
Vol. XXXV

February 2021

No. 2

News digest

▪
*a monthly digest of news
for the law maker*
▪

**PREPARED BY
THE SECRETARIAT OF THE KERALA LEGISLATURE**

NEWS DIGEST

VOL. XXXV

No. 2

FEBRUARY 2021

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

ദി.	-	ദീപിക
മാ.	-	മാതൃഭൂമി
എ.	-	എക്സ്പ്രസ്സ്
കേ.കൗ.	-	കേരളകൗമുദി
ദേ.	-	ദേശാഭിമാനി
മ.മ.	-	മലയാള മനോരമ
മാധ്യ.	-	മാധ്യമം
മം.	-	മംഗളം
ജന്മ.	-	ജന്മഭൂമി
ച.	-	ചന്ദ്രിക
B.T.	-	Business Times
H.	-	The Hindu
P.	-	The Pioneer
N.I.E	-	The New Indian Express
I.E.	-	The Indian Express
T.O.I.	-	The Times of India
F.E.	-	Financial Express
E.T.	-	The Economic Times
S.	-	The Statesman
T.	-	The Telegraph

സംസ്ഥാനവാർത്തകൾ

സാന്ത്വനസ്പർശം ഇന്നുമുതൽ; മന്ത്രിമാർക്ക് 25,000 രൂപ വരെ അനുവദിക്കാം

ജനങ്ങളുടെ പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ മന്ത്രിമാർ നേരിട്ടുകേട്ട് പരിഹരിക്കുന്ന സാന്ത്വനസ്പർശം അദാലത്ത് തിങ്കളാഴ്ച ആരംഭിക്കും. മുഖ്യമന്ത്രിയുടെ ദുരിതാശ്വാസ നിധിയിലെ സഹായം തേടി ലഭിക്കുന്ന അപേക്ഷയിൽ 25,000 രൂപ വരെ മന്ത്രിമാർക്ക് അനുവദിക്കാം. കൂടുതൽ തുക അർഹമെന്ന് കണ്ടാൽ പരാതി സർക്കാരിലേക്ക് അയയ്ക്കാനും മൂന്ന് ദിവസത്തിനകം അർഹർക്ക് സഹായം ബാങ്ക് അക്കൗണ്ടിൽ ലഭ്യമാക്കാനും ധന, റവന്യൂ പ്രിൻസിപ്പൽ സെക്രട്ടറിമാരെ ചുമതലപ്പെടുത്തി. കൊല്ലം, ആലപ്പുഴ, തൃശൂർ, കോഴിക്കോട്, കണ്ണൂർ ജില്ലയിലാണ് തിങ്കളാഴ്ച അദാലത്ത്. ചൊവ്വ, വ്യാഴം ദിവസങ്ങളിലും അദാലത്ത് തുടരും. അപേക്ഷ അക്ഷയ കേന്ദ്രം വഴി സൗജന്യമായി സ്വീകരിച്ചു. നേരത്തേ തീർപ്പാക്കാത്തവയും പുതിയ പരാതിയും സ്വീകരിക്കും. ഓൺലൈനായി പരാതി നൽകാത്തവർക്ക് നേരിട്ടെത്തി പരാതി നൽകാം. ഇവ ഓൺലൈനായി എൻട്രി ചെയ്ത് ഏഴ് ദിവസത്തിനകം പരിഹരിക്കണം. മുഖ്യമന്ത്രിയുടെ പരാതിപരിഹാരസെൽ വഴി പരിഹരിക്കുന്നതിന് പുറമെയാണ് ബ്ലോക്ക്തലത്തിൽ അദാലത്ത്. ആദിവാസി മേഖലകളിലുള്ളവർക്ക് അപേക്ഷ നൽകാൻ അക്ഷയ സെന്ററുകൾ പ്രത്യേക സൗകര്യം ഏർപ്പെടുത്താൻ മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി പിണറായി വിജയൻ നിർദ്ദേശിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ആദിവാസികളുടെ അടുത്തുപോയും പരാതി സ്വീകരിക്കും. നിയമഭേദഗതി വഴിയോ ചട്ടത്തിൽ മാറ്റം വരുത്തിയോ നയപരമായ തീരുമാനം വഴിയോ പരിഹരിക്കേണ്ടവ കലക്ടർമാർ ഏകീകരിച്ച് സർക്കാരിന് നൽകും. ബി.ഡി.ഒ.മാരാണ് അദാലത്തിന് സൗകര്യമൊരുക്കുക. പരാതിക്കാരുന് ഉടൻ ഗുണഫലം ലഭിച്ചു എന്ന് ഉറപ്പാക്കും.

(ഭേ., 01/02)

കേരള വികസനത്തിനായി പുതിയ ആശയങ്ങൾ തേടാൻ അന്താരാഷ്ട്ര കോൺഫറൻസുമായി ആസൂത്രണ ബോർഡ്

സംസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ സാമ്പത്തിക വളർച്ചയും വ്യാവസായിക കാർഷികോത്പാദനം വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കാനും ആരോഗ്യ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസ തൊഴിൽ മേഖലകളിലുൾപ്പെടെ പുതിയ ആശയങ്ങൾ സ്വീകരിക്കാനും ഉദ്ദേശിച്ച് ആസൂത്രണ ബോർഡ് അന്താരാഷ്ട്ര കോൺഫറൻസ് സംഘടിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. ഫെബ്രുവരി ഒന്നിന് കോൺഫറൻസ് മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി പിണറായി വിജയൻ ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്യും. ഫെബ്രുവരി ഒന്നു മുതൽ മൂന്നു വരെ വിവിധ സെക്ഷനുകളിലായി അന്താരാഷ്ട്ര രംഗത്തും ദേശീയ തലത്തിലും വിവിധ മേഖലകളെ പ്രതിനിധീകരിച്ച് പ്രമുഖർ പങ്കെടുക്കും. ഓൺലൈനായി കോൺഫറൻസിൽ പങ്കാളികളാകാൻ പൊതുജനങ്ങൾക്കും അവസരമുണ്ട്. കേരള ലുക്ക് അഹെഡ് എന്ന പേരിലാണ് കോൺഫറൻസ് സംഘടിപ്പിക്കുക. ഇന്റർനാഷണൽ ലേബർ ഓർഗനൈസേഷൻ, വേൾഡ് ഫുഡ് പ്രോഗ്രാം എന്നിവയിൽ നിന്നുള്ള പ്രതിനിധികളും കോൺഫറൻസിൽ പങ്കെടുക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. കൂടാതെ വികസിത,

വികസ്വര രാജ്യങ്ങളെ പ്രതിനിധീകരിച്ച് വിവിധ രാജ്യങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നുള്ളവരും ആശയങ്ങൾ പങ്കുവെക്കും. കാർഷിക-മത്സ്യബന്ധന, മൃഗസംരക്ഷണ മേഖലയുടെ ആധുനികവൽക്കരണം, ഇ-ഗവേണൻസ്, തദ്ദേശ ഭരണം, നൈപുണ്യ വികസനം, വ്യാവസായിക സാധ്യതകൾ, വിനോദ സഞ്ചാരം, ഉന്നതവിദ്യാഭ്യാസം തുടങ്ങിയ വിഷയങ്ങളിലൂണിയാണ് മൂന്നുദിവസത്തെ കോൺഫറൻസിൽ ചർച്ചകൾ നടക്കുക. നയരൂപീകരണ മേഖലയിലുള്ളവർ, വിവിധ മേഖലകളിലെ വിദഗ്ധർ, യുവാക്കൾ, വിദ്യാർത്ഥികൾ, അധ്യാപകർ, വ്യാവസായ കാർഷിക മേഖലകളിൽ നിന്നുള്ള പ്രതിനിധികൾ കോൺഫറൻസിൽ പങ്കെടുക്കാൻ അവസരമുണ്ട്. ഇവർക്ക് പുറമെ പൊതുജനങ്ങൾക്കും ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്ന എല്ലാ വിഭാഗം ആളുകൾക്കും ഇതിന്റെ ഭാഗമാവാം.

(മാ., 01/02)

ഇ-സ്റ്റാമ്പിങ് രണ്ടിടത്തു മാത്രം; മുദ്രപത്ര ഇടപാട് തുടരാമെന്നു രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ വകുപ്പ്
സംസ്ഥാനത്തു പരീക്ഷണാടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് ഇ-സ്റ്റാമ്പിങ് സംവിധാനം ഏർപ്പെടുത്തിയതെന്നും നിലവിലുള്ള മുദ്രപത്രത്തിലെ രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ ഒരു മാറ്റവുമില്ലാതെ തുടരുന്നെന്നും രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ വകുപ്പ് അധികൃതർ വ്യക്തമാക്കി. ഫെബ്രുവരി 1 മുതൽ പൂർണ്ണമായി ഇ-സ്റ്റാമ്പിങ്ങിലേക്കു മാറുന്നവെന്ന നികുതി വകുപ്പിന്റെ ഉത്തരവാണ് ആശയക്കുഴപ്പം സൃഷ്ടിച്ചത്. മുൻപ് ഒരു ലക്ഷത്തിലേറെയുള്ള ഇടപാടുകൾക്ക് ഇ-സ്റ്റാമ്പിങ് സൗകര്യം ഏർപ്പെടുത്തിയിരുന്നു. എന്നാൽ ഇന്നലെ മുതൽ ഇത് എല്ലാ തുകയ്ക്കുള്ള ഇടപാടുകൾക്കും ഏർപ്പെടുത്തുന്നവെന്നായിരുന്നു ഉത്തരവ്. ഇതോടെ മുദ്രപത്രങ്ങൾ വാങ്ങി സൂക്ഷിച്ചിരുന്ന വെണ്ടർമാരും സബ് രജിസ്ട്രാർമാരും ആശയക്കുഴപ്പത്തിലായി. തുടർന്നായിരുന്നു രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ വകുപ്പിന്റെ ഇന്നലെത്തെ വിശദീകരണം. കഴുത്തും, കൊട്ടാരക്കര പ്രിൻസിപ്പൽ സബ് രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ ഓഫീസ് എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിൽ മാത്രമാണ് ഇ-സ്റ്റാമ്പിങ് സൗകര്യം ഏർപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതെന്ന് അധികൃതർ വ്യക്തമാക്കി. ഇവിടെ മുദ്രപത്ര ഇടപാടും അനുവദിക്കും. മറ്റിടങ്ങളിൽ മുദ്രപത്ര ഇടപാട് തന്നെ തുടരും. നികുതി വകുപ്പിന്റെ ഉത്തരവ് ആശയക്കുഴപ്പം സൃഷ്ടിച്ചതിനാൽ വിശദീകരണ സർക്കുലർ ഇന്നു രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ വകുപ്പ് പുറത്തിറക്കും.

(മ.മ., 02/02)

കൊച്ചി മെട്രോ ആവശ്യപ്പെട്ട തുക കിട്ടി; രണ്ടാംഘട്ടം 4 വർഷത്തിനുള്ളിൽ പൂർത്തിയാക്കും-എം.ഡി

കൊച്ചി മെട്രോ രണ്ടാം ഘട്ടത്തിനായി കെ.എം.ആർ.എൽ. ആവശ്യപ്പെട്ട തുക പൂർണ്ണമായും കേന്ദ്ര ബജറ്റിൽ അനുവദിക്കപ്പെട്ടെന്ന് മെട്രോ എം.ഡി. അൽകേഷ് കുമാർ ശർമ്മ ഐ.എ.എസ്. രാജ്യത്തെ ഏറ്റവും നിലവാരമുള്ള മെട്രോയുടെ കുതിപ്പിന് ഇത് കരുത്താകുമെന്നും മാതൃഭൂമി ഡോട്ട് കോമിനോട് പ്രതികരിക്കവേ അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞു. ധനമന്ത്രി ഇന്ന് അവതരിപ്പിച്ച ബജറ്റിൽ 1,957 കോടി രൂപയാണ് കൊച്ചി മെട്രോയ്ക്ക് വകയിരുത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നത്. ഇൻഫോ പാർക്ക് വരെയുള്ള 11.5 കിലോമീറ്ററിന് വരുന്ന ആകെ

തുകയാണിത്. കഴിഞ്ഞയാഴ്ച കൊച്ചിയിലെത്തിയ പാർലമെന്ററി സമിതി മെട്രോയുടെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ വിലയിരുത്തിയിരുന്നു. രണ്ടാം ഘട്ടത്തിനുള്ള പ്രാഥമിക പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ തുടങ്ങി കഴിഞ്ഞതായി അൽകേഷ് കുമാർ പറഞ്ഞു. 'ബജറ്റിൽ തുക വകയിരുത്തിയ സാഹചര്യങ്ങൾ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ വേഗത്തിലാക്കും. 48 മാസമാണ് രണ്ടാംഘട്ടം പൂർത്തിയാക്കാൻ കണക്കാക്കുന്ന സമയം. എങ്കിലും, അതിനു മുമ്പേ തന്നെ പണി പൂർത്തിയാക്കാനാകുമെന്നാണ് കരുതുന്നത് '- അദ്ദേഹം കൂട്ടിച്ചേർത്തു. രണ്ടാംഘട്ടത്തിന്റെ പുരോഗതിയനുസരിച്ച് മൂന്നാം ഘട്ടത്തിനുള്ള പ്രൊപ്പോസൽ സമർപ്പിക്കുമെന്നും മെട്രോ എം. ഡി. വെളിപ്പെടുത്തി. ആലുവയിൽ നിന്നും നെടുമ്പാശേരി എയർപോർട്ടിലേക്കാണ് അടുത്ത ഘട്ടത്തിൽ മെട്രോ എത്തുക.

(മാ., 02/02)

നയപരമായ തീരുമാനത്തിന്റെ നിയമസാധുത പരിശോധിക്കാനാകും

സർക്കാരിന്റെ നയപരമായ തീരുമാനങ്ങളിൽ കോടതിക്ക് ഇടപെടാനാകില്ലെന്ന് വ്യവസ്ഥ പരിപൂർണ്ണമായ ഒന്നല്ലെന്ന് ഹൈക്കോടതി. തീരുമാനത്തിന്റെ നിയമസാധുത കോടതിക്ക് പരിശോധിക്കാനാകും. നിയമവ്യവസ്ഥകൾക്ക് എതിരാണെങ്കിൽ ഇടപെടാൻ കോടതിക്ക് അധികാരമുണ്ട്. പണിമുടക്കിയ ജീവനക്കാർക്ക് അവധി നൽകിയ സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാർ ഉത്തരവ് റദ്ദാക്കിയാണ് ഹൈക്കോടതിയുടെ ഈ അഭിപ്രായപ്രകടനം. നിയമവാഴ്ച എന്നത് രാജ്യം നിയമത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ ഭരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു എന്നാണ്. അല്ലാതെ ഭരണാധികാരികളാലോ ജനങ്ങൾ തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കപ്പെടുന്ന പ്രതിനിധികളോ ഭരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു എന്നല്ല. ഭരണഘടനയുടെ പരമാധികാരമാണ് രാജ്യത്ത് നിലനിൽക്കുന്നത് എന്നും കോടതി വ്യക്തമാക്കി. ഭരണഘടനയിൽനിന്നാണ് നിയമനിർമ്മാണസഭയ്ക്കും ഭരണാധികാരികൾക്കുമൊക്കെ അധികാരം കിട്ടുന്നത്. നിയമവാഴ്ച ഉറപ്പാക്കാൻ അവർക്ക് ചുമതലയുണ്ടെന്നും കോടതി അഭിപ്രായപ്പെട്ടു.

(മാ., 03/02)

മൂന്ന് മത്സ്യബന്ധന തുറമുഖങ്ങൾ ഈ മാസം കമ്മീഷൻ ചെയ്യും

എറണാകുളം ജില്ലയിലെ ചെല്ലാനം, മലപ്പുറം ജില്ലയിലെ താന്തൂർ, കോഴിക്കോട് ജില്ലയിലെ വെള്ളയിൽ എന്നീ മത്സ്യബന്ധന തുറമുഖങ്ങൾ ഫെബ്രുവരിയിൽ കമ്മീഷൻ ചെയ്യും. കേന്ദ്ര സംസ്ഥാന ഫണ്ടുകൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ച് സജ്ജമാക്കുന്ന മൂന്ന് മത്സ്യബന്ധന തുറമുഖങ്ങളുടെയും നിർമ്മാണ പ്രവർത്തനം അന്തിമഘട്ടത്തിലാണ്. കേന്ദ്രസംസ്ഥാന സംയുക്ത പദ്ധതിയായി ആരംഭിച്ച തുറമുഖങ്ങളുടെ നിർമ്മാണം പൂർത്തിയാകുന്നതിനു വേണ്ടിവന്ന അധികതുക നബാർഡിന്റെ ഗ്രാമീണ പശ്ചാത്തല സൗകര്യ വികസന പദ്ധതിയിലൂടെയും സംസ്ഥാന പ്ലാൻ ഫണ്ടിൽ നിന്നുമാണ് കണ്ടെത്തിയത്.

(മാ., 03/02)

വയനാട് വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിന് ചുറ്റും 3.4 കിലോമീറ്റർ പരിസ്ഥിതിലോലം

വയനാട് വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിന് ചുറ്റുമുള്ള 3.4 കിലോമീറ്റർ പ്രദേശം പരിസ്ഥിതി ലോല മേഖലയായി പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ച് കേന്ദ്രസർക്കാർ. കേന്ദ്ര വനം പരിസ്ഥിതി മന്ത്രാലയം ഇതുസംബന്ധിച്ച കരടുവിജ്ഞാപനം പുറപ്പെടുവിച്ചു. പരിസ്ഥിതി ലോല മേഖലയിൽ വാണിജ്യ വനനം, കരിങ്കൽകുറ്റി, കല്ലടയ്ക്കൽ, മലിനീകരണമുണ്ടാക്കുന്ന വ്യവസായങ്ങൾ, വലിയ ജലവൈദ്യുത പദ്ധതികൾ, നിർമ്മാണപ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ, മരംമുറിക്കൽ, വനവിഭവശേഖരണം തുടങ്ങിയ കാര്യങ്ങൾക്ക് നിരോധനമോ നിയന്ത്രണമോ ഉണ്ടാകും. രാത്രിയാത്രകൾ നിയന്ത്രിക്കും. പ്രദേശവാസികൾക്ക് താമസസൗകര്യങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കാൻ വേണ്ടിയുള്ള നിർമ്മാണങ്ങൾ നടത്താം. മലിനീകരണമുണ്ടാക്കാത്ത ചെറുകിട വ്യവസായങ്ങളുടെ പ്രവർത്തനം, ആശയവിനിമയ ടവറുകൾ സ്ഥാപിക്കൽ, റോഡ് നിർമ്മാണം, നിലവിലുള്ളവയുടെ വീതി കൂട്ടൽ, വിനോദസഞ്ചാര ആവശ്യങ്ങൾക്കായുള്ള ഇടപെടലുകൾ, ഖരമാലിന്യ നിർമാർജ്ജനം തുടങ്ങിയവയ്ക്കും നിയന്ത്രണങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാകും. ജൈവകൃഷി, മഴവെള്ള സംഭരണം, പരിസ്ഥിതി സൗഹൃദ ഗതാഗതം, പുനരുപയോഗിക്കാവുന്ന ഊർജ്ജോൽപ്പാദന രീതികൾ തുടങ്ങിയവ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കാം. വിജ്ഞാപനം പുറപ്പെടുവിച്ച് രണ്ട് വർഷത്തിനകം സംസ്ഥാനസർക്കാർ പരിസ്ഥിതി ലോല മേഖലയ്ക്കുള്ള സോണൽ മാസ്റ്റർപ്ലാൻ തയ്യാറാക്കണം. പരിസ്ഥിതി, വനം, വന്യജീവി, കൃഷി, റവന്യൂ, തദ്ദേശം, നഗരവികസനം, ടൂറിസം, ഗ്രാമവികസനം തുടങ്ങിയ വകുപ്പുകളുമായി കൂടിയാലോചിച്ചാകണം പ്ലാൻ തയ്യാറാക്കേണ്ടത്. കരടുവിജ്ഞാപനത്തെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള അഭിപ്രായനിർദ്ദേശങ്ങളും വിയോജിപ്പുകളും മൂന്നുമാസത്തിനകം പരിസ്ഥിതിമന്ത്രാലയത്തെ അറിയിക്കണം. esz--mef@nic.in എന്ന മെയിൽ ഐഡിയിലും അഭിപ്രായങ്ങൾ അറിയിക്കാം.

