 72 lakh of them needing help for cannabis use problems. Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Odisha registered maximum cannabis dependence.

The most common opioid used was heroin. The current use of heroin was 1.14%, followed by pharmaceutical opioids (0.96%) and opium

(0.52%). Here, the abuse was found most prevalent in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana.

The Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment maintained that a national guideline would be formulated after detailed consultation with all stakeholders to counter the drug menace in the country.

DEFENCE

HINDU, FEB 18, 2019

Central forces to be moved by air for Kashmir deployment



A commercial flight will be available six days a week

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has approved a plan to charter flights to transport Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel deployed in the Kashmir Valley.

A commercial flight will be available six days a week exclusively for the movement of personnel from Srinagar-Delhi-Srinagar and Srinagar-Jammu-Srinagar, CRPF Director-General R.R. Bhatnagar told The Hindu.

Inputs gathered

The officer said intelligence had been gathered in the past two days and operations against terrorist elements would follow soon. “We operate under the parameters of law; there will be operations in conjunction with other security forces.”

He said that following the Pulwama attack, a lot of false and inflammatory photographs were being circulated to incite passions, and an advisory had been issued warning people not to forward such posts on social media.

A car-borne suicide bomber rammed a CRPF bus, part of a 78-vehicle convoy that was moving from Jammu to Srinagar on February 14, killing 40 personnel near Pulwama in south Kashmir. The suicide attack was claimed by the Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and the bomber was identified as Adil Ahmed Dar, a resident of Pulwama.

Mr. Bhatnagar said the movement of large convoys was inevitable. “We have not had any convoy attack in the past two years. Now, we will have to initiate measures to counter this. With plans to fly the troops, we will be able to curtail some of the convoys but there will always be a need to move men and machine... Since elections are coming, there will be movement,” he said.

“The convoy movement is visible to everyone. It starts in the morning and so the question of any leak of its movement is irrelevant, it runs almost daily. We have also designated Delhi as a transit camp now. So they can fly directly to Srinagar and not halt at Jammu first,” he said. Most personnel who were part of the convoy that was hit by the suicide bomber were bunched up at the Jammu camp for days as the highway was closed due to snowfall.

He said professional counselling will be extended to the personnel if they still felt traumatised after the February 14 incident. The CRPF bus that bore the impact of the explosion was fifth in the convoy and had 39 personnel on board. It was followed by other buses and vehicles.

“We have asked all our commandants to speak to the personnel, especially those who were in the immediate vicinity of the bus. There is a sense of loss but there is determination alsothey know they are a fighting force and they have to take up the challenge,” he said.

He said the convoys have been strengthened immensely in terms of making the vehicles bullet-resistant. “But blast protection is totally different, even a bullet-proof vehicle is no protection against the blast,” he said.

HINDU, FEB 19, 2019

Watch: Two Surya Kiran aircraft crash near Bengaluru

One pilot was killed and two others ejected to safety on Tuesday after two aircraft of Indian Air Force's aerobatic team Surya Kiran crashed near the airbase at Yelahanka, a suburb of Bengaluru.

The Hawk trainer jets, which grazed each other before crashing, were on practice sorties a day ahead of the Aero India 2019 opening.

Sunil Agarwal, ADGP, Fire Services, confirmed that one pilot was dead and two pilots were injured.

EDUCATION

PIONEER, FEB 21, 2019

Op Digital Board launched to boost education quality

The Centre on Wednesday launched Operation Digital Board to leverage technology in order to boost quality education in the country.

Addressing a press conference HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar said that Operation Digital Board is a revolutionary step which will make the learning as well as the teaching process interactive and popularize flipped learning as a pedagogical approach.

Javadekar disclosed that the digital board will be introduced all over the country in Government and Government aided schools from class 9th onwards as well as in higher education institutions.

The process will begin from the coming session of 2019 itself, the Minister explained.

He further said that ODB aims at converting a class room into a digital class room and in addition to availability of e-resources at any time and at any place to students, it will also help in provisioning of personalised adaptive learning as well as Intelligent Tutoring by exploiting emerging technologies like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics.

An expert committee has worked out optimum configuration of the Digital Class Rooms under ODB.

The Union Minister said that the biggest challenge facing education sector in the country is maintaining acceptable quality standards across the country. Although we have good number of premier institutions, which compete with the best in the world, a large number of higher education institutions and schools needs improvements in quality teaching-learning, as the students coming out of these institutions find themselves unsuitable for the requirements of the society and market.

The spread of educational technology and connectivity has given an opportunity to resolve this issue and aim at equity in educational standards.