(ഭേ., 04/02)

കെട്ടിട നിർമ്മാണ അനുമതി; വിവരങ്ങൾ തെറ്റായാൽ 6 ലക്ഷം വരെ പിഴ

കെട്ടിട നിർമ്മാണ അനുമതി സംബന്ധിച്ച കൊണ്ടുവരുന്ന പുതിയ ഓർഡിനൻസ് പ്രകാരം സ്ഥലം ഉടമയോ എംപാനൽഡ് ലൈസൻസിയോ ആണ് പ്ലാനിനൊപ്പം സത്യവാങ്മൂലം നൽകേണ്ടത്. ആർക്കിടെക്ട്, എൻജിനീയർ, കെട്ടിടം രൂപകൽപന ചെയ്യുന്ന ആൾ, സൂപ്പർവൈസർ അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ടൗൺ പ്ലാനർ തുടങ്ങിയവരെ എംപാനൽഡ് ലൈസൻസിയായി കണക്കാക്കാം. സ്വയം സാക്ഷ്യപ്പെടുത്തൽ പത്രം നൽകുന്ന ഉടമയോ ലൈസൻസിയോ നൽകുന്ന വിവരങ്ങൾ തെറ്റാണെന്നു പിന്നീട് കണ്ടെത്തിയാൽ പിഴ ചുമത്താനും ലൈസൻസിയുടെ ലൈസൻസ് റദ്ദാക്കാനും നിയമത്തിൽ വ്യവസ്ഥയുണ്ട്. 100 ചതുരശ്രമീറ്റർ വരെ വിസ്തീർണ്ണമുള്ള കെട്ടിടത്തിനു 2 ലക്ഷം രൂപയും 200 ചതുരശ്ര മീറ്റർ വരെ വിസ്തീർണ്ണമുള്ളതിനു 4 ലക്ഷം രൂപയും 300 ചതുരശ്രമീറ്റർ വരെയുള്ളതിനും 6 ലക്ഷം രൂപയുമാണു പിഴ. കെട്ടിടത്തിന്റെ പ്ലാനും സൈറ്റ് പ്ലാനും നിലവിലുള്ള നിയമങ്ങൾക്കും ചട്ടങ്ങൾക്കും നിയമാനുസൃതമായ മറ്റ് വ്യവസ്ഥകൾക്കും അനുസൃതമാണെന്നു കെട്ടിട ഉടമസ്ഥനും എംപാനൽഡ് ലൈസൻസിയും സംയുക്തമായാണു സത്യവാങ്മൂലം നൽകേണ്ടത്.

കെട്ടിട നിർമ്മാണങ്ങൾക്ക് തദ്ദേശ ഭരണസ്ഥാപന സെക്രട്ടറിക്ക് അപേക്ഷ ലഭിച്ച കഴിഞ്ഞാൽ 30 ദിവസത്തിനകം തീരുമാനമെടുക്കണമെന്നതു 15 ദിവസമായി കുറച്ചു പഞ്ചായത്ത്-നഗര നിയമങ്ങൾ ഭേദഗതി ചെയ്യുന്നതിനും മന്ത്രിസഭായോഗം തീരുമാനിച്ചു. മുനിസിപ്പൽ - പഞ്ചായത്ത് കെട്ടിടനിർമ്മാണ ചട്ടങ്ങൾ, മലയോരസംരക്ഷണ നിയമം, തീരദേശസംരക്ഷണ നിയമം, ദേശീയപാത അതോറിറ്റി നിയമം, നെൽവയൽ - തണ്ണീർത്തട സംരക്ഷണ നിയമം, അതതു നഗരസഭകളിലുള്ള മാസ്റ്റർ പ്ലാനുകളെയും സോണുകളെയും ജില്ലാ വികസന പ്ലാൻ സ്കീമുകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള അവബോധം എന്നിവ പ്ലാൻ തയ്യാറാക്കാൻ ആവശ്യമാണ്.

(മ.മ., 04/02)

കെട്ടിടനിർമ്മാണം : പഴയ രീതിയിലും അപേക്ഷിക്കാം

കെട്ടിടനിർമ്മാണത്തിന് സ്വയം സാക്ഷ്യപത്രം അനുമാനിയായി കണക്കാക്കുന്ന പുതിയരീതി നടപ്പായാലും നിലവിലുള്ള രീതിയിലും അപേക്ഷിക്കാനാകും. നിയമഭേദഗതികളുള്ള വിജ്ഞാപനം പുറത്തിറങ്ങി ചട്ടങ്ങൾ തയ്യാറാക്കുന്നതുവരെ ഇപ്പോഴുള്ള രീതി തുടരും. വിവിധ തദ്ദേശസ്ഥാപനങ്ങളിലായി 18,150 കെട്ടിടനിർമ്മാണ അപേക്ഷകൾ തീർപ്പാക്കാനുണ്ട്. ഇവ നിലവിലുള്ള രീതിയിൽ മാത്രമേ തീർപ്പാക്കൂ. അപേക്ഷ നൽകിയിൽ 30 ദിവസത്തിനുള്ളിലാണ് ഇപ്പോൾ തീർപ്പാക്കുന്നത്. ചില തദ്ദേശ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളിൽ നിലവിലുള്ള ഏകദിന പെർമിറ്റ് സംവിധാനം തുടരാനിടയില്ല. റോഡ് വികസനം, മാസ്റ്റർ പ്ലാൻ തുടങ്ങിയ സ്കീമുകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ധാരണയില്ലാതെ എംപാനൽഡ് ലൈസൻസി നൽകുന്ന സാക്ഷ്യപത്രത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ നിർമ്മാണാനുമതി ലഭിച്ചാൽ പിന്നീടുണ്ടാകുന്ന പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ നേരിടാൻ ലൈസൻസികൾ തയ്യാറാവേണ്ടിവരമെന്നും ഈ രംഗത്തുള്ളവർ പറയുന്നു. നിർമ്മാണ അനുമാന ലഭിച്ചശേഷം ഉടമ വരുത്തുന്ന മാറ്റങ്ങളുടെ ഉത്തരവാദിത്വവും ലൈസൻസികൾ ഏറ്റെടുക്കേണ്ട അവസ്ഥ വരമെന്നും അവർ പറയുന്നു. ചട്ടങ്ങൾ ലംഘിച്ചുണ്ടാക്കിയ 26,000-ലധികം നിർമ്മാണങ്ങൾ നിലവിൽ ക്രമവത്കരിക്കേണ്ട അവസ്ഥയിലാണ്. പുതിയ സംവിധാനത്തിലും ചട്ടലംഘനത്തിനുള്ള സാധ്യത കൂടുതലാണെന്നും സംഘടനകൾ പറയുന്നു.

(മാ., 05/02)

ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കാൻ വിജ്ഞാപനമായി

തിരുവനന്തപുരം-കന്യാകുമാരി പാത ഇരട്ടിപ്പിക്കലിന്റെയും നേമം ടെർമിനലിന്റെയും ഭാഗമായുള്ള ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കലിന് വിജ്ഞാപനമായി. ഫെബ്രുവരി ഒന്നിന് പുറത്തിറക്കിയ വിജ്ഞാപനത്തിൽ ആക്ഷേപമുള്ളവർ 15 ദിവസത്തിനകം സ്പെഷ്യൽ തഹസിൽദാരുടെ ഓഫീസിൽ ബന്ധപ്പെടണം. തിരുവനന്തപുരം, നേമം, നേമം-നെയാറ്റിൻകര, നെയാറ്റിൻകര പാറശ്ശാല എന്നിങ്ങനെ മൂന്ന് റീച്ചായാണ് ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കുന്നത്. ആദ്യ റീച്ചിൽ തൈയ്ക്കാട്, നേമം, പള്ളിച്ചൽ വില്ലേജ് ഓഫീസുകളുടെ പരിധിയിൽവരുന്നവരുടെ ഭൂമിയാണ് ഏറ്റെടുക്കുക. തൈയ്ക്കാട് വില്ലേജിൽ 164 പേരുടെയും തിരുമല വില്ലേജിൽ 165 പേരുടെയും നേമം വില്ലേജിൽ 172 പേരുടെയും പള്ളിച്ചൽ വില്ലേജിൽ 296 പേരുടെയും ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കും. ആകെ

769 സർവ്വേ നമ്പരുകളിലായാണ് ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കൽ. തിരുവനന്തപുരം മുതൽ പള്ളിച്ചൽ വരെ എട്ട് കിലോമീറ്റർ പാതയാണ് ഒന്നാം റീച്ചിൽ ഇറട്ടിപ്പിക്കുന്നത്. ഇവിടെ 14.9047 ഹെക്ടർ ഭൂമി ആവശ്യമായി വരും. ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കലിന് നഷ്ടപരിഹാരത്തിനായി 207 കോടി രൂപയാണ് വേണ്ടത്.

(മാ., 05/02)

പി.എസ്.സി. റാങ്ക് പട്ടികകളുടെ കാലാവധി ആറുമാസം നീട്ടി

പി.എസ്.സി. റാങ്ക് പട്ടികകളുടെ കാലാവധി ആറുമാസം വരെ ദീർഘിപ്പിക്കാനുള്ള സർക്കാരിന്റെ ശുപാർശ ഭേദഗതികളോടെ പി.എസ്.സി. അംഗീകരിച്ചു. ഫെബ്രുവരി അഞ്ചു മുതൽ ഓഗസ്റ്റ് മൂന്നുവരെയുള്ള കാലയളവിൽ റദ്ദാകാനിടയുള്ള 493 റാങ്ക് പട്ടികകൾക്കാണ് അധിക കാലാവധി ലഭിക്കുക. വിവിധ വകുപ്പുകളിൽ എൽ.ഡി.ക്ലാർക്ക്, ലാസ്റ്റ് ഗ്രേഡ് സർവെന്റ്സ്, എൽ.ഡി.വി. ഡ്രൈവർ, സപ്ലൈകോയിൽ അസിസ്റ്റന്റ് സെയിൽസ്മാൻ, ആരോഗ്യവകുപ്പിൽ സ്റ്റാഫ് നഴ്സ്, ഫാർമസിസ്റ്റ് തുടങ്ങിയ റാങ്ക് പട്ടികകൾക്ക് അധിക കാലാവധി ലഭിക്കും. ഒരു ദിവസം മുതൽ പരമാവധി ആറുമാസം വരെയാണ് അധിക കാലാവധി വരിക്കുക.

(മാ., 06/02)

ലൈസൻസ് കിട്ടാൻ ഡ്രൈവിങ് കോഴ്സ് : കരട് വിജ്ഞാപനമായി

അംഗീകൃത ഡ്രൈവർ ട്രെയിനിങ് സെന്ററുകളിൽ നിന്ന് കോഴ്സ് പൂർത്തിയായവർക്കു മാത്രം ലൈസൻസ് നൽകുന്ന സംവിധാനത്തിന് ആദ്യ നടപടിയായി. നിലവിലുള്ള സംവിധാനം ഉടൻ പിൻവലിക്കാത്തതിനാൽ ഡ്രൈവിങ് സ്കൂളുകളെ തത്കാലം ബാധിക്കില്ല. ലൈസൻസ് ലഭിക്കാൻ ആർ.ടി. ഓഫീസിൽ നൽകേണ്ട രേഖകളിൽ ഡ്രൈവിങ് കോഴ്സ് സർട്ടിഫിക്കറ്റും ഹാജരാക്കണം. ലേണേഴ്സ് ലൈസൻസ്, മെഡിക്കൽ സർട്ടിഫിക്കറ്റ്, ഫോട്ടോ, ഫീസ് തുടങ്ങിയവ നിലനിർത്തും. ഡ്രൈവർ ട്രെയിനിങ് സെന്ററുകൾ എങ്ങനെയെല്ലാമാ യിരിക്കണമെന്നും എന്തെല്ലാമാണ് പഠിപ്പിക്കേണ്ട തെന്നും സംബന്ധിച്ച വിശദവിവരങ്ങൾ ഉൾപ്പെടുത്തിയ കരട് വിജ്ഞാപനം കേന്ദ്രസർക്കാർ ഗസറ്റിൽ പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിച്ചു. ജനങ്ങൾക്ക് പരാതികളും നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങളും നൽകാൻ ഒരുമാസം സമയമുണ്ട്.

(മാ., 06/02)

ബോർഡിംഗ് കോടതി

ഹൈവേകളിലും പൊതുനിരത്തുകളിലും നടപ്പാതകളിലുമുള്ള എല്ലാ അനധികൃത ആർച്ചകളും ബോർഡുകളും ഹോർഡിങ്ങുകളും പ്ലക്കാർഡുകളും ബാനറുകളും ഉടൻ നീക്കം ചെയ്യണമെന്ന് ഹൈക്കോടതി. തദ്ദേശസ്വയംഭരണങ്ങളും ദേശീയപാത അതോറിറ്റിയും ഇക്കാര്യത്തിൽ നടപടി സ്വീകരിക്കുമ്പോൾ പോലീസ് മതിയായ സുരക്ഷ ഉറപ്പുവരുത്തണം. യാത്രക്കാർക്ക് തടസ്സമായ അനധികൃത ബോർഡുകൾ കണ്ടെത്തി റോഡ് സുരക്ഷാ അതോറിറ്റി ചീഫ് സെക്രട്ടറിക്ക്

റിപ്പോർട്ട് നൽകണം. വഴിയോരത്തെ മരങ്ങളിൽ പരസ്യങ്ങളും മറ്റും സ്ഥാപിക്കാനായി അടിച്ചുറപ്പിച്ച ആണികളും നീക്കം ചെയ്യണം. മരങ്ങൾക്കും ജീവനങ്ങളെന്ന് കോടതി ഓർമ്മിപ്പിച്ചു. ഇതുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട് ഒട്ടേറെ നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങളാണ് ചീഫ് ജസ്റ്റിസ് എസ്. മണികമാറ്റം ജസ്റ്റിസ് ഷാജി പി. ചാലിയും അടങ്ങിയ ഡിവിഷൻ ബെഞ്ച് നൽകിയിരിക്കുന്നത്. നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങൾ മൂന്നുമാസത്തിനുള്ളിൽ നടപ്പാക്കണം.

(മാ., 07/02)

ഉൾനാടൻ ജലഗതാഗതമേഖല അപകട നഷ്ടപരിഹാര ട്രിബ്യൂണലായി

സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ ഉൾനാടൻ ജലാശയങ്ങളിലെ മോട്ടോർ ഘടിപ്പിച്ച ജലയാനങ്ങൾക്കായുള്ള അപകട നഷ്ടപരിഹാര ഇൻഷുറൻസ് ട്രിബ്യൂണൽ യാഥാർഥ്യമായി. ജലഗതാഗതമേഖലയിലെ ദീർഘകാല ആവശ്യമായിരുന്നു അത്. സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ എം.എ.സി.ടി. കോടതികളെല്ലാം ഇൻലാന്റ് വെസൽ ക്ലെയിം ട്രിബ്യൂണലുകൾ കൂടി ആക്കി. നഷ്ടപരിഹാരത്തിനായി യാനം രജിസ്റ്റർ ചെയ്ത സ്ഥലത്തെ എം.എ.സി.ടി.(മോട്ടോർ ആക്ലിഡന്റ് ക്ലെയിം ട്രിബ്യൂണൽ) കോടതികളെ സമീപിച്ചാൽ മതിയാകും. ജലയാനമേഖലയെ ആശ്രയിക്കുന്നവരുടെ സംരക്ഷണം ഉറപ്പുവരുത്തുന്നതിന് ഫെബ്രുവരി അഞ്ചിന് ഇറങ്ങിയ സർക്കാർ വിജ്ഞാപനം ഉപകരിക്കും. 2008 ഫെബ്രുവരി 21 മുതൽ മുൻകാല പ്രാബല്യത്തോടെയാണ് വിജ്ഞാപനം. ആ കാലയളവിൽ നടന്നിട്ടുള്ള ബോട്ടപകടങ്ങൾക്കും നഷ്ടപരിഹാരത്തിനായി സമീപിക്കാനാവും.

(മാ., 07/02)

കേരളത്തിലെ വനവിസ്തൃതി കൂടി

2 വർഷത്തിനിടെ കേരളത്തിന്റെ വനവിസ്തൃതി കൂടിയതായി റിപ്പോർട്ട്. 2016 ഏപ്രിൽ 1 മുതൽ 2018 മാർച്ച് 31 വരെയുള്ള കണക്കുകൾ പ്രകാരം 212.3376 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്റർ വനപ്രദേശം കൂടിയതായി വനംവകുപ്പ് അഡ്മിനിസ്ട്രേഷൻ റിപ്പോർട്ടിൽ പറയുന്നു. 2017-'18 ലെ റിപ്പോർട്ട് പ്രകാരം സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ മൊത്തം വന വിസ്തൃതി 11521.813 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്ററാണ്. പരിസ്ഥിതി പ്രാധാന്യമുള്ള കണ്ടൽക്കാടുകൾ, പുറമ്പോക്കുകൾ, റിസർവ് വനമായി പ്രഖ്യാപിക്കാത്ത വനഭൂമി എന്നിവ സംരക്ഷിത വനമാക്കാൻ നടപടി സ്വീകരിച്ചതിന്റെ ഫലമായാണു വനവിസ്തൃതി കൂടിയതെന്നും റിപ്പോർട്ടിൽ പറയുന്നു. കണ്ണൂരിൽ 237.92 ഹെക്ടറും തൃശൂരിൽ 3.3853 ഹെക്ടറും കണ്ടൽക്കാടുകൾ സംരക്ഷിത വനമായി വിജ്ഞാപനം ചെയ്തു. തൃശൂർ, മലപ്പുറം, കോഴിക്കോട്, കാസർഗോഡ് ജില്ലകളിൽ ആകെ 81.6805 ഹെക്ടർ കണ്ടൽക്കാടുകൾ നിർദ്ദിഷ്ട സംരക്ഷിതവനമായും വിജ്ഞാപനം പുറപ്പെടുവിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. 2017 ലെയും 2019 ലെയും ഫോറസ്റ്റ് സർവേ ഓഫ് ഇന്ത്യ റിപ്പോർട്ട് പ്രകാരം കേരളത്തിലെ വനാവരണ തോത് ഗണ്യമായി ഉയർന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. രാജ്യത്തെ വനാവരണ തോതു വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കാൻ ഏറ്റവുമധികം സംഭാവന നൽകിയ മൂന്നാമത്തെ സംസ്ഥാനവും കേരളമാണ്.

(മ.മ., 08/02)

സ്റ്റഡന്റ് ലാപ്ടോപ്പ് : 4 ബ്രാൻഡുകൾ; വില 14,990 മുതൽ 18,000 വരെ

പലിശരഹിത തവണവ്യവസ്ഥയിൽ വിദ്യാർത്ഥികൾക്കു കുറഞ്ഞ വിലയ്ക്കു ലാപ്ടോപ്പ് നൽകാനുള്ള സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാർ പദ്ധതിയായ വിദ്യാശ്രീയിൽ എച്ച്പി ഉൾപ്പെടെ 4 ബ്രാൻഡുകളെ ഉൾപ്പെടുത്തി സർക്കാർ ഉത്തരവിറക്കി. എച്ച്പി, ലെനോവോ, ഏയ്സർ, കൊക്കോണിക്സ് എന്നീ 4 കമ്പനികളായിരിക്കും ലാപ്ടോപ്പുകൾ ലഭ്യമാക്കുക. നിലവിൽ 1.44 ലക്ഷം കുടുംബശ്രീ അംഗങ്ങളാണ് പദ്ധതിയിൽ രജിസ്റ്റർ ചെയ്തു കാത്തിരിക്കുന്നത്. താൽപര്യമുള്ള കുടുംബശ്രീ അംഗങ്ങൾക്ക് അയൽക്കൂട്ടങ്ങൾ വഴി ഇനിയും പദ്ധതിയിലേക്ക് അപേക്ഷിക്കാം. 500 രൂപ മാസ അടവുള്ള 30 മാസത്തെ കെഎസ്എഫ്ഇ സമ്പാദ്യപദ്ധതിയിൽ ചേർന്ന് 3 മാസം മുടക്കമില്ലാതെ അടയ്ക്കുന്ന കുടുംബശ്രീ അംഗങ്ങൾക്ക് ലാപ്ടോപ്പ് നൽകുന്നതാണ് പദ്ധതി. 3 തവണ പണം അടച്ചവർക്കു പ്രത്യേക പോർട്ടൽ വഴി ഇഷ്ടമുള്ള ലാപ്ടോപ്പ് തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കാൻ അവസരം നൽകും. തുടക്കത്തിൽ 15,000 രൂപയാണ് സർക്കാർ പരമാവധി വില നിശ്ചയിച്ചതെങ്കിൽ പിന്നീട് 18,000 ആക്കി. ഒരു ലാപ്ടോപ്പിനു കെഎസ്എഫ്ഇയിൽ നിന്നും 15,000 രൂപയേ വായ്പ ലഭിക്കൂ. ബാക്കി തുക ലാപ്ടോപ്പ് വാങ്ങുന്നവർ ഒറ്റത്തവണയായി നൽകണം.

(മ.മ., 08/02)

കോർപറേഷനുകൾക്കും നഗരസഭകൾക്കും ഇത്തവണ പ്രോത്സാഹന ബോണസ് ഇല്ല.

നികുതി പിരിവിൽ കോർപറേഷനുകളും നഗരസഭകളും ലക്ഷ്യം കാണാതിരുന്നതോടെ ഇത്തവണ അവയ്ക്കു സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാരിന്റെ റവന്യൂ കലക്ഷൻ ഇൻസെന്റീവ് ബോണസ്(പ്രോത്സാഹന ബോണസ്) ആയി അധിക ഫണ്ട് ലഭിക്കില്ല. അതേ സമയം, പഞ്ചായത്തുകളിൽ ആകെയുള്ള 941 ൽ 168 എണ്ണം ബോണസിന് അർഹത നേടി. നികുതി പിരിവ് 97 ശതമാനത്തിലേറെ നിർവഹിച്ച പഞ്ചായത്തുകൾക്കാണ് ബോണസിന് അർഹത. ഇത്തരത്തിലുള്ള 168 പഞ്ചായത്തുകൾക്കായി ആകെ 5 കോടി രൂപ സർക്കാർ അനുവദിച്ചു. ഓരോ പഞ്ചായത്തിനും 2.97 ലക്ഷം രൂപ വീതം ലഭിക്കും. 95 ശതമാനമോ അതിലധികമോ നികുതി പിരിവു നടത്തിയാലാണ് കോർപറേഷനുകൾക്കും നഗരസഭകൾക്കും ബോണസ്.

(മ.മ., 08/02)

പാചകവാതകവും ഇനി 'തത്കാൽ'

പാചകവാതകവും തത്കാലായി ബുക്ക് ചെയ്യാനുള്ള സൗകര്യം വരുന്നു. ഇന്ത്യൻ ഓയിൽ കോർപ്പറേഷനാണ് പാചകവാതക ബുക്കിങ്ങിന് തത്കാൽ സേവാസൗകര്യം ഒരുക്കുന്നത്. തിരുവനന്തപുരമടക്കമുള്ള രാജ്യത്തെ പ്രധാന നഗരങ്ങളിൽ ഈ സൗകര്യം നടപ്പാക്കും. ബുക്ക് ചെയ്ത് മുക്കാൽ മണിക്കൂറിനകം പാചകവാതക സിലിൻഡറുകൾ വീട്ടിലെത്തിക്കുന്നതാണ് പദ്ധതി. ഒരു സിലിൻഡർ മാത്രമുള്ള ഉപഭോക്താക്കൾക്കൊക്കെ തത്കാൽ ബുക്കിങ് അനുവദിക്കുക.

(മാ., 09/02)

തൊഴിലാളിക്ക് സൗജന്യചികിത്സ ഉറപ്പാക്കേണ്ടത് ഗ്രാമപഞ്ചായത്ത്

തൊഴിലുറപ്പ് ജോലിക്കിടെ തൊഴിലാളിക്ക് അപകടത്തിൽ പരിക്കേറ്റാൽ ഗ്രാമപഞ്ചായത്ത് സൗജന്യചികിത്സ ഉറപ്പാക്കണം. അപകടങ്ങൾക്കുപുറമേ മുഗങ്ങൾ, പാമ്പ്, കടന്നൽ, തേനീച്ച തുടങ്ങിയവയുടെ ആക്രമണത്തിലൂടെയുള്ള പരിക്കിനും അവശതയ്ക്കും ചികിത്സ കിട്ടും. തൊഴിലാളിക്കോ കുട്ടിക്കോ അപകടമുണ്ടായാൽ അടുത്ത സർക്കാർ ആശുപത്രിയിലെത്തിക്കും. പഞ്ചായത്ത് പ്രസിഡന്റ്, സെക്രട്ടറി എന്നിവരെ ഇക്കാര്യം അറിയിക്കണം. തൊട്ടടുത്ത് സർക്കാർ ആശുപത്രിയില്ലെങ്കിൽ സ്വകാര്യ ആശുപത്രിയില്ലെങ്കിൽ സ്വകാര്യ ആശുപത്രിയിലെത്തിക്കാം. ശസ്ത്രക്രിയ ഉൾപ്പെടെയുള്ള അടിയന്തര ചികിത്സയ്ക്ക് മെഡിക്കൽ കോളേജിലെത്തിക്കണം. ഫിസിയോ തെറാപ്പിക്കും ആയുർവേദ ചികിത്സയ്ക്കും മെഡിക്കൽ ഓഫീസറുടെ ശുപാർശവേണം. ആശുപത്രിച്ചെലവ്, വാഹനച്ചെലവ് എന്നിവ അനുവദിക്കും. തൊഴിലാളിക്ക് ആ ദിവസത്തെ മുഴുവൻ വേതനവും അടുത്ത ദിവസം മുതൽ തൊഴിൽ ആവശ്യപ്പെട്ടിരുന്ന ദിവസം വരെ പകുതിവേതനവും ലഭിക്കും.

(മാ., 09/02)

സിവിൽ നിയമത്തിൽ ഭേദഗതി വരുന്നു

വ്യവസായ സംരംഭങ്ങൾ തുടങ്ങാനുള്ള നടപടിക്രമം എളുപ്പമാക്കാനും വ്യവസായ സൗഹൃദ അന്തരീക്ഷത്തിനും സിവിൽ നിയമത്തിൽ ഭേദഗതി വരുത്താൻ കേന്ദ്ര നിർദ്ദേശം. തടവുശിക്ഷ ഒഴിവാക്കി പിഴമാത്രമായിരിക്കും ചുമത്തുക. ഇക്കാര്യം പരിശോധിക്കാൻ ആഭ്യന്തര വകുപ്പ് നടപടി തുടങ്ങി. നിയമവകുപ്പിന്റെ കൂടി പരിശോധനയ്ക്ക് ശേഷമായിരിക്കും തുടർനടപടി. 27 വകുപ്പുകളിൽ മൂന്നു ഘട്ടമായിട്ടായിരിക്കും പരിഷ്കരണം. ആദ്യഘട്ടം ജനുവരിയിൽ പൂർത്തിയാക്കി. രണ്ടും മൂന്നും ഘട്ടത്തിലാണ് പരിഷ്കരണങ്ങൾ നിർദ്ദേശിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളത്. വ്യവസായ സംരംഭങ്ങളിലെ തർക്കങ്ങൾക്ക് തടവുശിക്ഷ നൽകുന്നത് ശരിയല്ലെന്നാണ് കേന്ദ്ര വാണിജ്യമന്ത്രാലയം ചൂണ്ടിക്കാട്ടിയത്. ഒരു സംരംഭകൻ ജയിലിലാകുന്നതോടെ തർക്കം പരിഹരിക്കു പ്പെടാതെ സംരംഭം തകരും. അതിനാൽ സിവിൽ കേസുകളുടെ 'ക്രിമിനൽ' സ്വഭാവം ഒഴിവാക്കണം. കുറ്റത്തിന്റെ തീവ്രത അനുസരിച്ചു പിഴ ചുമത്തുന്ന വിധത്തിലാണ് ഭേദഗതി വരുത്തേണ്ടത്. വ്യവസായ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളിലുണ്ടാകുന്ന ക്രിമിനൽ കുറ്റങ്ങൾക്ക് ഇളവ് ബാധകമല്ല.

(മാ., 10/02)

കടുവാ സങ്കേതം ഇനി 51

രാജ്യത്തെ അമ്പത്തിയൊന്നാമത് കടുവാ സങ്കേതം കേരള-തമിഴ്നാട് അതിർത്തിയിലെ മേഖലയിൽ. കേരളത്തിലെ പെരിയാർ കടുവാ സങ്കേതത്തിന്റെ തമിഴ്നാട്ടിലെ തുടർച്ചയാണ് ഈ വനപ്രദേശം. മേഘമല വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതവും ശ്രീവില്ലിപ്പുത്തൂർ ചാമ്പൽമലയണ്ണത്തൂർ സങ്കേതവും സംയോജിപ്പിച്ചതാണ് പുതിയ കടുവാ സങ്കേതം. ഈ മേഖലയിൽ 14 കടുവകളുടെ സാന്നിധ്യം വനംവകുപ്പ് കണ്ടെത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. പെരിയാറിന് സമാന്തരമായി

വനവിനോദസഞ്ചാരത്തിൽ തമിഴ്നാടിനുമുന്നിൽ പുതുവഴി തെളിഞ്ഞിരിക്കുകയാണ് മേഘമല-ശ്രീവില്ലിപ്പുത്തൂർ കടുവാ സങ്കേതത്തിലൂടെ. തേനി, മധുര ജില്ലകളിലായാണ് ഈ വനപ്രദേശം. കേരളവുമായി അതിർത്തി പങ്കിടുന്ന 1016.57 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്ററാണ് പുതിയ കടുവാ സങ്കേതമായി പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. ഇതിൽ 641.86 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്ററാണ് സങ്കേതത്തിന്റെ ഹൃദയഭാഗം(കോർ ഏരിയ) 374.70 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്റർ ബഫർ സോൺ ആണ്.

(മാ.,10/02)

എ.ഷാജഹാൻ സംസ്ഥാന തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് കമ്മീഷണർ

തദ്ദേശ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളിലെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു നടത്തുന്ന സംസ്ഥാന തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷണറായി വിദ്യാഭ്യാസ സെക്രട്ടറി എ.ഷാജഹാനെ നിയമിക്കാൻ മന്ത്രിസഭ തീരുമാനിച്ചു. ഇതിനായി ഗവർണ്ണർക്കു ശുപാർശ നൽകും. നിലവിലെ കമ്മീഷണർ കെ. ഭാസ്കരൻ അടുത്ത മാസം 31 ന് സ്ഥാനമൊഴിയുമ്പോൾ ഷാജഹാൻ ചുമതലയേൽക്കും. ജൂലൈയിൽ വിരമിക്കാനിരിക്കെയാണു ഷാജഹാന്റെ നിയമനം. ഇതു രണ്ടാം തവണയാണു ജൂഡീഷ്യൽ സർവീസിൽ നിന്നല്ലാത്ത ഒരാൾ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷണറാകുന്നത്. ഐഎഎസ് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥനായ പി.കമാൽകുട്ടി 2006 മുതൽ 2011 വരെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷണറായിരുന്നു. വഖഫ്, ന്യൂനപക്ഷക്ഷേമ, കായിക - യുവജനക്ഷേമ വകുപ്പുകളുടെ സെക്രട്ടറി കൂടിയാണു ഷാജഹാൻ . ഉന്നത വിദ്യാഭ്യാസ - സാമൂഹികനീതി, തദ്ദേശഭരണ വകുപ്പുകളുടെ സെക്രട്ടറി, പൊതുവിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, ലോട്ടറി, ഐടി മിഷൻ തുടങ്ങിയവയുടെ ഡയറക്ടർ എന്നീ നിലകളിൽ പ്രവർത്തിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. 17 തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പുകളിൽ കേന്ദ്ര തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു നിരീക്ഷകനായിരുന്നു.

(മ.മ., 11/02)

ഓൺലൈൻ റമ്മിക്ക് നിയന്ത്രണം വരുന്നു

സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് ഓൺലൈൻ റമ്മി ഉൾപ്പെടെ ഇലക്ട്രോണിക് ഉപാധികളിലൂടെയുള്ള ഗെയിമുകൾക്കു നിയന്ത്രണം വരുന്നു. ഓൺലൈൻ ചൂതാട്ടം, വാതുവയ്പ്പ് തുടങ്ങിയവയെ 1960 ലെ കേരള ഗെയിമിങ്ങ് ആക്ടിന്റെ പരിധിയിൽപ്പെടുത്തി രണ്ടാഴ്ചയ്ക്കുള്ളിൽ ഭേദഗതി വിജ്ഞാപനം കൊണ്ടുവരണമെന്നു സർക്കാർ ഹൈക്കോടതിയെ അറിയിച്ചു. സംസ്ഥാന പൊലീസ് മേധാവി നൽകിയ ശുപാർശ നിയമ വകുപ്പ് അംഗീകരിച്ചതായും അറിയിച്ചു. ഓൺലൈൻ റമ്മി കളി നിരോധിക്കണമെന്നും നിയമനിർമാണം കൊണ്ടുവരണമെന്നും ആവശ്യപ്പെട്ടു തൃശൂർ സ്വദേശി പോളി വടക്കൻ നൽകിയ പൊതുതാൽപര്യ ഹർജിയിലാണു വിശദീകരണം. വിശദീകരണത്തെ തുടർന്ന്, ചീഫ് ജസ്റ്റിസ് ഉൾപ്പെട്ട ഡിവിഷൻ ബെഞ്ച് ഹർജി തീർപ്പാക്കി. നിലവിലുള്ള നിയമം ഓൺലൈൻ ചൂതാട്ടവും വാതുവയ്പ്പും നിയന്ത്രിക്കാൻ പര്യാപ്തമല്ലെന്നും ഈ പഴുതുപയോഗിച്ച് ഓൺലൈൻ റമ്മിയുൾപ്പെടെയുള്ളവ വ്യാപകമാകുകയാണെന്നും ആരോപിച്ചാണു ഹർജി.

(മ.മ., 11/02)

മാലിന്യത്തിന്റെ വില നൽകാൻ ഗ്രീൻ ഹൈടെക് ഗ്രീൻ ക്രെഡിറ്റ് കാർഡ് വരുന്നു

ജനങ്ങൾ തരം തിരിച്ച് കൈമാറുന്ന അജൈവ മാലിന്യങ്ങൾക്ക് വില നൽകാൻ കോർപ്പറേഷന്റെ ഗ്രീൻ ക്രെഡിറ്റ് കാർഡ് വരുന്നു. ക്ലീൻ കേരള കമ്പനി പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള നിരക്കിലായിരിക്കും വില നൽകുന്നത്. നഗരസഭയുടെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത മെറ്റീരിയൽ റിക്കവറി ഫെസിലിറ്റികളിൽ ഇതിനുള്ള ക്രമീകരണം ഏർപ്പെടുത്തും. കൈമാറുന്ന അജൈവ മാലിന്യത്തിന്റെ വിലയ്ക്കു തുല്യമായി മൂല്യം കൈമാറുന്ന ആളുടെ ഗ്രീൻ ക്രെഡിറ്റ് കാർഡിലേക്ക് നിക്ഷേപിക്കും. ഈ കാർഡ് ഉപയോഗിച്ച് നഗരത്തിലെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത വ്യാപാര സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന് സാധനങ്ങൾ വാങ്ങാൻ കഴിയുന്ന രീതിയിലാണ് പദ്ധതി. വ്യാപാരികളുമായി ഉടൻ ചർച്ച നടത്തുമെന്ന് മേയർ ആര്യ രാജേന്ദ്രൻ പറഞ്ഞു. മാലിന്യ സംസ്കരണവുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട് അണിചേരാം ആഴ്കാർന്നൊരു അനന്തപുരിയായി എന്ന പേരിൽ 19 മുതൽ 25 വരെ ക്യാമ്പയിൻ നടത്തും. 19-ന് മ്യൂസിയം ആർകെവി. റോഡ്, പേരൂർക്കട മാർക്കറ്റ്, പാളയം ട്രിഡ കോംപൗണ്ട്, മണക്കാട് മാർക്കറ്റ്, മെഡിക്കൽ കോളജ് ട്രിഡ കോംപൗണ്ട് എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിൽ ഉദ്ഘാടനം നടക്കും. കോവിഡ് നിയന്ത്രണങ്ങൾ മൂലം താൽക്കാലികമായി നിർത്തിവയ്ക്കേണ്ടിവന്ന അജൈവ മാലിന്യങ്ങളുടെ സ്പെഷൽ കലക്ഷൻ ഡ്രൈവുകൾ പുനരാരംഭിക്കുമെന്നും മേയർ അറിയിച്ചു.