ELECTION

PIONEER, FEB 19, 2019

Home Secy briefs EC about J&K situation on holding polls

Ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and elections to some legislative assemblies, Union Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Monday briefed the Election Commission about the prevailing situation in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of Pulwama terror attack in which 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans were killed.

Sources said that the meeting was held to help the EC in taking a decision on holding Lok Sabha elections as well as the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir, which is currently under President's rule.

“During the hour-long meeting, the Home Ministry officials apprised the EC about the ground realities in the State, strength of Central forces currently deployed and the additional forces which could be made available for election duties”, sources said.

The EC will have to take a decision on whether to hold Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir simultaneously or conduct the Assembly polls later in the year based on the assessment provided by the Home Ministry.

“The officials of Home Ministry also apprised the EC about the internal security situation in the country and the central forces it could make available for polling duties across the country,” another official said.

The EC is expected to announce the schedule for Lok Sabha elections in the first fortnight of March. Assembly polls are expected to be held with Lok Sabha elections simultaneously in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

A senior security officer, who is familiar with the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, said the Assembly polls in the State should be held simultaneously as such decisions cannot be held ransom to one incident or a couple of incidents.

Besides, the same number of forces will be required if Lok Sabha and Assembly polls are held simultaneously.

Some additional security personnel will be required only for giving protection of candidates, the official said, requesting anonymity.

The Governor’s rule was imposed in Jammu and Kashmir on June 19, 2018 after the State plunged into a political crisis when the Mehbooba Mufti-led PDP-BJP coalition Government was reduced to minority following withdrawal of support by the 25-member BJP in the State. The Assembly had been kept under the suspended animation then.

However, the Governor on November 21 dissolved the 87-member State Assembly after the PDP, supported by the Congress and arch rivals National Conference, tried to stake claim to form the Government.

He had cited “extensive horse-trading”, the “impossibility” of forming a stable Government by coming together of political parties with “opposing political ideologies” and “serious doubts about the longevity of any such arrangement where there are competing claims of majority” as the reasons behind the decision.

When the Governor’s rule expired on December 19, 2018, President’s rule was imposed in the State as under the Constitution of Jammu & Kashmir, there is no provision for extension of Governor’s rule.

HUMAN RIGHTS

HINDU, FEB 20, 2019

UN Human Rights chief strongly condemns Pulwama terror attack



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on India and Pakistan to take 'immediate steps' to de-escalate tension, says his offices are always available should both sides ask

The top United Nations human rights official has strongly condemned last week's suicide bomb attack against Indian security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, calling on authorities to bring those responsible to justice.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Michelle Bachelet is also saddened by the further loss of life from subsequent gun battles in the same area, the spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Rupert Colville said in Geneva on Tuesday.

“The High Commissioner strongly condemns the suicide bomb attack against Indian security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on 14 February and calls on authorities to bring those responsible to justice,” Mr. Colville said.

A suicide bomber from the Jaish-e-Mohammed group drove his explosives-laden vehicle into a CRPF bus last week, killing 40 jawans and critically wounding others.

In a major encounter in Pulwama’s Pinglan area on Monday, two Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists, including a Pakistani commander of the group being investigated for his role in the February 14 attack, and an Army major were among the seven people killed.

The UN Human Rights chief expressed hope that escalating tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours “will not add further to the insecurity in the region”.

In the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, Mr. Colville said the High Commissioner is also “concerned” by reports from India that “some elements” are using the attack as “justification for threats and potential acts of violence” targeting Kashmiri people living in different parts of India.

In New Delhi, India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday directed officials to ensure protection of innocent Kashmiris living in different parts of the country.

"We acknowledge actions taken by the Indian authorities to tackle these incidents and we hope that the Government will continue to take steps to protect people from all forms of harm that may be directed at them on account of their ethnicity or identity," Mr. Colville said.

Guterres calls for steps to de-escalate tension

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on India and Pakistan to take "immediate steps" to de-escalate tension.

"The Secretary General stresses the importance for both sides to exercise maximum restraint and take immediate steps to de-escalation, and his good offices are always available should both sides ask," the UN Chief's spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters here on Tuesday at the daily press briefing.

Mr. Dujarric was asked about a meeting Pakistan's Permanent Mission to the UN has sought with the Secretary General and also about Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi saying the UN must step in to defuse tensions between the two nations.

"...Looking at the situation in general between India and Pakistan, we're deeply concerned at the increase in tensions between the two countries in the wake of the attack on Indian security personnel on 14 February in Pulwama," Mr. Dujrraic said.

He said Pakistan's mission at the UN requested for the meeting with the Secretary General.