(മ.മ., 12/02)

കോവാക്സിൻ ഇന്നു മുതൽ

മൂന്നാം ഘട്ട ട്രയൽ നടക്കുന്ന ഭാരത് ബയോടെക്കിന്റെ കോവാക്സിൻ ഇന്നു മുതൽ മൂന്നണിപ്പോരാളികൾക്കു കുത്തിവയ്ക്കാൻ സംസ്ഥാന ആരോഗ്യവകുപ്പു തീരുമാനിച്ചു. മൂന്നണിപ്പോരാളികൾക്കുള്ള കുത്തിവയ്പ്പിന്റെ ആദ്യദിനമായ ഇന്നലെ സിറം ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ടിന്റെ കോവിഷീൽഡാണു നൽകിയത്. ആരോഗ്യ പ്രവർത്തകർക്ക് കോവിഷീൽഡ് കുത്തിവയ്ക്കുന്നതു തുടരും. ഒപ്പം വിവിധ കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളിൽ ശേഷിക്കുന്ന കോവിഷീൽഡ് തിരിച്ചെടുക്കാനും ജില്ല മെഡിക്കൽ ഓഫീസർമാരോട് ആവശ്യപ്പെട്ടു. ഇതിനകം ഒരു ലക്ഷം ഡോസ് കോവാക്സിൻ സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് എത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. കോവാക്സിൻ കുത്തിവയ്പ്പെടുക്കുന്നവരോട് ട്രയൽ നടക്കുന്ന വാക്സിനാണെന്നും അതിന്റെ മറ്റു കാര്യങ്ങളും വാക്സിനേഷൻ കേന്ദ്രത്തിലുള്ളവർ വിശദീകരിക്കണമെന്നു നിർദ്ദേശിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. തുടർന്നു കുത്തിവയ്പ്പിനുള്ള അനുമതി പത്രം ഒപ്പിട്ടു വാങ്ങും. വാക്സിൻ സ്വീകരിക്കുന്നവർക്കു ഫോം കൊടുത്തുവിടും. ഒരാഴ്ചത്തെ ആരോഗ്യാവസ്ഥകൾ ഇവർ ഫോമിൽ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തണം. കോവിഷീൽഡ് വാക്സിൻ സ്വീകരിക്കുന്നവർക്ക് ഈ നടപടിക്രമങ്ങളില്ല. ട്രയൽ നടക്കുന്ന കോവാക്സിൻ കുത്തിവയ്പ്പില്ലെന്നാണു സംസ്ഥാനം കേന്ദ്രത്തെ അറിയിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. തീരുമാനം മാറ്റിയതിന്റെ കാര്യം സർക്കാർ ഔദ്യോഗികമായി വിശദീകരിച്ചിട്ടില്ല.

(മ.മ., 12/02)

ഇ-റേഷൻ കാർഡ് തുടങ്ങി

കേരളത്തിൽ ഇ-റേഷൻ കാർഡ് പദ്ധതി തുടങ്ങി. തിരുവനന്തപുരം നോർത്ത് സിറ്റി റേഷനിങ് ഓഫീസ് പരിധിയിലാണ് പരീക്ഷണാടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ നടപ്പാക്കുന്നത്. മന്ത്രി പി. തിലോത്തമൻ ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു. കോവിഡ് കാലം മുതൽ ഇരട്ടിയിലധികം ഭക്ഷ്യസാധനങ്ങളാണ് റേഷൻകടകളിലൂടെ വിതരണം ചെയ്യുന്നതെന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞു. ഇ-ആധാർ മാതൃകയിൽ സ്വയം പ്രിന്റ് ചെയ്ത് ഉപയോഗിക്കാവുന്നതാണ് ഇ-റേഷൻ കാർഡ്. ഓൺലൈനായി അപേക്ഷിക്കുന്നവർക്ക് പി.ഡി.എഫ്. രൂപത്തിലുള്ള ഇ-റേഷൻ കാർഡ് അക്ഷയ ലോഗിനിലോ അപേക്ഷകരുടെ സിറ്റിസൺ ലോഗിനിലോ ലഭിക്കും. ഇ-ട്രഷറിയിലൂടെ ഓൺലൈനായി അപേക്ഷാ ഫീസ് അടയ്ക്കാം. അക്ഷയ ലോഗിനിലൂടെയോ സിറ്റിസൺ ലോഗിനിലൂടെയോ ഓൺലൈനായി അപേക്ഷിക്കാം.

(മാ., 13/02)

തപാൽ വോട്ട് മുതിർന്ന പൗരന്മാർ, ഭിന്നശേഷിക്കാർ, കോവിഡ് ബാധിതർ എന്നിവർക്ക്

വരുന്ന നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിൽ കോവിഡ് സാഹചര്യം പരിഗണിച്ചു തപാൽ വോട്ട് നടത്താവുന്നതു 3 വിഭാഗങ്ങൾക്ക്. ഇവർക്ക് ഇഷ്യാനസരണമാണു തപാൽ വോട്ട്. മുതിർന്ന പൗരന്മാർ (80 വയസ്സിനു മുകളിൽ), തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് വോട്ടർ പട്ടികയിൽ അടയാളപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുള്ള ഭിന്നശേഷിക്കാർ, കോവിഡ് പോസിറ്റീവായവരോ അപ്രകാരം സംശയിക്കുന്ന വ്യക്തികളോ എന്നിവരാണ് ഈ വിഭാഗങ്ങൾ. ബൂത്ത് അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ ബൂത്ത് ലെവൽ ഓഫീസർ (ബിഎൽഒ) ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട വീടു സന്ദർശിച്ച ഫോം 12 ഡി കൈമാറും. വോട്ടർ തപാൽ ബാലറ്റാണു തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കുന്നതെങ്കിൽ പൂരിപ്പിച്ച ഫോം 12 ഡി, ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട വോട്ടറുടെ വീട്ടിൽ നിന്ന് അറിയിപ്പു ലഭിച്ച് 5 ദിവസത്തിനകം ബിഎൽഒ കൈപ്പറ്റി റിട്ടേണിങ് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്കു സമർപ്പിക്കണം. വീട്ടിലോ സ്ഥാപനത്തിലോ ക്യാരന്റീനിൽ ഉള്ള സമ്മതിദായകൻ ഫോം 12 ഡി റിട്ടേണിങ് ഓഫീസർക്ക് ക്യാരന്റീൻ സർട്ടിഫിക്കറ്റ് സഹിതമാണു സമർപ്പിക്കേണ്ടത്. തപാൽ വോട്ടിന്റെ അപേക്ഷ സ്വീകരിച്ചാൽ വോട്ടർക്ക് അതു മാത്രമേ ചെയ്യാൻ കഴിയുകയുള്ളൂ. തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു ദിനം ബൂത്തിൽ പോയി വോട്ടു ചെയ്യാൻ പറ്റില്ല.

(മ. മ., 14/02)

സ്റ്റാർട്ടപ്പുകൾക്ക് 4.32 കോടി രൂപയുടെ ഗ്രാന്റ്

ന്യൂനതനാശയങ്ങളുടേയും സാങ്കേതിക വിദ്യകളുടേയും കരുത്തിൽ സ്റ്റാർട്ട് അപ്പ് സംസ്കാരം വളർത്തി സമ്പദ്ഘടനയിൽ നിർണായക പങ്ക് വഹിക്കാൻ സ്റ്റാർട്ട്അപ്പുകൾക്ക് കേരള സ്റ്റാർട്ട് അപ്പ് മിഷൻ(കെ.എസ്.യു.എം.) 4.32 കോടി രൂപയുടെ ഗ്രാന്റ് പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചു. കെ.എസ്.യു.എം. സംഘടിപ്പിച്ച ആറാമത് 'സീഡിങ് കേരള' ഉച്ചകോടിയുടെ സമാപനസമ്മേളനത്തിലായിരുന്നു ഈ പ്രഖ്യാപനം. 52 സ്റ്റാർട്ട്അപ്പുകൾക്ക്

ഉത്പന്നവൽകരണത്തിന് 3.5 കോടി രൂപയും 41 നൂതനാശയങ്ങൾക്ക് 82 ലക്ഷം രൂപയുമാണ് ഗ്രാന്റായി നൽകുന്നത്.

(മാ., 14/02)

ശൈശവ വിവാഹങ്ങൾ കൂടുന്നു, വിവരം അറിയിച്ചാൽ 2500 രൂപ

ശൈശവ വിവാഹങ്ങൾ തടയാൻ പുതിയ പദ്ധതിയുമായി സർക്കാർ. ശൈശവ വിവാഹങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ച് അറിയിക്കുന്നവർക്ക് പാരിതോഷികം നൽകും. 2500 രൂപയാണ് പാരിതോഷികം. കേരളത്തിൽ ശൈശവവിവാഹങ്ങൾ കൂടിവരുന്നതായാണ് വിലയിരുത്തൽ. ചിവ പ്രത്യേക പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ ആകെ നടക്കുന്ന വിവാഹങ്ങളിൽ 17 ശതമാനവും 18 വയസ്സിനു താഴെയുള്ള പെൺകുട്ടികളുടേതാണെന്ന് സാമൂഹിക നീതിവകുപ്പ് സെക്രട്ടറി ബിജു പ്രഭാകർ പറഞ്ഞു. എവിടെയെങ്കിലും ശൈശവവിവാഹം നടന്നാൽ അത് അധികൃതരുടെ ശ്രദ്ധയിൽപെടാൻ ഇപ്പോൾ തടസ്സങ്ങളുണ്ട്. ബന്ധുക്കളോ, നാട്ടുകാരോ, വേണം അറിയിക്കാൻ. അങ്ങനെ അറിയിക്കാൻ തയ്യാറാകുന്നവർ വിരളം. ആരെങ്കിലും വിവരം നൽകിയാലും വകുപ്പിന് നേരിട്ട് കണ്ടെത്താനും കഴിയുന്നില്ല. അധികൃതരുടെ കണ്ണുവെട്ടിക്കാൻ മറ്റു സംസ്ഥാനങ്ങളിൽ കൊണ്ടുപോയി കുട്ടികളെ വിവാഹം കഴിപ്പിക്കുന്ന രീതിയും വ്യാപിക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് ബിജു പ്രഭാകർ പറഞ്ഞു. ഈ സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ വിവരം നൽകാൻ തയ്യാറാകുന്നവരെ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കാനാണ് പാരിതോഷികം പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചത്.

(മാ., 14/02)

നഗരസഭ - കോർപ്പറേഷൻ കെട്ടിട നികുതി വർദ്ധിപ്പിച്ചു

കേന്ദ്ര സർക്കാർ നിർദ്ദേശിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള കടമെടുപ്പ് പരിധി വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കാൻ വേണ്ടി സംസ്ഥാനത്തു നഗരസഭകളിലെയും കോർപ്പറേഷനുകളിലെയും വസ്തു നികുതി(കെട്ടിട നികുതി) കൂട്ടി സർക്കാർ ഉത്തരവ്. ഭൂമിയുടെ ന്യായ വിലയുടെ നിശ്ചിത ശതമാനം എന്ന നിലയിലാണ് വർദ്ധന. നിലവിൽ കെട്ടിടങ്ങളുടെ തറ വിസ്തീർണം, സമീപത്തെ റോഡ്, കാലപ്പഴക്കം എന്നീ മാനദണ്ഡങ്ങൾ കണക്കിലെടുത്ത് സ്റ്റാബ് അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് വസ്തുനികുതി നിർണ്ണയിക്കുന്നത്. ഇതിന്റെ കൂടെ ഭൂമിയുടെ ന്യായവില എന്ന മാനദണ്ഡം കൂടി കണക്കാക്കുമ്പോൾ നികുതി കുത്തനെ ഉയരും. വീടുകൾ മുതൽ സിനിമാശാലകൾ വരെയുള്ളവയ്ക്ക് വർദ്ധന ബാധകമാവും. ന്യായവില അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കി നിരക്ക് നിശ്ചയിക്കുമ്പോൾ വലുതും ചെറുതുമായ വിസ്തീർണമുള്ള ഭൂമിയിലും നിർമ്മിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള ഒരേ വിസ്തീർണമുള്ള കെട്ടിടങ്ങൾക്കാ വ്യത്യസ്ത നിരക്ക് നികുതിയായി അടയ്ക്കേണ്ടിവരും. അതായത് 10 സെന്റിൽ 1000 ചതുരശ്ര മീറ്റർ ഉള്ള കെട്ടിടത്തിന് 10 സെന്റ് ഭൂമിയുടെ നിശ്ചിത ശതമാനം നികുതി അടച്ചാൽ മതി. എന്നാൽ അതേ പ്ലിന്റ് ഏരിയ ഉള്ള കെട്ടിടം 20 സെന്റ് ആണെങ്കിൽ 20 സെന്റ് ഭൂമിയുടെ നിശ്ചിത ശതമാനം നികുതി അടയ്ക്കണം. വാർഷിക നികുതിയിൽ 5 ശതമാനമോ ഉപഭോക്തൃ സൂചികയിലെ വർദ്ധനയോ ഏതാണോ കുറവ് അതായിരിക്കും രണ്ടാമത്തെ വർഷം മുതലുള്ള മാനദണ്ഡമെന്നും ഉത്തരവിൽ വ്യക്തമാക്കി.

സംസ്ഥാനങ്ങൾക്കു ഈ സാമ്പത്തികവർഷം ആഭ്യന്തര ഉൽപാദനത്തിന്റെ 2% അധിക വായ്പ അനുവദിക്കാൻ കേന്ദ്ര സർക്കാർ നിശ്ചയിച്ച മാനദണ്ഡപ്രകാരമാണു നിരക്കു വർധന.

(മ. മ., 15/02)

നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിനൊപ്പം മലപ്പുറം ലോക് സഭാ ഉപതിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പും

നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിനു സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് 40,771 പോളിങ് ബൂത്തുകൾ. നിലവിലെ 25,000 ബൂത്തുകൾക്കു പുറമെ കോവിഡ് കണക്കിലെടുത്ത് 15,000 അനുബന്ധ ബൂത്തുകൾ കൂടി സജ്ജീകരിക്കുമെന്നു കേന്ദ്ര തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷൻ അറിയിച്ചു. ഓരോ ബൂത്തിലും 500-1000 വോട്ടർമാരുണ്ടാകും. എല്ലാ ബൂത്തുകളും താഴത്തെ നിലയിലായിരിക്കണം. മലപ്പുറം ലോക്സഭാ ഉപതിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പും നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിനൊപ്പം നടത്തുമെന്നു മുഖ്യതിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷണർ അറിയിച്ചു. വിഷു, ഈസ്റ്റർ, റമസാൻ എന്നിവയും പരീക്ഷകളും കണക്കിലെടുത്തും കേന്ദ്ര സേനകളുടെ ലഭ്യത പരിഗണിച്ചുമാകും തീയതി നിശ്ചയിക്കുക. ജൂൺ ഒന്നിനാണു നിലവിലെ നിയമസഭയുടെ കാലാവധി തീരുന്നത്. ഏപ്രിൽ 14 നു മുൻപു തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു നടത്തണമെന്ന സർക്കാർ നിലപാട് ചീഫ് സെക്രട്ടറി വിശ്വാസ് മേത്ത കമ്മീഷനെ അറിയിച്ചു. പോളിങ് സമയം ഒരു മണിക്കൂർ നീട്ടണമെന്ന നിർദ്ദേശം പരിഗണനയിലുണ്ടെന്നു മുഖ്യ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷണർ അറിയിച്ചു. കോവിഡ് മാനദണ്ഡങ്ങൾ കർശനമായി പാലിക്കാൻ മാർഗനിർദ്ദേശം നൽകി. മുഖ്യതിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ഓഫീസർക്കു സാഹചര്യമനുസരിച്ചു വേണ്ട കൂട്ടിച്ചേർത്തലുകൾ നടത്താം. എല്ലാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്കും സംസ്ഥാന ആരോഗ്യവകുപ്പ് കോവിഡ് പ്രതിരോധ ഉപകരണ കിറ്റ് നൽകും. പ്രതിരോധ വാക്സിനും നൽകും.

(മ. മ., 15/02)

കെഎസ്ആർടിസി പമ്പുകളിൽ നിന്നും ഇനി പൊതു ജനങ്ങൾക്കും ഇന്ധനം നിറയ്ക്കാം

കെഎസ്ആർടിസിയുടെ 67 ബസ് സ്റ്റേഷനുകളിൽ ആരംഭിക്കുന്ന പെട്രോൾ ഡീസൽ പമ്പുകളിൽ നിന്നും ഇനി മുതൽ പൊതു ജനങ്ങൾക്കും ഇന്ധനം നിറയ്ക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള ധാരണപത്രത്തിൽ ഒപ്പ് വെച്ചു. കെഎസ്ആർടിസി സിഎംഡി ബിജുപ്രഭാകർ ഐഎഎസും, ഇന്ത്യൻ ഓയിൽ കോർപ്പറേഷൻ ചീഫ് ജനറൽ മാനേജർ എസ്. ധനപാണ്ഡ്യനും ചേർന്നാണ് ധാരണാ പത്രം ഒപ്പു വെച്ചത്. ഇതോടെ കെഎസ്ആർടിസിയുടെ 67 ഡിപ്പോകളിൽ സ്ഥാപിക്കുന്ന ഐഒസിയുടെ പമ്പുകളിൽ നിന്നാണ് ഇന്ധനം നിറയ്ക്കാൻ കഴിയുക. ഇത്രയും കാലം കെഎസ്ആർടിസിയുടെ കൺസ്യൂമർ പമ്പുകളിൽ നിന്നും കെഎസ്ആർടിസിക്ക് മാത്രമായിരുന്നു ഇന്ധനം നിറയ്ക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നത്. കെഎസ്ആർടിസിയിൽ ടിക്കറ്റേതര വരുമാനം വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിന്റെ ഭാഗമായാണ് ഇത്തരമൊരു പദ്ധതി ആവിഷ്കരിച്ച് നടപ്പിലാക്കുന്നത്. ഗതാഗത പ്രിൻസിപ്പൽ സെക്രട്ടറി കെ ആർ ജ്യോതിലാൽ ഐഎഎസ് അധ്യക്ഷനായ ചടങ്ങിൽ ഗതാഗതമന്ത്രി എ കെ ശശീന്ദ്രൻ

ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു. 150 കോടി രൂപ ചിലവഴിച്ചാണ് ഐഒസി കെഎസ്ആർടിസിയുമായി സഹകരിക്കുന്നത്. പെട്രോൾ - ഡീസൽ പമ്പു കൂടാതെ അഞ്ച് കിലോഗ്രാമിന്റെ സിലിണ്ടർ, ടോയിലറ്റ്, കണ്ണേരിയ എന്നിവയുടെ അധിക വരുമാനവും കെഎസ്ആർടിസിയും ഐഒസിയും പങ്കിട്ടെടുക്കും. 67 പമ്പിൽ നിന്നും ഇന്ത്യൻ സർക്കാർ നിശ്ചയിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള ഡീലർ കമ്മീഷൻ പുറമെ സർക്കാർ സ്ഥലത്തിലുള്ള കെഎസ്ആർടിസി നിശ്ചയിക്കുന്ന സ്ഥലവാടകയുൾപ്പെടെ എല്ലാ ചിലവുകളും കഴിഞ്ഞ ഒരു വർഷം 70 കോടിയോളം രൂപ ലഭ്യമാകുമെന്നാണ് പ്രതീക്ഷ.

(ഭേ., 16/02)

അതിവേഗ ഇന്റർനെറ്റുമായി കെ - ഫോൺ; ആദ്യഘട്ട ഉദ്ഘാടനം ഇന്ന്

രാജ്യത്തിന് അഭിമാനമായ കേരളത്തിന്റെ അതിവേഗ ഇന്റർനെറ്റ് കണക്ടിവിറ്റി-- കെ ഫോൺ പദ്ധതിയുടെ ഒന്നാംഘട്ട ഉദ്ഘാടനം തിങ്കളാഴ്ച മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി പിണറായി വിജയൻ നിർവഹിക്കും. വൈകിട്ട് 5.30 ന് ഓൺലൈനിലാണ് ഉദ്ഘാടനം. എറണാകുളം, തൃശൂർ, പാലക്കാട്, പത്തനംതിട്ട, ആലപ്പുഴ, കൊല്ലം, തിരുവനന്തപുരം ജില്ലകളിലാണ് ആദ്യഘട്ടം കെ ഫോൺ യാഥാർഥ്യമാകുന്നത്. മറ്റൊരു ബൃഹത് പദ്ധതികൂടി ഇതോടെ യാഥാർഥ്യമാകുന്നു. തുടക്കത്തിൽ ഈ ഏഴ് ജില്ലകളിലെ 1000 സർക്കാർ ഓഫീസുകൾക്ക് ഇന്റർനെറ്റ് കണക്ഷൻ നൽകും. ജൂലൈയിൽ 5700 സർക്കാർ ഓഫീസുകളിൽ കൂടി കെ ഫോൺ എത്തും. സംസ്ഥാനത്താകെ ഒന്നാംഘട്ടത്തിൽ 30,000 സർക്കാർ ഓഫീസുകൾക്കാണ് കണക്ഷൻ. പദ്ധതിക്കായി 7500 കിലോമീറ്ററിൽ കേബിൾ സ്ഥാപിച്ചു. കെഎസ്ഇബി തുണവഴിയാണ് ലൈൻ വലിച്ചത്. അടുത്ത ഘട്ടത്തിൽ 20 ലക്ഷം ബിപിഎൽ കുടുംബങ്ങൾക്ക് സൗജന്യ കണക്ഷൻ നൽകും. 1531 കോടിരൂപയാണ് പദ്ധതി ചെലവ്. ഇതിന്റെ 70 ശതമാനം തുക കിഫ്ബി നൽകും.

(ഭേ., 16/02)

കേരളത്തിന് ഭീഷണിയായി ‘ എൻ 440 കെ ’ ; പ്രതിരോധ സംവിധാനത്തെ മറികടക്കുന്ന കോവിഡ് വകഭേദം

ശരീരത്തിന്റെ പ്രതിരോധ സംവിധാനത്തെ മറികടക്കാൻ (ഇമ്യൂൺ എസ്കേപ്പ്) ശേഷിയുള്ള മാറ്റങ്ങൾ സംഭവിച്ച 13 കൊറോണവൈറസ് വകഭേദങ്ങൾ കേരളത്തിലുണ്ടെന്നു കണ്ടെത്തൽ. ഇതിൽ ‘ എൻ 440 കെ ’ എന്നു പേരിട്ടിരിക്കുന്ന വകഭേദം കൂടുതൽ ജാഗ്രത ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നു. മാസ്ക് ധരിക്കലും കൈകഴുകലും ഉൾപ്പെടെയുള്ള നിയന്ത്രണങ്ങൾ കർശനമായി പാലിച്ചാൽ മാത്രമേ സ്ഥിതി നിയന്ത്രണവിധേയമാകൂ. സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാരുമായി സഹകരിച്ച് ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട് ഓഫ് ജിനോമിക്സ് ആൻഡ് ഇൻഫ്രാറിവ് ബയോളജി നടത്തുന്ന ജനിതക ശ്രേണീകരണത്തിന്റെ ആദ്യ ഫലങ്ങൾ: 14 ജില്ലകളിലെ 2569 സാംപിളുകളിൽ 658 എണ്ണത്തിന്റെ ശ്രേണീകരണം നടത്തി. ഡിസംബർ - ജനുവരി കാലത്തെ സാംപിളുകളാണിവ. • ഇവയുടെ ജനിതകഘടനയിൽ മൊത്തം 2174

വ്യതിയാനങ്ങൾ (മ്യൂട്ടേഷൻ). ഇതിൽ 13 എണ്ണം ഇമ്യൂൺ എസ്റ്റേപ് ശേഷിയുള്ളതും 5 എണ്ണം തീവ്രവ്യാപന ശേഷിയുള്ളതുമാണ്. ഒരു സാംപിളിൽ യുകെ വകഭേദവും കണ്ടെത്തിയെങ്കിലും പടരാതെ തടയാനായി. • 113 സാംപിളിലാണ് ഇമ്യൂൺ എസ്റ്റേപ് ശേഷിയുള്ള മാറ്റങ്ങൾ കണ്ടത്. ഓരോ സാംപിളിലും ഒന്നിലധികം ഇമ്യൂൺ എസ്റ്റേപ് പ്രൊട്ടീനുകൾ കണ്ടിട്ടില്ലാത്തത് ആശ്വാസകരമാണ്. ഒന്നിലധികമായാൽ സ്ഥിതി ഗുരുതരം. ദക്ഷിണാഫ്രിക്കയിൽ കണ്ടെത്തിയ വകഭേദം ഇത്തരത്തിലുള്ളതാണ്.

(മ.മ., 17/02)

ആരാധനാലയങ്ങൾ സ്ഥാപിക്കുന്നതിനു നിയന്ത്രണം ഏർപ്പെടുത്തി സർക്കാർ

സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് ആരാധനാലയങ്ങൾ നിർമ്മിക്കുന്നതിനും നവീകരിക്കുന്നതിനും കർശന വ്യവസ്ഥകൾ ഏർപ്പെടുത്തി സർക്കാർ ഉത്തരവ്. ഒരു ആരാധനാലയം സ്ഥാപിച്ചാൽ അവിടെ നിലനിൽക്കുന്ന മതസൗഹാർദ്ദവും ക്രമസമാധാനവും തകരാൻ ഇടയാകുമെങ്കിൽ തദ്ദേശ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങൾ ആ നിർമ്മാണം തടയണം. പകരം മറ്റേതെങ്കിലും ഇടങ്ങളിലേക്ക് ആരാധനാലയം മാറ്റണം. മുൻകൂർ അനുമതിയില്ലാതെ ആരാധനാലയങ്ങൾ സ്ഥാപിക്കാനും നവീകരിക്കാനും തദ്ദേശ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങൾ അനുമതി നൽകരുത്. ഇതിൽ വീഴ്ച വരുത്തിയാൽ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്കെതിരെ കർശന നടപടിയുണ്ടാകും. ആരാധനാലയങ്ങളുടെ പുനരുദ്ധാരണപ്രവൃത്തികൾ പൊതു ജനങ്ങൾക്കു ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടാകരുത്. റോഡ് വീതികൂട്ടുന്നതിന് ആവശ്യമായ സ്ഥലം മാറ്റിവച്ച ശേഷമേ നിർമ്മാണവും നവീകരണവും പാടുള്ളൂ എന്നും ആഭ്യന്തര അഡിഷണൽ ചീഫ് സെക്രട്ടറിയുടെ ഉത്തരവിൽ പറയുന്നു.

(മ.മ., 17/02)

കോവിഡ് ബാധിതർക്കും ഭിന്നശേഷിക്കാർക്കുമായി സഞ്ചരിക്കുന്ന ബൂത്തുകൾ

നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിൽ കോവിഡ് രോഗികൾ, ഭിന്നശേഷിക്കാർ എന്നിവർക്കു വോട്ടു ചെയ്യുന്നതിനു ' സഞ്ചരിക്കുന്ന ബൂത്തുകൾ' വോട്ടറുടെ വീട്ടിലെത്തുമെന്നു മുഖ്യതിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ഓഫീസർ ടിക്കാറാം മീണ. പ്രത്യേക ബാലറ്റ് റിട്ടേണിങ് ഓഫീസറുടെ മേൽനോട്ടത്തിൽ വോട്ടറുടെ വീട്ടിലെത്തിക്കുകയാണ് ഇതുവഴി ഉദ്ദേശിക്കുന്നത്. തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ചട്ടം ലംഘിക്കുന്ന ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥരെ സസ്പെൻഡ് ചെയ്യുന്നതിനു പുറമേ നിയമനടപടി സ്വീകരിക്കും. പ്രത്യേക ബാലറ്റ് തപാൽ മാർഗം അയയ്ക്കില്ല. വോട്ടർക്കു ബാലറ്റ് നൽകുന്ന നടപടി വിഡിയോയിൽ പകർത്തും. അംഗവൈകല്യം സംഭവിച്ചവർക്ക് പ്രത്യേക ബാലറ്റ് നൽകുമ്പോൾ മതിയായ സർട്ടിഫിക്കറ്റ് ഉണ്ടെന്ന് ഉറപ്പു വരുത്തും. കോവിഡ് രോഗികൾ ഉൾപ്പെടെയുള്ളവർ പ്രത്യേക ബാലറ്റ് വഴി തന്നെ വോട്ട് ചെയ്യണമെന്നു നിർബന്ധമില്ല. അത് വോട്ടർക്കു തീരുമാനിക്കാമെന്നും മീണ പറഞ്ഞു.

(മ.മ., 18/02)

സ്വരാജ് ടോഫി പാപ്പിനിശ്ശേരി ഗ്രാമപഞ്ചായത്തിന്

ത്രിതല പഞ്ചായത്തുകളിൽ 2019- 20 ലെ മികച്ച പ്രവർത്തനത്തിനുള്ള സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാരിന്റെ സ്വരാജ് ടോഫി കണ്ണൂർ ജില്ലയിലെ പാപ്പിനിശ്ശേരി ഗ്രാമപഞ്ചായത്തിന്. കൊല്ലം ജില്ലയിലെ മുഖത്തലയാണു മികച്ച ബ്ലോക്ക് പഞ്ചായത്ത്. മികച്ച ജില്ലാ പഞ്ചായത്തിനുള്ള പുരസ്കാരം തിരുവനന്തപുരം നേടി. വിവിധ വിഭാഗങ്ങളിൽ രണ്ടും മൂന്നും സ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ നേടിയവ- ഗ്രാമപഞ്ചായത്ത്: വെള്ളിനേഴി (പാലക്കാട്), ചേമഞ്ചേരി (കോഴിക്കോട്). ബ്ലോക്ക് പഞ്ചായത്ത്: നെടുമങ്ങാട് (തിരുവനന്തപുരം), പെരുമ്പടപ്പ് (മലപ്പുറം). ജില്ലാ പഞ്ചായത്ത്: കൊല്ലം, കണ്ണൂർ. 1 മുതൽ 3 വരെ സ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ നേടിയ ഗ്രാമ, ബ്ലോക്ക്, ജില്ലാ പഞ്ചായത്തുകൾക്ക് യഥാക്രമം 25 ലക്ഷം, 20 ലക്ഷം, 15 ലക്ഷം രൂപ പ്രത്യേക പദ്ധതി ധനസഹായവും സ്വരാജ് ടോഫിയും ലഭിക്കും.

(മ.മ., 18/02)

വെള്ളം നിരക്കിൽ 5% വർദ്ധനയുമായി ഉത്തരവ്

ഏപ്രിൽ ഒന്നു മുതൽ വെള്ളത്തിന്റെ നിരക്ക് വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കാൻ സർക്കാർ ഉത്തരവ്. ഗാർഹിക ഉൾപ്പെടെ എല്ലാ വിഭാഗത്തിനും അടിസ്ഥാന താരിഫിൽ 5% വർദ്ധന വരും. ഗാർഹിക ഉപഭോക്താക്കൾക്ക് 1000 ലീറ്റർ പ്രതിമാസ ഉപയോഗത്തിനു മിനിമം നിരക്ക് 4 രൂപയായിരുന്നത് ഇതോടെ 4.20 രൂപയാകും. ഓരോ വർഷവും വെള്ളത്തിന്റെ നിരക്ക് 5% കൂട്ടണമെന്നും ഉത്തരവിൽ പറയുന്നു. കടമെടുപ്പു പരിധി ഉയർത്താൻ കേന്ദ്ര സർക്കാരിന്റെ നിർദ്ദേശപ്രകാരമാണു നിരക്കു വർദ്ധന.

(മ.മ., 19/02)

വോട്ട് ചെയ്യാൻ കയ്യറ തരം

നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിൽ കോവിഡ് ചിട്ടവട്ടങ്ങളനുസരിച്ച് വോട്ട് ചെയ്യാൻ കയ്യറ (ഗ്ലൗസ്) തരം. 2.67 കോടി വോട്ടുമാരാണ് നിലവിൽ പട്ടികയിലുള്ളത്. 6 കോടി കയ്യറകളെങ്കിലും കരുതിവയ്ക്കാനാണു കേന്ദ്ര തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷന്റെ തീരുമാനം. കേരള മെഡിക്കൽ സർവീസസ് കോർപ്പറേഷനാകും ടെൻഡറിലൂടെ ഗ്ലൗസും സാനിറ്റൈസറും മറ്റും വാങ്ങുക. ഒറ്റത്തവണ ഉപയോഗത്തിനു ശേഷം കയ്യറ നശിപ്പിക്കാനുള്ള ചുമതല ഇന്ത്യൻ മെഡിക്കൽ അസോസിയേഷൻ സ്ഥാപനമായ 'ഇമേജി' നായിരിക്കും. പഞ്ചായത്ത് തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിൽ കയ്യറ നൽകിയിരുന്നില്ല. കോവിഡ് രൂക്ഷമായി തുടരുന്നതിനാലാണു നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിനു കേന്ദ്ര തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പു കമ്മീഷന്റെ ചെലവിൽ കയ്യറ നൽകുന്നത്.

(മ.മ., 19/02)

മുനിസിപ്പൽ നിയമം ഭേദഗതിക്ക് ചട്ടമായി; ഒരു മാസത്തിനകം പെർമിറ്റ്; ഫീസ് സ്റ്റാമ്പ് അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ

മുനിസിപ്പൽ പരിധിയിൽ ഇനി വ്യാപാരമോ ഉൽപാദനമോ ആരംഭിക്കാൻ അനുമതി 30

ദിവസത്തിനകം നൽകും. ഇതിനായി മുനിസിപ്പിൽ നിയമം ഭേദഗതിയുടെ ചട്ടം നിലവിൽ വന്നു. 400 ഓളം വിഭാഗത്തെ അഞ്ച് സ്റ്റാമ്പാക്കി വിവിധ ഫീസുകൾ ഏകീകരിച്ചു. പലരും ഒരുക്കടയിൽ ഒന്നിലേറ ഉൽപന്നങ്ങൾ വിൽക്കും. സീസൺ അനുസരിച്ച് വിൽക്കുന്ന സാധനങ്ങൾ മാറ്റുന്നവരുമുണ്ട്. അത്തരക്കാർ ഓരോന്നിനും വെവ്വേറെ ഫീസ് അടയ്ക്കണമായിരുന്നു. എന്നാൽ, സ്റ്റാമ്പ് സമ്പ്രദായം വന്നതോടെ ഈ പ്രശ്നത്തിന് പരിഹാരമായി. നിക്ഷേപം പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിന് കേരള മുനിസിപ്പൽ നിയമം 2018 ൽ ഭേദഗതി ചെയ്തിരുന്നു. ഇതിന്റെ ചട്ടമാണ് നിലവിൽ വന്നത്. അപേക്ഷ ലഭിച്ചാൽ അപ്പോൾ സെക്രട്ടറി കൈപ്പറ്റ് രസീത് നൽകണം. അപേക്ഷ പരിശോധിച്ച് രേഖകൾ ഇല്ലെങ്കിൽ അത് അറിയിച്ച് അഞ്ച് ദിവസം സമയം അനുവദിക്കണം. ഇത് അപേക്ഷകനെ രേഖാമൂലം അറിയിക്കണം. തുടർന്ന് പരമാവധി 30 ദിവസത്തിനകം പെർമിറ്റ് നൽകണം. അല്ലെങ്കിൽ എന്തുകൊണ്ട് അനുമതി നൽകുന്നില്ലെന്ന് അറിയിക്കണം. ഫീസിൽ വരുത്തിയ മാറ്റമാണ് ഏറ്റവും പ്രധാനം. വ്യാപാരം സ്ഥാപനം അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ഉൽപാദന മേഖല എന്നിവയെ അതിന്റെ മൂലധന നിക്ഷേപത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് സ്റ്റാമ്പാക്കിയത്. ഏറ്റവും കുറഞ്ഞ ഫീസ് 500 രൂപയും കൂടിയത് 15,000 രൂപയുമാണ്.