"We have seen press reports of a letter having been delivered to the UN. As far as we've ascertained, none has been received as of this very minute," he added.

Last week, Mr. Guterres had "strongly" condemned the terror attack, calling for those behind the attack to be brought to justice.

"We strongly condemn today's attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district and express our deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and to the government and people of India," Mr. Dujarric had said at the daily press briefing last Thursday.

MINORITIES

PIONEER, FEB 20, 2019

Triple Talaq Ordinance renewed

As the Bills could not pass in Rajya Sabha due to stiff opposition, Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved ordinances to prevent instant Triple Talaq, amendments proposed in the Indian Medical Council, Companies Act. The Cabinet meeting also approved increase in the Dearness Allowance by 3 per cent effective from January 1, 2019, a move which will benefit 1.1 crore central government employees and pensioners.

The Triple Talaq bill which seeks to make the practise of talaq-e-biddat void, is pending in Rajya Sabha. The bill will lapse on June 3 with the dissolution of the present Lok Sabha. The Cabinet has given its nod to the Triple Talaq Ordinance, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said. Once signed by President Ram Nath Kovind, the triple talaq ordinance will come into force for the third time in less than one year.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the revision of norms under Mid-Day Meal Scheme with an outlay of Rs 12,054 Crore for 2019-20 in addition to the subsidy of about Rs 8,000 crore borne by Department of Food & Public Distribution, said the statement issued by the Government.

POLICE

HINDU, FEB 19, 2019

Supreme Court refuses to intervene in appointment of Nageshwar Rao as interim CBI Director

The petition termed the January 10 order of the government handing over the charge and work of the CBI Director to Mr. Rao as “illegal”.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to intervene in the process of re-appointment of M. Nageshwar Rao as the interim CBI Director in January.

A Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra said a regular CBI Director has already been appointed in Mr. Rao's stead. The court also refused to delve into the issues of more transparency raised by NGO and petitioner, Common Cause.

The petitioner, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, said the government had “completely bypassed” the statutory requirement to consult the high-powered selection committee of the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader and the Chief Justice of India before appointing Mr. Rao.

The NGO and activist Anjali Bhardwaj had termed the January 10 order of the government handing over the charge and work of the CBI Director to Mr. Rao as “illegal”.

“The Government of India has attempted to stifle the independence of the institution of the CBI by appointing the Director of the CBI in an arbitrary and illegal manner,” the petition had contended.

It said the mandatory requirement under Section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act of 1946 to consult the high-powered selection committee was a statutory measure to make the appointment process of the CBI Director free from government interference.

“The DSPE Act as amended by the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 provides for the appointment of the CBI Director by a high-powered selection committee which does not have a preponderance of the government and its representatives. The committee consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or any Judge of Supreme Court nominated by him,” the petition said.

Besides, it argued that Mr. Rao’s earlier appointment as interim CBI Director following the ouster of Alok Verma on October 23 was quashed by the Supreme Court in a judgment on January 8. Yet the January 10 order has stated that the Appointment Committee of the Cabinet approved the appointment of Mr. Rao “as per the earlier arrangement”.

“The October 23 order making Mr. Rao interim CBI Director was quashed by the Supreme Court on January 8 for violating the procedure for appointment of CBI Director as defined in the DSPE Act... However, the government still invoked its earlier order which had been quashed, to once again make Shri Nageshwar Rao Interim Director of the CBI even though it was not the competent authority and did not have any powers to make the appointment,” the petition said.

Lack of transparency in the appointment of the CBI Director allows the government to exercise undue influence in the appointment process especially at the stage of short-listing of candidates, the petition said.

RAILWAYS

PIONEER, FEB 20, 2019

Union Cabinet approves 82 km long RRTS project

Ahead of 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved a project Rapid Rail Transit System (RRTS) connecting Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut covering a distance of 82.15 kms. The project will cost Rs 30, 274 crore. The rapid rail will have a design speed of 180 kmph and will operate at 160 kmph. It is expected to cater to nearly 7.4 lakh daily commuters as per the detailed project report. The rapid train will cover the distance in 55 minutes from Meerut to Delhi. Presently, traveler takes 2 to 3 hours to complete the distance between Delhi and Meerut.

Addressing after the cabinet meeting, Union Minister Arun Jaitley said that the central assistance to this project in the form of grant and subordinate debt will be Rs 5634 crore. “The implementation of this project will provide additional public transport infrastructure to the National Capital Region to address the issue of congestion, air pollution, catalyse balanced and sustainable regional development,”

As per proposal, there will be 24 stations between Delhi and Meerut. Of the total length of 82.15 kms, 68.03 kms will be elevated while 14.12 kms will be underground. The RRTS station can accommodate 12-coach trains with superior amenities is all set to change the way India travels on rails.