(ഭേ., 20/02)

ഊരിലെത്തും സേവനം ഓൺലൈനായി; എല്ലാ പട്ടികവർഗക്കാർക്കും മൈക്രോചിപ്പ് ഘടിപ്പിച്ച സ്റ്റാർട്ട് കാർഡ്

പട്ടികവർഗക്കാർക്കുള്ള വിവിധ സർക്കാർ സേവനങ്ങളും ആനുകൂല്യങ്ങളും ഇനി ഓൺലൈനായി ലഭിക്കും. ഓൺലൈൻ സേവന പദ്ധതിയുടെയും വ്യക്തിഗത സ്റ്റാർട്ട് കാർഡ് വിതരണത്തിന്റെയും ഉദ്ഘാടനം മന്ത്രി എ കെ ബാലൻ നിർവഹിച്ചു. പട്ടികവർഗ സമൂഹങ്ങളുടെ വികസനക്ഷേമ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിലെ നാഴികക്കല്ലാണ് ഈ പദ്ധതികളെന്ന് മന്ത്രി പറഞ്ഞു. സംസ്ഥാന ധന വകുപ്പിന്റെ ഐടി വിഭാഗത്തിന്റെയും ഡൽഹി കേന്ദ്രമായ നാഷണൽ ഇൻഫർമാറ്റിക്സ് സെന്ററിന്റെയും സാങ്കേതിക സഹായത്തോടെ 'സർവീസ് പ്ലസ്' സംവിധാനമുപയോഗിച്ചാണ് ഓൺലൈൻ സേവനങ്ങൾ നൽകുന്നത്. ദുർഘട പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടെ അധിവസിക്കുന്ന പട്ടികവർഗക്കാർക്ക് സർട്ടിഫിക്കറ്റുകൾക്കും രേഖകൾക്കുമായി സർക്കാർ ഓഫീസുകൾ കയറിയിറങ്ങേണ്ട സാഹചര്യം ഒഴിവാക്കും. ഗുണഭോക്താക്കളുടെ ബാങ്ക് അക്കൗണ്ട് ലിങ്ക് ചെയ്യുന്നതോടെ സാമ്പത്തികാനുഭവങ്ങൾ നേരിട്ട് ബാങ്ക് അക്കൗണ്ടിലും എത്തും. പട്ടികവർഗ പ്രമോട്ടർമാരുടെ സഹായത്തോടെയാണ് പദ്ധതി ഊരുകളിൽ നടപ്പാക്കുന്നത്. ഇതോടൊപ്പം എല്ലാ പട്ടികവർഗക്കാർക്കും മൈക്രോചിപ്പ് ഘടിപ്പിച്ച സ്റ്റാർട്ട് കാർഡ് നൽകും. സർക്കാർ പദ്ധതികൾക്കും സേവനങ്ങൾക്കും അപേക്ഷിക്കാനും അർഹത നിർണ്ണയിക്കാനും ഇത് സഹായമാകും.

(ഭേ., 20/02)

ലൈബ്രറികൾ ഇനി വിരൽതുവിൽ; ഡിജിറ്റൽ സർവകലാശാല നാടിന് സമർപ്പിച്ചു
വിജ്ഞാനാധിഷ്ഠിത സമൂഹമാകാനുള്ള കേരളത്തിന്റെ ചുവടുവയ്പിന് ഊർജമേകി കേരള യൂണിവേഴ്സിറ്റി ഓഫ് ഡിജിറ്റൽ സയൻസസ് ഇന്നൊവേഷൻ ആൻഡ് ടെക്നോളജി (ഡിജിറ്റൽ സർവകലാശാല) യാഥാർഥ്യമായി. ചാൻസലർകൂടിയായ ഗവർണർ ആരിഫ് മൊഹമ്മദ് ഖാൻ ഓൺലൈനായി ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു. മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി പിണറായി വിജയൻ അധ്യക്ഷനായി. സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ ഉന്നതപഠനത്തിന്റെയും ഡിജിറ്റൽ സാങ്കേതിക വിദ്യയുടെയും ആഗോള കേന്ദ്രമാക്കാനും വിജ്ഞാന സമ്പദ്വ്യവസ്ഥയിലൂടെ നാടിനെ അഭിവൃദ്ധിപ്പെടുത്താനുമാണ് കഴക്കൂട്ടം ടെക്നോസിറ്റി ആസ്ഥാനമാക്കി രാജ്യത്തെ ആദ്യത്തെ ഡിജിറ്റൽ സർവകലാശാല സ്ഥാപിച്ചത്. പുതിയ മാറ്റങ്ങൾ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളാനുള്ള കേരളത്തിന്റെ ദൃഢനിശ്ചയമാണ് ഡിജിറ്റൽ സർവകലാശാലയുടെ രൂപീകരണത്തിലൂടെ വെളിവാകുന്നതെന്ന് ഗവർണർ പറഞ്ഞു. ചെറുപ്പക്കാരുടെ ഭാവി ഉദ്ദേശിച്ചുള്ള പ്രധാന ചുവടുവയ്പ്യാണിതെന്ന് മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി പറഞ്ഞു. ഗവർണർ സർവകലാശാലയുടെ ഫലകം അനാച്ഛാദനം ചെയ്തു. ഡിജിറ്റൽ യൂണിവേഴ്സിറ്റി ക്യാമ്പസിന്റെ ഹ്രസ്വ വീഡിയോയും പ്രദർശിപ്പിച്ചു.

(ദേ., 21/02)

സർക്കാർ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്കെതിരായ അഴിമതി പരാതികൾ തീർപ്പാക്കാൻ വകുപ്പു മേധാവികൾ

സർക്കാർ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്കെതിരായ അഴിമതി പരാതികൾ ഇനി തീർപ്പാക്കുന്നത് അവരുടെ വകുപ്പു മേധാവികൾ. 2021 ലെ മുഖ്യമന്ത്രിയുടെ പത്തിന പരിപാടിയിൽപെടുത്തി അഴിമതിരഹിത കേരളത്തിനായി സർക്കാർ തയ്യാറാക്കിയ ജനജാഗ്രത പോർട്ടലിൽ ലഭിക്കുന്ന രഹസ്യ പരാതികളാണ് ആരോപണവിധേയന്റെ മേലുദ്യോഗസ്ഥൻ തീർപ്പാക്കുന്നത്. പോർട്ടലിൽ ഒരു ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥനെതിരെ ജനത്തിനു പരാതി നൽകണമെങ്കിൽ അതിലെ ആകെയുള്ള 10 ചോദ്യങ്ങളിൽ നക്ഷത്ര ചിഹ്നമിട്ട 9 എണ്ണവും പൂരിപ്പിച്ചു നൽകണം. തെളിവുകൾ, ആരോപണത്തിന്റെ ചുരുക്കം, ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥന്റെ പേര്, ഓഫീസ്, വകുപ്പ്, ജില്ല, ശീർഷകം, അതിന്റെ വിവരണം എന്നിവയെല്ലാം നക്ഷത്ര ചിഹ്നത്തിലാണ്. ഇതെല്ലാം പൂരിപ്പിച്ചു നൽകിയാൽ മാത്രമേ പരാതി പോർട്ടലിൽ സ്വീകരിക്കുകയുള്ളൂ. തുടർന്ന് ആ പരാതി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട വകുപ്പു മേധാവിക്ക് ഓൺലൈനായി ലഭിക്കും. പരാതിയിൽ കഴമ്പുണ്ടോ, അന്വേഷണം വേണോ എന്നിവയെല്ലാം ആ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥനു തീരുമാനിക്കാം. എന്നാൽ അന്വേഷണം നടത്താൻ തീരുമാനിച്ചാൽ ആഭ്യന്തര വിജിലൻസ് സംവിധാനമുള്ള വകുപ്പാണെങ്കിൽ അവർക്കു കൈമാറും. അതില്ലെങ്കിൽ വിജിലൻസ് ബ്യൂറോയ്ക്കു കൈമാറാം. നിലവിൽ മുഖ്യമന്ത്രിയുടെ പോർട്ടിൽ ബന്ധിപ്പിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള 700 ഓഫീസുകളും സെക്രട്ടേറിയറ്റിലെ 40 വകുപ്പുകളും ഈ പോർട്ടലിലും ബന്ധിപ്പിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

(മ.മ., 22/02)

23,000 പേർക്ക് നേരിട്ടും 3.3 ലക്ഷംപേർക്ക് പരോക്ഷമായും തൊഴിൽ; 3 മത്സ്യബന്ധന തുറമുഖം നാടിന് സമർപ്പിച്ചു

ഇരുപത്തിമൂവായിരംപേർക്ക് നേരിട്ട് തൊഴിലും 1700 ടൺ അധികമത്സ്യോൽപ്പാദനവും സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്ന ചെല്ലാനം, താന്തൂർ, വെള്ളയിൽ മത്സ്യബന്ധന തുറമുഖങ്ങൾ മുഖ്യമന്ത്രി പിണറായി വിജയൻ നാടിന് സമർപ്പിച്ചു. ഇതുവഴി 3.3 ലക്ഷംപേർക്ക് പരോക്ഷമായും തൊഴിൽ ലഭിക്കും. പൂർണ്ണമായും സംസ്ഥാനഫണ്ടുപയോഗിച്ചാണ് ചെല്ലാനം തുറമുഖം നിർമ്മിച്ചത്. 50 കോടി രൂപയാണ് ചെലവ്. ചെല്ലാനം, മറുപക്കാട്, കണ്ടേക്കടവ്, കണ്ണമാലി, ചെറിയകടവ്, മറന്നശ്ശേരി മത്സ്യബന്ധന ഗ്രാമങ്ങൾക്ക് ഇതിന്റെ പ്രയോജനംലഭിക്കും. താന്തൂർ തുറമുഖത്തിന് കേന്ദ്ര സർക്കാരിന്റെ 25.5 കോടി ഉൾപ്പെടെ 86 കോടിരൂപ ചെലവഴിച്ചു. പുതിയ കടപ്പുറം, ചീരാൻ കടപ്പുറം, എടക്കടപ്പുറം, ഒസ്സാൻ, എളാരൻ, പണ്ടാരക്കടപ്പുറം, കോർമൻ ഗ്രാമങ്ങൾക്ക് ഗുണം ലഭിക്കും. 75 കോടി ചെലവിലാണ് വെള്ളയിൽ തുറമുഖം പൂർത്തിയാക്കിയത്. 17.5 കോടി രൂപയായിരുന്നു കേന്ദ്ര സഹായം. വെള്ളയിൽ, പുതിയകടവ്, തോപ്പയിൽ, കാമ്പുറം ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിലെ തൊഴിലാളികൾക്ക് പ്രയോജനം ലഭിക്കും.

(ദേ., 23/02)

തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്ക് വാക്സിനേഷൻ തുടങ്ങി

നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ചുമതലയുള്ള ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്ക് കോവിഡ് വാക്സിനേഷൻ ആരംഭിച്ചു. മുഖ്യ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ഓഫീസർ ടിക്കാരാം മീണ ആദ്യ വാക്സിൻ സ്വീകരിച്ചു. തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിനു മുൻപ് ചുമതലയുള്ള മുഴുവൻ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർക്കും വാക്സിൻ നൽകുമെന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞു. ഇതിനായി തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് ഡ്യൂട്ടിയുള്ള ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥരുടെ ഡേറ്റാ ബേസ് തയ്യാറാക്കി കോവിഡ് പോർട്ടലിൽ നൽകാൻ കലക്ടർമാർക്ക് നിർദ്ദേശം നൽകി.

(മ.മ., 24/02)

കേസ് തോറ്റു; ഇഎഫ്എൽ ആക്കി ഏറ്റെടുത്ത 24 ഏക്കർ വനംവകുപ്പ് തിരികെ നൽകണം

വിനോദ സഞ്ചാരികളുടെ ഇഷ്ടകേന്ദ്രമായ തുഷാരഗിരി വെള്ളച്ചാട്ടത്തിനു സമീപം പരിസ്ഥിതി ലോല പ്രദേശം (ഇഎഫ്എൽ) ആയി വനം വകുപ്പ് ഏറ്റെടുത്ത 24 ഏക്കറോളം ഭൂമി 20 വർഷത്തിനു ശേഷം ഉടമകൾക്ക് വിട്ടുകൊടുക്കാൻ സുപ്രീം കോടതി ഉത്തരവ്. വനം ട്രൈബ്യൂണലിലും ഹൈക്കോടതിയിലും കേസ് പരാജയപ്പെട്ടതിനു പിന്നാലെ സുപ്രീം കോടതിയിലെത്തിയ കേസിൽ സമയപരിധിക്കുള്ളിൽ വാദങ്ങൾ സമർപ്പിക്കാത്തതിനെ തുടർന്നാണ് ഉടമകൾക്ക് അനുകൂലമായ വിധി വന്നത്. വെള്ളച്ചാട്ടത്തിലേക്ക് പ്രവേശിക്കുന്ന ടിക്കറ്റ് കൗണ്ടറിനു മുൻവശത്തുള്ള ഭൂമി വിട്ടു കൊടുക്കണമെന്ന വിധി വന്നതോടെ എന്തു നടപടി സ്വീകരിക്കണമെന്ന് വ്യക്തമാക്കാൻ സർക്കാരിനോട് ആവശ്യപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്

വനം വകുപ്പ്. ഇഎഫ്എൽ നിയമത്തിലെ നാലാം വകുപ്പ് പ്രകാരം ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കണമെന്ന നിർദ്ദേശമാണ് വനം വകുപ്പിന്റെ മുന്നിൽ ഇനിയുള്ളത്. വിദഗ്ധ സമിതി സ്ഥലം പരിശോധിച്ചു, അതീവ പരിസ്ഥിതി പ്രാധാന്യം ഉള്ളതാണെന്നു ബോധ്യപ്പെട്ടാൽ വില നൽകി ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കാം എന്നാണ് ഈ വകുപ്പ് പറയുന്നത്. നടപടികൾ എന്തു വേണമെന്നത് സർക്കാരിന് തീരുമാനിക്കാം എന്ന് വനം ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥർ പറയുന്നു. നേരത്തേ, നഷ്ടപരിഹാരം നൽകേണ്ടതില്ലാത്ത മൂന്നാം വകുപ്പ് പ്രകാരമാണ് ഭൂമി എടുത്തത്.

(മ.മ., 24/02)

വിദേശത്തുനിന്ന് വരുന്നവർക്ക് ആർടിപിസിആർ നിർബന്ധം; വിമാനത്താവളങ്ങളിൽ പരിശോധന

വിദേശത്തുനിന്നെത്തുന്നവർ ആർടിപിസിആർ പരിശോധനയ്ക്ക് വിധേയരാകണമെന്ന കേന്ദ്ര ആരോഗ്യമന്ത്രാലയത്തിന്റെ നിർദ്ദേശപ്രകാരം സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ വിമാനത്താവളങ്ങളിൽ പരിശോധന ആരംഭിച്ചു. വിവിധ രാജ്യങ്ങളിൽ കൊറോണ വൈറസിന്റെ ജനിതക വകഭേദം കണ്ടെത്തിയ സാഹചര്യത്തിലാണിത്. തികച്ചൊഴു മുതലാണ് പരിശോധന ആരംഭിച്ചത്. ബ്രിട്ടനിൽനിന്നെത്തിയവരിൽ കോവിഡിന്റെ വകഭേദം കണ്ടെത്തിയതോടെ പരിശോധന ശക്തമാക്കിയിരുന്നു. നിലവിൽ ബ്രിട്ടനപ്പുറമെ ബ്രസീൽ, ദക്ഷിണാഫ്രിക്ക, മധ്യപൗരസ്ഥ്യ രാജ്യങ്ങൾ എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിൽനിന്നെത്തുന്നവർക്ക് പരിശോധന നിർബന്ധമാണ്. വിമാനത്താവളങ്ങളിൽ പ്രത്യേക പരിശോധനാ കൗണ്ടറുകൾ ക്രമീകരിച്ചു. പരിശോധനയുടെ മുഴുവൻ ചെലവും യാത്രക്കാർ വഹിക്കണമെന്നാണ് കേന്ദ്ര ആരോഗ്യ മന്ത്രാലയത്തിന്റെ നിർദ്ദേശം. സ്രവം പരിശോധനയ്ക്ക് നൽകിയശേഷം വീടുകളിലേക്ക് പോകാം. ഫലം അധികൃതർ വഴിയോ എസ്എംഎസ് വഴിയോ അറിയിക്കും. നെഗറ്റീവാണെങ്കിലും ഏഴുദിവസം സമ്പർക്കവിലക്കിൽ കഴിയണം. വീണ്ടും ആർടിപിസിആർ പരിശോധന നടത്തണം. തുറമുഖത്തിലൂടെയെത്തുന്നവർക്കും ഇവ ബാധകമാണ്.

(ദേശ., 25/02)

കോവിഡ് പരിശോധനയ്ക്ക് മൊബൈൽ ലാബുകൾ വരണം

കോവിഡ് നിർണ്ണയത്തിനുള്ള ആർ.ടി.പി.സി.ആർ. പരിശോധനയ്ക്ക് മൊബൈൽ ലാബുകൾ സജ്ജമാകുന്നു. ദിവസം 2000 പരിശോധന നടത്താൻ ശേഷിയുള്ള ലാബുകളാണ് സർക്കാർ ആശുപത്രികളുടെയും മറ്റും പരിസരത്തു സജ്ജമാക്കുക. വിമാനത്താവളങ്ങളുള്ള ജില്ലകളിൽ അന്താരാഷ്ട്ര യാത്രക്കാരിൽ നിന്ന് സാംപിൾ ശേഖരിക്കുന്നതടക്കമുള്ള ചുമതലയും നൽകും. സന്ദൂർ മെഡിക്കൽ പ്രൈവറ്റ് ലിമിറ്റഡ് എന്ന സ്ഥാപനത്തെയാണ് മെഡിക്കൽ സർവീസസ് കോർപ്പറേഷൻ ഇതിനായി തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്തിട്ടുള്ളത്. മൂന്നുമാസത്തേക്കാണ് കരാർ. സർക്കാർ നിർദ്ദേശിക്കുന്നവർക്കാണ് പരിശോധന നടത്തുക. 24 മണിക്കൂറിനകം ഫലം നൽകണം.

(മാ., 26/02)

ഉത്തരവാദ ടൂറിസത്തിന് കേരളത്തിന് ദേശീയ പുരസ്കാരം

കേരളത്തിന്റെ ഉത്തരവാദ ടൂറിസം പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾക്ക് ദേശീയ പുരസ്കാരം. ഒഡിഷയിലെ കൊണാർക്കിൽ നടന്ന ഇന്ത്യൻ റെസ്പോൺസിബിൾ ബെസ്റ്റ് ഫ്യൂച്ചർ ഫോർവേർഡ് സ്റ്റേറ്റ് കാറ്റഗറിയിൽ സുവർണ പുരസ്കാരം ലഭിച്ചത്. 2017-ൽ ഉത്തരവാദ ടൂറിസം മിഷൻ രൂപവത്കരിച്ച ശേഷം ലഭിക്കുന്ന പതിനൊന്നാമത്തെ പുരസ്കാരമാണിത്. സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാരിന്റെ ജനകീയ ടൂറിസം നിലപാടുകൾക്കുള്ള അംഗീകാരമാണിതെന്ന് ടൂറിസം മന്ത്രി കടകംപള്ളി സുരേന്ദ്രൻ പറഞ്ഞു.

(മാ., 26/02)

മത്സ്യത്തൊഴിലാളി സംഘങ്ങൾക്ക് ലോങ്ങ് ലൈനർ യാനങ്ങൾ നൽകും

ആഴക്കടൽ മീൻപിടിത്തത്തിന് മത്സ്യത്തൊഴിലാളി സഹകരണസംഘങ്ങൾക്ക് ലോങ്ങ് ലൈനർ യാനങ്ങൾ നൽകുമെന്ന് മന്ത്രി ജെ. മേഴ്സിക്കുട്ടിയമ്മ. ആഴക്കടലിന്റെ അടിത്തട്ട് ഇളക്കാതെ ചൂണ്ട, ഗിൽനെറ്റ് എന്നിവ ഉപയോഗിച്ച് മീൻപിടിക്കുന്നതാണ് ലോങ്ങ്ലൈനർ യാനങ്ങൾ. പരമ്പരാഗത യാനങ്ങളിൽ അപകടകരമായ രീതിയിൽ മീൻപിടിക്കുന്ന മത്സ്യത്തൊഴിലാളികളെ സുരക്ഷിതരാക്കുന്നതിന്റെ ഭാഗമായാണിത്. ബോട്ടുകളുടെ നിർമ്മാണത്തിന് കൊച്ചിൻ ഷിപ്യാർഡുമായി ധാരണയായി. നിർമ്മാണച്ചെലവ്, വല, ഇൻഷുറൻസ്, സുരക്ഷാ ഉപകരണങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയുൾപ്പെടെ ബോട്ടിന് 1.63 കോടി രൂപ ചെലവ് വരും. ഇതിൽ 48 ലക്ഷം രൂപ കേന്ദ്ര-സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാരുകൾ സബ്സിഡി നൽകും. ശേഷിക്കുന്ന തുക ബാങ്ക് വായ്പയാണ്. മത്സ്യത്തൊഴിലാളി പ്രാഥമിക സഹകരണസംഘങ്ങളിൽ അംഗങ്ങളായ പത്തുവീതം മത്സ്യത്തൊഴിലാളികൾ അടങ്ങുന്ന ഗ്രൂപ്പുകളെയാണ് ഗുണഭോക്താക്കളായി തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്തത്.

(മാ., 27/02)

ജി.വി.രാജായിൽ പുതിയ കളിക്കളങ്ങൾ

കേരളത്തിന്റെ കായികഭാവിക്ക് മുതൽക്കൂട്ടായി ജി.വി.രാജാ സ്പോർട്സ് സ്കൂളിൽ നിർമ്മിച്ച കളിക്കളങ്ങൾ കായികവകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി ഇ.പി.ജയരാജൻ നാടിനു സമർപ്പിച്ചു. 13 കോടി രൂപ ചെലവിട്ട് ലോകോത്തര നിലവാരമുള്ള കളിക്കളങ്ങൾ ഒരുക്കിയാണ് സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ ഏക കായിക വിദ്യാഭ്യാസസ്ഥാപനം മുഖം മിനക്കിയത്. സിന്തറ്റിക് ഫുട്ബോൾ ടർഫ്, സിന്തറ്റിക് ഹോക്കി സ്റ്റേഡിയം, രണ്ട് സിന്തറ്റിക് വോളിബോൾ കോർട്ടുകൾ, മൺ വോളിബോൾ കോർട്ട് എന്നിവയാണ് ആദ്യഘട്ടത്തിൽ നിർമ്മിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. ഇൻഡോർഹാൾ സിന്തറ്റിക് പ്രതലമാക്കുകയും രാത്രി പരിശീലനത്തിനാവശ്യമായ ഫ്ലൂഡ്ലൈറ്റുകൾ സ്ഥാപിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു. മൂന്ന് വോളിബോൾ കോർട്ടുകളും ബാസ്ക്കറ്റ്ബോൾ, വോളിബോൾ പരിശീലനങ്ങൾക്കായി ഓരോ ബോൾഫീഡിങ് മെഷീനും സജ്ജീകരിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. രാജ്യന്തര നിലവാരത്തിലാണ് സിന്തറ്റിക് ഫുട്ബോൾ ടർഫ് തയ്യാറാക്കിയത്. ഹോക്കി സ്റ്റേഡിയത്തിൽ ആധുനിക രീതിയിലുള്ള സ്പിംഗ്ലർ സംവിധാനവും ഒരുക്കിയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

(മാ., 27/02)

ഓൺലൈൻ ചുതാട്ടം നിരോധിച്ചു

ഓൺലൈൻ ചുതുകളി നിരോധിച്ച് സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാർ വിജ്ഞാപനമിറക്കി. ചുതാട്ട നിരോധന നിയമത്തിൽ ഓൺലൈൻ ചുതുകളിയെയും ഉൾക്കൊള്ളിച്ച് ഗെയിമിങ് ആക്ടിൽ ഭേദഗതി വരുത്തി. പണം വെച്ചുള്ള ചുതുകളി നേരത്തേ തന്നെ നിയമവിരുദ്ധമാണ്. ഇതിനൊപ്പം ഓൺലൈൻ വഴി പണംമുടക്കുന്ന ചുതുകളിയും നിരോധിച്ചാണ് പുതിയ ഉത്തരവ്. ഓൺലൈൻ ചുതുകളിയിൽ പണം നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട ഒട്ടേറെപ്പേർ ആത്മഹത്യ ചെയ്തിരുന്നു. ഇതിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് സർക്കാർ നടപടി. വിജ്ഞാപനത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ ഓൺലൈൻ ചുതാട്ടസൈറ്റുകൾ തടയാൻ ഇന്റർനെറ്റ് സേവനദാതാക്കൾക്ക് പോലീസ് കത്തുനൽകും. ഓൺലൈൻ ഗെയിമിങ് ആപ്പുകൾക്കും ഇന്റർനെറ്റ് സേവനം തടയും. ഇത്തരം സൈറ്റുകൾക്ക് പണം കൈമാറുന്നതും തടയാൻ ഓൺലൈൻ പേമെന്റ് ഗേറ്റ്വേകൾക്കും നിർദ്ദേശം നൽകും.

(മാ., 28/02)

വോട്ടെടുപ്പ് ഏഴുമുതൽ ഏഴുവരെ

കോവിഡിന്റെ പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ ഏപ്രിൽ ആറിനു നടക്കുന്ന സംസ്ഥാന നിയമസഭാ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പിൽ വോട്ടെടുപ്പ് രാവിലെ ഏഴുമുതൽ വൈകിട്ട് ഏഴുവരെയാക്കി. നിലവിലിൽ വൈകിട്ട് ആറുവരെയായിരുന്നു. അതാണ് ഒരു മണിക്കൂർ ദീർഘിപ്പിച്ചത്. മാവോവാദി ബാധിത മേഖലയായി കണ്ടെത്തിയ 298 ബ്ലോക്കുകളിൽ വൈകിട്ട് ആറുവരെയായി വോട്ടുചെയ്യാനുള്ള സമയം. മാവോവാദി ബാധിത ബ്ലോക്കുകളിൽ വോട്ടെടുപ്പ് സമയം നീട്ടില്ല.

(മാ., 28/02)

പൊതുജനാരോഗ്യം ഉറപ്പിക്കാൻ അതോറിറ്റി

പൊതുജനാരോഗ്യം ഉറപ്പുവരുത്താൻ വിപുലമായി അധികാരങ്ങളോടെ സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് പബ്ലിക് ഹെൽത്ത് അതോറിറ്റി നിലവിലുവരും. സംസ്ഥാന, ജില്ല, പഞ്ചായത്ത് തലത്തിലാണിത്. പൊതുജനാരോഗ്യം ഉറപ്പുവരുത്താൻ എവിടെയും നോട്ടീസ് പോലും നൽകാതെ പരിശോധന നടത്താൻ അതോറിറ്റിക്ക് അധികാരമുണ്ട്. കഴിഞ്ഞദിവസം ഗവർണ്ണർ പുറപ്പെടുവിച്ച കേരള പബ്ലിക് ഹെൽത്ത് ഓർഡിനൻസിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണിത് നിലവിലുവരുക. ആരോഗ്യവകുപ്പ് ഡയറക്ടറായിരിക്കും സംസ്ഥാന പബ്ലിക് ഹെൽത്ത് അതോറിറ്റിയായി മാറുക. ഡി.എം.ഒ. ആണ് ജില്ലാ പബ്ലിക് ഹെൽത്ത് അതോറിറ്റി. ഓരോ പഞ്ചായത്തിലുമുള്ള പി.എച്ച്.സി. യിലെ മെഡിക്കൽ ഓഫീസർക്കായിരിക്കും ലോക്കൽ പബ്ലിക് ഹെൽത്ത് അതോറിറ്റിയുടെ ചുമതല.

(മാ., 28/02)

NATIONAL NEWS

Universities, PSUs to seek government nod for virtual events: MEA

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has made the government's prior clearance mandatory for hosting international conferences, trainings, and seminars online and also forbidden such virtual events on themes related to India's security, Northeast states, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh or any other issue concerning the country's "internal matters". The fresh set of guidelines, issued in November last year and part of the new "approval procedure" notified by the MEA for organising virtual events, apply to all government ministries and departments, Public Sector Undertakings, public-funded universities, and organisations controlled and run by the Union and state governments. The organisers of the virtual event will now have to approach their respective "administrative secretary" for approval regarding the theme and the list of participants. For instance, a Central university keen on hosting an online international conference will have to seek prior clearance from the Ministry of Education. But matters related to internal matters and security will be a no-go area. The new approval process has the academic community worried.

(I.E., 01/02)

India hands over mobile harbour cranes to Chabahar port authorities

India on Sunday formally handed over two 140-tonne mobile harbour cranes to the authorities of the Chabahar port in Iran and both sides reviewed their overall cooperation in developing the transit hub. Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the port is being developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to boost trade ties. An Indian delegation, led by Joint Secretary (Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran) in the External Affairs Ministry JP Singh handed over the cranes, according to Indian Embassy in Iran. The first phase of the project was inaugurated in December 2017. It is learnt that both sides also reviewed the overall cooperation in developing the port which is being increasingly seen as a fulcrum of connectivity to Central Asia. Last month, India, Iran and Uzbekistan held their first trilateral talks to explore ways for joint use of the port for trade and enhancing regional connectivity. The trilateral meeting took place in the backdrop of India pitching for participation of Uzbekistan in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project. The INSTC is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

(N.I.E., 01/02)

Focus on clean air, govt earmarks Rs 2,217 cr for 42 urban centres

The budget has focused primarily on clean air in the environment sector – with its objectives spanning across ministries and sectors, from National Clean Air Programme under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to the ministries of Power, New and Renewable Energy and Urban Affairs. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the government has earmarked Rs 2,217 crore for 42 urban centres with a million-plus

population to focus on clean air. The minister had made a similar announcement, with an allocation of Rs 4,400 crore for cities above one million population. But hit by Covid-19, disbursement only started in the later part of this year, say experts. It is important to focus on urban centres so this announcement is welcome, but as we know from our recent experience, budgets need to be in line with regional air sheds – such as the NCR air shed. The policy also needs to be performance-linked so that the disbursal of funds is effective,” says Anumita Roy Choudhury, air pollution expert at the Centre for Science and Environment. “These funds come mainly as a recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission and are directly disbursed to urban local bodies for a five-year period with the intention of reducing 5 per cent air pollution annually, which is in keeping with the goals of the National Clean Air Programme, to reduce air pollution between 20-22 per cent by 2024.”

(I.E., 02/02)

Gaganyaan's first unmanned launch slated for December 2021: Sitharaman

The launch of the first unmanned mission of Gaganyaan is slated for December, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday. The mission was originally scheduled for launch in December 2020 but had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In her budget speech, Sitharaman said as part of Gaganyaan, India's manned space mission, four Indian astronauts are being trained on generic space flight aspects in Russia. "The first unmanned launch is slated for December 2021," Sitharaman said. The Rs 10,000 crore Gaganyaan mission aims to send a three-member crew to space for a period of five to seven days by 2022 when India completes 75 years of independence. The ISRO had started planning for the mission accordingly. The first unmanned mission was planned in December 2020, the second unmanned mission in June 2021. The final and the main component, the manned mission of Gaganyaan, was scheduled six months later in December 2021, much before the 2022 deadline. ISRO had earlier indicated that there would be a delay in several missions as the space body's work has been hit by disruptions due to the coronavirus pandemic. Among the major projects that have been affected are Chandrayaan-3 and Gaganyaan. Chandrayaan-3, the third mission to the moon, was scheduled in late 2020. Staff members from ISRO's different centres were infected with COVID-19 during the pandemic and only essential and process-related work was going on. The related industry was also affected due to the coronavirus lockdown.

(N.I.E., 02/02)

Jal Jeevan Mission to revive urban water bodies

The urban water supply mission announced in the Budget on Monday would include rejuvenation of water bodies as well as 20% of supply from reused water, the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry said on Tuesday. In a statement, the Ministry said there was an estimated gap of 2.68 crore urban household tap connections that the Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) [JJMU] would seek to bridge in all 4,378 statutory towns. The Mission would also aim to bridge the gap of 2.64 crore sewer connections in the 500 cities under the existing Atal

Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). The mission would include rejuvenation of water bodies to boost the sustainable freshwater supply and creation of green spaces. "JJM(U) will promote circular economy of water through development of city water balance plan for each city focusing on recycle/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation," it said. The Ministry said 20% of the water demand would be met with reused water. The total expenditure on the mission would be ₹2.87 lakh crore over five years. The Ministry said the MetroNeo and MetroLite technologies, which are cheaper than conventional Metros, mentioned in the Budget were already being considered.

(H., 03/02)

'Let HCs decide first': Supreme Court on conversion law plea

The Supreme Court Wednesday declined to entertain petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the religious conversion laws enacted by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand saying it would like the state High Courts, where similar petitions are pending, to decide first. "We are on a question of jurisdiction. The Allahabad and Uttarakhand High Courts are hearing this. We will have the benefit of the HC judgment", a bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said, adding that this was why it had earlier rejected a plea by the Uttar Pradesh government to transfer all such pending matters to the Supreme Court. Senior advocate Sanjay Parikh, appearing for a petitioner, said innocent people are being targeted under the laws and that Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat were also about to bring similar laws. "We are not disputing the importance but we are saying let the HC complete hearing it", responded the CJI. The SC asked the petitioners, Advocate Vishal Thakre and People's Union for Civil Liberties, who had challenged The Uttarakhand, Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 and The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition Of Unlawful Conversion Of Religion Ordinance, 2020 to approach the concerned High Court and allowed them to withdraw their pleas. The plea by Thakre and others contended that the laws "curtail the Fundamental Rights of the citizen of India...disturbs the Basic Structure of the Constitution as laid down by the Law". Their plea says the Act and the ordinance are "against the provisions of Special Marriage Act, 1954 and it will create fear in the society" as even those who are not a part of any such activity can be falsely implicated.

(I.E., 04/02)

Parliament panel raises concerns over creating national DNA database as proposed under new bill

A parliamentary panel has raised concerns over building a national database of crime scene DNA profiles as proposed under a new bill, saying it will include virtually everyone as DNA is left at such spots before and after the incident by several people who may have nothing to do with the case. The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Bill, 2019, seeks to establish a National DNA Data Bank and Regional DNA Data banks to store and maintain the DNA profiles in accordance with the provisions relating to the use and access to information, its retention and expunction. The 32-member Department related Parliamentary Standing

Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change, headed by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, tabled its report before Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. Two members of the panel, Asaduddin Owaisi, a Lok Sabha member from Telangana, and Binoy Viswam, a Rajya Sabha member representing Kerala, have submitted a dissent note. The bill seeks to address concerns related to quality, accuracy, security of data and other related matters that may arise in the use of DNA technology. The panel also raised concerns about the DNA data banks. "The risk with a national data bank of crime scene DNA profiles is that it will likely include virtually everyone since DNA is left at the crime scene before and after the crime by several persons who may have nothing to do with the crime being investigated." "There is also DNA to be present of those who were nowhere near crime scene but bodily material like hair may have been transported to the crime scene inadvertently by a variety of ways," the report said.

(N.I.E., 04/02)

Maternal Welfare scheme beneficiaries cross 1.75 crore

The government's maternity benefits scheme Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, has crossed 1.75 crore eligible women till financial year 2020, the sender informed Parliament. A total sum of Rupees 5,931.95 crore was paid to 1.75 crore eligible beneficiaries between financial year 2018 and 2020. Apart from that Rupees 2063.70 crore was disbursed in the current fiscal to 65.12 lakh women, Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani informed the Rajya Sabha. Disaggregated data on how many of these were unique beneficiaries, and how many were those receiving different instalment of the scheme was not provided. According to the Government's initial estimate, it aimed to reach 51.7 lakh women per year to the scheme. Under PMMVY, pregnant women and lactating mothers receive Rupees 5000 on the birth of their first child in three instalments, after fulfilling certain conditionalities. The direct benefits cash transfer is to help expectant mothers meet enhanced nutritional requirements as well as to partially compensate them for wage loss during their pregnancy.

(H., 05/02)

Aero components sector to double to ₹ 60,000 cr. by 2024

The aero components sector in the country is set to double from ₹30,000 crore today to ₹60,000 crore by 2024, according to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. On the last day of Aero India here on Friday, Mr. Singh said the government's endeavour to bring down defence imports by at least \$2 billion by 2022 would remain. "We have signed 128 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), 19 Transfer of Technology (ToT), four handing overs, 18 product launches and 32 major announcements, totalling a grand figure of 201 feats. Further, of the 45 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) participating in Aero India, 21 have bagged orders worth ₹203 crore. This is a major achievement," he stated. President Ram Nath Kovind visited the show on the last day, witnessed an air display and addressed the gathering. Talking

of domestic defence manufacturing, Mr. Singh said that between 2016 and 2019, 138 proposals worth over \$37 billion for domestic manufacturing had been approved.

(H., 06/02)

Registered unrecognised parties double in last 10 years

The contribution reports of only 78 (3.39%) of the total 2,301 registered unrecognised political parties are available in the public domain for 2018-19, while the reports of only 82 such parties (3.56%) for 2017-18 are uploaded on the respective State Chief Electoral Officers' websites, according to the Association For Democratic Reforms (ADR). The number of these parties increased two-fold in the last 10 years, from 1,112 in 2010 to 2,301 in 2019. The figure spiked disproportionately during the year of parliamentary election. "Between 2018 and 2019, it increased by over 9.8%, while between 2013 and 2014, it increased by 18%," said an ADR report. There are 2,360 political parties registered with the Election Commission of India and 2,301 or 97.50% of them are unrecognised. "Either newly registered parties or those which have not secured enough percentage of votes in Assembly or General Elections to become a State party or those which have never contested in elections since being registered are considered unrecognised parties," it said. Such parties don't enjoy all the benefits extended to the recognised parties. The reports analysed by the ADR declared 6,860 donations worth Rs. 65.45 crore during 2018-19 and 6,138 donations of Rs. 24.6 crore for 2017-18. The Apna Desh Party of Uttar Pradesh declared the highest donations for both financial years, involving Rs. 65.63 crore. In 2017-18, only 39 registered such parties had submitted contribution reports before the due date and in 2018-19, only 38 did so.

(H., 06/02)

NITI Aayog study to track economic impact of green verdicts

The NITI Aayog — the government's apex thinktank — has commissioned a study that seeks to examine the "unintended economic consequences" of judicial decisions that have hindered and stalled big-ticket projects on environmental grounds. A perusal of the document appears to suggest that judgments that negatively impact major infrastructure projects don't adequately consider the economic fallout — in terms of loss of jobs, revenue. Doing so, it reckons, would contribute to public discourse among policymakers for promoting an "economically responsible approach by judiciary" in its decisions. The project brief, a copy of which has been viewed by *The Hindu*, says that it intends to examine five major projects that have been "impacted" by judicial decisions of the Supreme Court or the National Green Tribunal. It plans to do this by interviewing people who've been affected by the closure of the projects, environmental campaigners, experts and assessing the business impact of closure. Projects to be analysed include the construction of an airport in Mopa, Goa; cessation of iron ore mining in Goa and, the shutting down of the Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu. The others are decisions by the NGT involving sand mining and construction activities in the Delhi National Capital Regions.