The Sarai Kale Khan station, the starting point of the Delhi-Meerut corridor will be a transit hub, with an existing inter-state bus terminal, the Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station, and the upcoming Delhi Metro station, on the Pink Line, which you can read about [here](#).

The trains will have the facilities of universal access, which means differently-abled people won't have an issue embarking or disembarking. The stations will have platform screen doors, and trains will be loaded with safety features for safety and stability at high speeds.

RELIGION

PIONEER, FEB 16, 2019

SC to hear plea against 1993 Central law on land acquisition near disputed site in Ayodhya

The Supreme Court Friday decided to hear a fresh plea challenging the constitutional validity of a 1993 Central law by which the government acquired 67.703 acres of land, including the disputed premises of Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi tagged the matter with the main petition on title dispute pending before a constitution bench.

“List the matter before the bench already seized with the issue,” the bench of Chief Justice Gogoi and Justice Sanjiv Khanna said.

The plea, challenging legislative competence of Parliament to acquire religious land, was filed a week after the Centre had moved the apex court seeking modification in its 2003 order and allow it to return to original owners the 67 acres “non-disputed” land around the disputed structure in Ayodhya.

The petition, filed by seven individuals, including two Lucknow-based lawyers claiming to be devotees of Ram Lalla, has contended that Parliament had no legislative competence to acquire land belonging to the state.

Moreover, it said, the state legislature has the exclusive power to make provisions relating to the management of affairs of religious institutions inside its territory.

PIONEER, FEB 21, 2019

SC to hear Ayodhya land dispute matter on February 26

The Supreme Court on Wednesday decided to hear on February 26 the politically sensitive Ayodhya's Ram-Janmabhoomi Babri Masjid land dispute matter.

It will be heard by a five-judge Constitution Bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices S A Bobde, D Y Chandrachud, Ashok Bhushan and S A Nazeer.

The apex court on January 27 had cancelled the scheduled hearing for January 29 as Justice Bobde was not available that day.

The fresh notice issued by the apex court registry said all the petitions in Ayodhya land dispute will come up for hearing on February 26.

Fourteen appeals have been filed in the apex court against the 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment, delivered in four civil suits, that the 2.77-acre land in Ayodhya be partitioned equally among the three parties-the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla.

The five-judge bench was re-constituted on January 25 as Justice U U Lalit, who was a member of the original bench, had recused himself from hearing the matter.

When the new bench was constituted, Justice N V Ramana was excluded from the re-constitution bench. Justices Bhushan and Nazeer made a comeback to hear the Ayodhya land dispute matter-both were part of an earlier bench headed by then CJI Dipak Misra (now retired).

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

HINDU, FEB 20, 2019

Cabinet approves new National Electronics Policy



Aim is to achieve turnover of 26 lakh crore for design and manufacturing sector by 2025

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved the National Electronics Policy 2019 aimed at achieving a turnover of \$400 billion (about 26 lakh crore) for the electronics system design and manufacturing (ESDM) sector by 2025, while generating employment opportunities for one crore people.

“The policy will enable flow of investment and technology, leading to higher value addition in the domestically manufactured electronic products and increased manufacturing of electronics hardware for local use as well as exports,” IT and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

The policy has introduced “easier to implement” incentive schemes, including an interest subvention scheme and credit default guarantee, to replace some of the existing ones under the National Electronics Policy 2012.

It proposes to provide interest subsidy of 4% on loans up to 1,000 crore on plant and machinery, an IT Ministry official told *The Hindu*, adding that in case of larger loans, the subsidy would be limited to 1,000 crore.

Default guarantee

The government proposes to create a fund to provide default guarantee of up to 75% to banks for plant and machine loans of up to 100 crore. “This will eliminate the need for small and new investors to provide third-party collateral... the scheme will be on the pattern of credit guarantee being provided by SIDBI for the SME sector,” the official said.

However, for both these schemes, consultations are on with the Department of Expenditure, the official added. They will be launched once the policy is notified.

To help create an ecosystem, the policy has pitched for 2.0 version of the Electronics Manufacturing Cluster Scheme, under which infrastructure support will be provided for a group of industries that are part of the product supply chain rather than individual industries.

It has also proposed a sovereign patent fund to acquire intellectual property for chips and chip components.

TERRORISM

PIONEER, FEB 20, 2019

US to help India in counter terrorism

In a major development, United States has resolved to cooperate with India on counter terrorism and work with it to get to the nadir of the terror attacks. The US also called on Pakistan to put an end immediately to its support and safe haven, provided to all terrorist groups operating from its soil. Addressing the media on the sidelines of a programme on Tuesday, the US Ambassador to India, Kenneth I Juster, has said US is closely working with India in terms of getting to the bottom of the terrorist attacks. He was referring to Pulwama incident in Jammu & Kashmir and said US will ask Pakistan to stop supporting terrorists from its soil.

He said "We are working closely with the Government of India in terms of getting to the crux of the terrorist attacks. We have condemned them. We have previously condemned terrorist sanctuaries that exist in Pakistan and we have suspended military assistance to them"

"This incident bolsters our resolve to cooperate with India on "counter terrorism matters" and work with them to get to the bottom of what occurred last week," he said on the Pulwama incident, in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed in one of the deadliest terror strikes in decades in Jammu & Kashmir.

Juster described the Pulwama attack as "horrific." Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), headed by Masood Azhar, has claimed responsibility for the attack in which a suicide bomber rammed a vehicle carrying explosives into a bus in the CRPF convoy.

The US ambassador is here leading a high-level US delegation for the five-day Aero India event beginning in Bengaluru on Wednesday at the outskirts at Yalahanka air base.

Asked if he would foresee Pakistan ordering a crackdown on terror groups operating from its soil with more pressure from the US, Juster said "I don't want to get ahead of the situation that is developing, we have condemned the existence of terrorist sanctuaries and we are urging Pakistan to crackdown on those and we will have to see what the factual... in terms of exactly how this incident occurred."

On US' defence relationship with India, Juster said it continued to undergo a rapid expansion as part of the deepening strategic partnership between the two countries. He said the US and India were committed to strengthening defence cooperation in line with India's status as a major defence partner and added that defence acquisition was a key element of "deepening our bilateral relationship."

The US delegation to Aero India includes Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Alan Shaffer and Director of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency Lieutenant General Charles Hooper.

Twenty eight U.S. companies are participating in Aero India, 19 of which are exhibiting in the USA Partnership Pavilion, organized for the

fifth consecutive edition by Kallman Worldwide. There are four Pavilion exhibitors presenting for the first time at Aero India. In addition to U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of State officials, more than 100 U.S. Department of Defense personnel will support the U.S. delegation at Aero India 2019, including a demonstration team for the C-17 Globemaster III assigned to the 535th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, and the F-16 Fighting Falcons assigned to the 35th Fighter Wing, Misawa Air Base, Japan. U.S. Naval assets on display will include the F/A-18 Super Hornet from VFA-27 Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, and a P-8 from VP-47 Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington.

TRANSPORT

HINDU, FEB 20, 2019

Centre clears Regional Rapid Transport System

The government on Tuesday approved the construction of a 30,274 crore Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) to connect the national capital with Meerut through Ghaziabad.

According to the government, the 82 km-stretch will be covered in less than 60 minutes by high-speed and green public transit.

The approval was given at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The RRTS is a first-of-its-kind, rail-based, high-speed regional transit system to be implemented in India.

Once operational, it will be the fastest, most comfortable and safest mode of commuter transport in the National Capital Region (NCR).

WOMEN

PIONEER, FEB 19, 2019

Rajnath launches emergency helpline number 112 for women security in 16 States

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday launched emergency helpline number 112 for women security and immediate assistance to anyone in distress in 16 states. The 112 helpline is an integration of police (100), fire (101) and women (1090) helpline numbers. The health helpline (108) will be integrated with it soon.

Launching the '112' helpline, under the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS), Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the central government is committed to the safety of citizens, particularly women, for whom laws were changed to ensure the guilty is punished in a time-bound manner. "The helpline number '112' will be activated across the country by next year and anyone in distress can reach the helpline by pressing a single key of phones which will be pre-programmed," he said.

The 16 states and Union Territories are Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Andaman, Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir.

The '112' helpline has already been launched in Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

To access emergency services, a person can dial '112' on a phone or press the power button of a smart phone three times quickly to send a panic call to the Emergency Response Centre. In case of a normal phone, a long press of the '5' or '9' key will activate the panic call. People can also log onto the ERSS website for the respective state and send an emergency email or SOS alert to state ERC. They can use

'112' India mobile app, which is available free on Google Play Store and Apple Store. The single number for emergency services is similar to '911' in the United States.

The Home Minister said safe city implementation monitoring portal will instill a sense of security in women in metro cities. "The Government has identified eight cities for implementation of safe city projects in first phase at a cost of Rs 2,919 crore. The cities are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai. The projects are funded under Nirbhaya Fund scheme," he said.

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