(H., 07/02)

After oils, FSSAI caps trans fats in foods

The FSSAI has amended its rules to put a cap on trans fatty acids (TFAs) in food products just weeks after it tightened the norms for oils and fats. "Food products in which edible oils and fats are used as an ingredient shall not contain industrial trans fatty acids more than 2% by mass of the total oils/fats present in the product, on and from 1st January, 2022," said the revised regulations notified recently and made public on February 5. In December, the FSSAI had capped TFAs in oils and fats to 3% by 2021, and 2% by 2022 from the current levels of 5%. "The 2% cap is considered to be elimination of trans fatty acids, which we will achieve by 2022. We are happy to say that we will be reaching this goal a year sooner than the WHO deadline. We have held eight meetings with industry stakeholders and they are onboard to implement the rules," FSSAI CEO Arun Singhal told.

(H., 07/02)

Afghanistan gets Covishield doses

Afghanistan received a large consignment of COVID-19 vaccines from India on Sunday. A special Indian aircraft carrying 500,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine from Mumbai reached Kabul, where officials of Afghanistan's Health Ministry took charge of the consignment. The India-made vaccine is the first to reach Afghanistan as the country battles the pandemic. "Made in India vaccines reach Afghanistan, (We) stand with our friends, as always," External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said in a social media message. The vaccine, made by the Serum Institute of India, has already been supplied to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives in South Asia. Ghulam Dastagir Nazari, head of the immunisation programme at the Health Ministry in Kabul, said the vaccines will be kept in storage till the country receives emergency approval from the World Health Organization (WHO).

(H., 08/02)

Men access mental health helpline more

Seventy per cent of callers to a mental health rehabilitation helpline launched, in September 2020 by the Social Justice and Empowerment (SJE) Ministry, were men according to an internal report of the Ministry accessed by The Hindu. About 32% of those who reached out were students. The Kiran helpline (1800-599-0019) of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD) of the Ministry was launched on September 7 by SJE Minister Thaawarchand Gehlot. From September 16, 2020 to January 15, the helpline received 13,550 new calls, of which 70.5% were from females, the report said. A total of 1,618 follow-up calls were fielded by the mental health professionals of the helpline, it said. The majority of callers (75.5%) were in the age group of 15 to 40 years, while 18.1% were older, in the 41 to 60 age group, it said. Categorising the callers, the report said, 65.9% had "milder nature of distress"; while 26.5% were "moderately distressed" and 7.6% were "severely distressed". The report said 32.3% of the callers were students, 15.2% were self-employed, 27.1% were employed, 23.3% were unemployed, 1.4% were home makers and 0.7% did not reveal the information. While most of the callers (78.2%) sought help for themselves, other parents, siblings, spouse and others reached out for their parents, siblings, spouse and others. "Majority the challenges faced by the callers were related to anxiety (28.5%) and depression (25.5%); while few others included pandemic-related challenges (7.8%), suicidal tendency (2.8%), substance abuse (3.4%) and

miscellaneous (32%)," the report said. Most of the calls were from the North zone (40.32%) followed by West (27.08%), South (16.99%), East (11.28%) and North East (4.33%), the report said. An DEPwD official said the number of calls to the helpline had increased to 15,170 till January 31, while there had been 1,978 followup cases.

(H., 08/02)

171 still missing as death toll in Himalayan tragedy rises to 26

The death toll in the Nanda Devi deluge in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district went up to 26 on Monday, even as operations continued for the second day to rescue nearly 35 labourers trapped inside the 2.5-km-long Tapovan hydel project tunnel filled with slush and debris. A total of 171 persons, including the trapped workers, are still missing. Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, who reached Joshimath in the evening to take stock of the situation, said a joint team had entered 130 metres into the tunnel by around 7 p.m. and might take another two to three hours to reach the T-point. Earlier, Union Power Minister R.K. Singh also inspected the tunnel. "There is a turning point at 180 metres where we hope to find the workers, as briefed by the NTPC officials. However, removing the slush is proving to be a time-consuming exercise as only one JCB can enter and exit at a time. We may explore other options to create access routes to the point where the labourers are suspected to be stranded," said a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) official. The flash flood in the Alaknanda river system on Sunday washed away the Raini bridge and cut off 13 villages located close to the border with China.

(H., 09/02)

New labour codes to allow 4-day work week

The new labour codes set to be implemented soon would provide companies the flexibility of reducing the number of working days to four days a week and provide free medical check-ups to workers through the Employees State Insurance Corporation, Labour and Employment Secretary Apurva Chandra said on Monday. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Chandra said the draft rules under the labour codes are being finalised. He added that most States were in the process of framing their rules and some, including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh, would be ready with their drafts this week. He said the concerns about the working hours going up from 10.5 hours to 12 hours, with one hour of rest, that arose during consultations had been addressed. Under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 draft rules, the limit of working hours for a week was 48 hours. Mr. Chandra said this limit was "sacrosanct" and that employers and workers would have to agree to a change in working days. "It cannot be forced," he said. He added that ESIC would provide free medical check-ups to workers so the employer does not have to bear the costs.

(H., 09/02)

Nod for phase 1 trials of Bharat Biotech's nasal vaccine

A subject expert committee of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has given approval to Bharat Biotech to launch Phase I clinical trial of an intranasal vaccine

candidate for COVID-19. "After detailed deliberation, the committee recommended for conduct of proposed Phase I clinical trial," read the minutes of the SEC meeting held earlier this month. The approval followed the Hyderabad-based vaccine maker presenting its proposal along with revised phase I clinical trial protocol of the Chimpanzee Adenovirus Vected COVID-19 Vaccine (BBV154) (intranasal) as sought by the committee, at its meeting in January. The committee had then advised the firm to generate safety and immunogenicity data in Phase-I clinical trial, with 75 subjects, in the proposed doses as per the protocol. Bharat Biotech and Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis had announced a licensing agreement in September for the nasal vaccine candidate, under which the firm bagged the distribution rights in all markets except the U.S., Japan and Europe. Founder and CMD Krishna Ella had been highlighting that the single dose nasal vaccine would be easy to administer and reduce cost of vaccination since medical consumables such as syringes and needles would not be required. The company has plans to manufacture the nasal vaccine at its facility in Genome Valley here. On Aurobindo Pharma's proposal for conducting Phase II/III clinical trial of UB-612 vaccine for Covid-19, the SEC said the firm should submit revised clinical trial protocol for further deliberation. The company had presented the proposal for conduct of Phase II/III clinical trial along with protocol, animal studies and Phase I clinical trial report conducted in Taiwan.

(H.,10/02)

Covid closure had big learning impact on primary school students: Study

The prolonged closure of schools due to Covid has had a significant negative impact on the learning levels of children. The loss in learning is both in terms of curriculum they would have learnt had the schools remained open and the lessons forgotten from previous years, reveals an extensive study — 'Loss of Learning during the Pandemic' — by Azim Premji University. The study covered 16,067 primary school children across five states and found that on an average, 92 per cent of children have lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year across all classes. These abilities include describing a picture or their experiences orally, reading familiar words, reading with comprehension and writing simple sentences based on a picture. The study which was held in 44 districts of Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand revealed that 92 per cent of children in class 2, 89 per cent in class 3, 90 per cent in class 4, 95 per cent in Class 5 and 93 per cent in Class 6 have lost this ability.

(N.I.E., 11/02)

Gaganyaan: Second unmanned mission planned in 2022-23 followed by human spaceflight, says government

The human spaceflight module of Gaganyaan will be launched after the second unmanned mission planned in 2022-23, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday. It was initially envisaged that the Rs 10,000 crore Gaganyaan mission aims to send a three-member crew to

space for five to seven days by 2022 when India completes 75 years of independence. "First unmanned mission is planned in December 2021. Second unmanned flight is planned in 2022-23, followed by human spaceflight demonstration," Singh said in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha. His response also hinted at delay in the last and crucial manned spaceflight. In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said the first unmanned launch is slated for December 2021. In the past, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) officials had pointed to the delay due to the coronavirus-forced lockdown. Singh also said the astronaut training at Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center (GCTC), Russia was halted for a period for nearly a month and a half last year. "As per COVID 19 protocols in Russia and health advisories issued by local authorities, the astronaut training in Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center (GCTC), Russia was halted for a period from 28th March, 2020 to 11th May, 2020. As per the revised COVID 19 protocols the training of Indian astronauts has henceforth resumed since 12th May, 2020," he said.

(N.I.E., 11/02)

‘India fastest to reach 70 lakh vaccinations’

In 26 days, India has become the fastest country to finish 70 lakh COVID-19 vaccinations, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday. "It took 27 days for the U.S. and 48 days for the U.K. to reach the same vaccination figures. India was also the fastest to touch the six million (60 lakh) mark a few days back. As of February 11, till 8 a.m., more than 70 lakh (70,17,114) beneficiaries have received the vaccination under the country wide exercise," a press release from the Ministry said. As many as 57, 05,228 health care workers and 13,11,886 frontline workers were vaccinated in 1,43,056 sessions, a Ministry release noted, Thirteen States and Union Territories have vaccinated over 65% of the registered healthcare workers, with Bihar leading with over 79%. But seven states and Union Territories have reported less than 40%, with Puducherry at the lowest 17.5%. Seventeen States and Union Territories reported no COVID-19 deaths in the past 24 hours.

(H.,12/02)

Revised airfare bands to be in force till March 31

Air travel has become costlier, with the Union government on Thursday increasing the minimum and maximum fares an airline can levy on a given route with immediate effect. The minimum fare on each route has gone up by 10% and the maximum by nearly 30%, according to the order issued by the Civil Aviation Ministry. The Government has been regulating airfares from May 25, 2020, when domestic flights resumed after the nationwide lockdown. There are seven fare bands, which according to the duration of a flight. The fare for the shortest flight(40 minutes) will now vary from ₹2,200 to ₹7,800 and the longest flight(nearly 4 hour 40 minutes) will cost ₹7,200 and ₹24,200. The actual cost will be higher with the user development and security fees and GST. The government has said the fare bands will be temporary, but has extended them several times. The latest order makes them mandatory till March 31.

(H.,12/02)

Over 80 lakh health, frontline workers vaccinated in India

India on Saturday had provided COVID vaccination to over 80 lakh beneficiaries (80,52,454) till 6 p.m. and also started the second dose of vaccination drive. The country has reported 103 deaths in the last 24 hours with six States accounting for 80.58% of the new deaths. Maharashtra registered the maximum number of casualties (36). Kerala came next with 18 daily deaths, while Karnataka and Punjab reported eight deaths each, as per information released by the Health Ministry. It added that in the last 24 hours, 17 States/UTs including Telangana, Odisha, Jharkhand, Puducherry, Chandigarh, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Ladakh and Mizoram have not reported any new deaths. India's total active caseload currently stands at 1.36 lakh and a total of 1.06 crore (1,06,00,625) people have recovered so far. In the last 24 hours, 11,395 patients have recovered and got discharged.

(H., 13/02)

SC panel likely to reach out to protesting farmers to take their views on farm laws

After holding meetings with a number of stakeholders engaged in the agriculture sector including Amul, ITC and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), the Supreme Court-appointed expert committee is likely to reach out to protesting farmer unions to take their viewpoints over the three farm legislations. Top sources said that the committee is expected to invite agitating farmers for discussion after next week. The protesting farmers under the banner of Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) - has refused to talk to the committee - continue to protest at Delhi's borders - Tikri, Singhu, and Ghazipur for over 80 days. On the other hand, BJP MP Subramanian Swamy took to Twitter on Saturday to criticise the Centre's treatment of the farmers' agitation saying the farmers' agitation may soon become an international issue as human rights groups plan to approach the International Labour Organisation of the United Nations. He further alleged that Chinese media are distorting the farmers' agitation. "Our I&B Ministry should see that it is effectively countered since Chinese media influence in our neighbourhood is considerable now," he tweeted. The Committee has held nine rounds of deliberations with stakeholders engaged directly or indirectly in the agriculture sector so far. The three-member committee has been holding consultations with stakeholders, both online and in person.

(P., 14/02)

Skill Ministry announces rollout of MG fellowship programme

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship on Saturday said it is rolling out the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) programme in all the districts of the country. So far the programme was working across 69 districts, and the ministry "is now expanding MGNF to all remaining districts in the country," the ministry said in a statement. Fellows under MGNF will acquire academic expertise and technical competency in understanding the overall skill ecosystem along with being attached to District Skill Committees, it added. The ministry has also partnered with Kerala Institute of Local Administration to conduct capacity building programmes for district officials from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Lakshadweep. SANKALP (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion) is a World Bank loan assisted programme to strengthen the district skill administration and the District Skill Committees (DSCs).

(P., 14/02)

No FASTag on vehicles? Prepare to shell out double at toll plazas from Feb 16

Have you installed FASTag on vehicles? If not, be prepared to cough up twice the toll fee from February 16. On Sunday, Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari said the deadline for implementation of FASTag would not be extended further for vehicle owners. The Centre had extended the FASTag deadline from January 1 to February 15. All lanes in the fee plazas on national highways will be declared as 'FASTag lane of the fee plaza' from midnight of 15th / 16th February, said the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways said in a statement. "Therefore, as per NH Fee Rules 2008, any vehicle not fitted with FASTag or vehicle without valid, functional FASTag entering into the FASTag lane of the fee equivalent to two times of the fee applicable to that category.

(N.I.E., 15/02)

Inconsistency in distribution of vendor loans, UP top beneficiary

Only about 41 per cent of the 33.69 lakh loan applicants under the PM SVANidhi scheme have actually received them. West Bengal is at the Bottom, with less than two per cent beneficiaries(only 118 of 6545 applicants received loans). A look at government data discloses a stark contrast among the states. Uttar Pradesh tops with 3.60 lakh, nearly 48 per cent of the persons from the state seeking loans. The Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi Scheme launched on June 1, 2020 aims at facilitating collateral free working capital loans of up to Rs 10,000 for one year for about 50 lakh street vendors across the country. The approved outlay for the scheme is Rs 600 crore. So far, 33,69,678 persons have applied in eight months and 18,38,870 have been sanctioned the loan. Till date, loans have been disbursed to 13,82,539 beneficiaries across the country. Telangana is in second position. Of the 4.42 lakh who applied, 2.42 lakh have received the amount. States like Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have also seen a large number of applicants. In Madhya Pradesh, nearly 2.40 lakh of 3.91 lakh applicants (62 per cent) got the loan. A government official said that an end-to-end solution through an IT platform has been developed in collaboration with Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) to handle this.

(N.I.E., 15/02)

Centre announces changes in mapping policy, PM Modi says reforms will unlock tremendous opportunities

The Ministry of Science and Technology on Monday announced the "sweeping changes" to the country's mapping policy, specifically for Indian companies, to enable them to create substantial advances in mapping and ultimately empowering small businesses. "What is readily available globally does not need to be restricted in India and therefore geospatial data that used to be restricted will now be freely available in India," the Ministry of Science and Technology said in a release. Furthermore, the country's corporations and innovators are no longer subject to restrictions nor do they require prior approvals before they collect, generate,

prepare, disseminate, store, publish, update digital Geospatial Data and Maps within the territory of India, the release said. "Our government has taken a decision that will provide a huge impetus to Digital India. Liberalising policies governing the acquisition and production of geospatial data is a massive step in our vision for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat," the release said. "Our startups and mapping innovators will be trusted to self-certify, apply good judgement and be relied upon to demonstrate adherence to guidelines. In addition, measures to promote the development of Indian geospatial innovations that take advantage of the latest map-making technologies are proposed," the release further said.

(N.I.E., 16/02)

India to start trials of 160 km strike range Astra missile this year

In a step that would establish its superiority in air combat over China and Pakistan, India would start testing the Astra Mark 2 beyond visual range air to air missile, which would be capable of taking down enemy aircraft from a range of 160 kilometres. The extended range Astra Mark 2 would give India an edge over its adversaries and would add more lethality to its fighter jets in aerial combat, like the one which happened a day after the Balakot airstrikes on February 26, 2019. "The trial for the Astra Mark would be starting in the second half of this year and we are hoping to see the missile fully developed by 2022," government officials told ANI. The next-generation missile is expected to be operational by the next year-end, former Central Air Commander Air Marshal SBP Sinha (Retd) said. The retired officer has been associated with the Astra missile programme for a long time now. The Astra is a beyond visual range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM), which flies over four times the speed of sound at Mach 4.5. Efforts are now on to integrate the over 100 km strike range missile on the indigenous fighter aircraft LCA Tejas.

(N.I.E., 16/02)

Rajnath launches e-Chhawani portal for cantonment residents

At the launch event here, the minister said "With the help of this portal, the people would be able to get government documents made such as trade license and apply for services such as water connectivity." Public services such as health, sanitation and primary education in a defence cantonment area are provided by the cantonment board concerned, which is a civic administration body under the Ministry of Defence. Rajnath said "I know very well that the people living in cantonment board have to face a number of problems...You can sit at home and get your complaints registered and resolved with the help of this portal." The truth is that our government wants to make the entire system citizen-friendly, he mentioned. He also said "We have started this portal so that people do not have to visit government offices again and again or stand in a line to resolve their problems." The portal is not a solution to all the problems but it is an effective and important step towards good governance, he noted. The minister also suggested to the officials of the Cantonment boards that they must take people's feedback on how well the portal is doing its job in resolving their problems.

(P., 17/02)

Government launches pilot survey on drinking water in 10 cities

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry on Tuesday launched a pilot survey to collect data on drinking water in 10 cities under the Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban). As part of the survey, 'Pey Jal Survekshan', data will also be collected on wastewater management and condition of water bodies in the cities. "As the first step, the ministry has decided to launch the survey in 10 cities, including Agra, Badlapur, Bhubaneswar, Churu, Kochi, Madurai, Patiala, Rohtak, Surat and Tumkur. Based on the learnings of the pilot, this survekshan (survey) will be extended to all the AMRUT cities," said Urban affairs secretary Durga Shankar Mishra. Data on drinking water, wastewater management, non-revenue water and condition of three water bodies in the city will be collected through face-to-face interviews with residents and municipal officials as per the approved questionnaire, on-call interviews, water sample collection and laboratory testing, and field survey for non-revenue water. The mission will be monitored through a technology-based platform on which beneficiary response will be monitored along with progress and output-outcome.

(N.I.E., 17/02)

India third on list of countries with highest cumulative vaccination numbers: Health ministry

India is third globally, after the US and the UK, in highest cumulative vaccination numbers, the Union health ministry said on Thursday. Till 8 am on Thursday, the cumulative vaccination coverage of healthcare workers (HCWs) and frontline workers (FLWs) against COVID-19 in the country has crossed 94 lakh, the ministry said. The daily COVID-19 positivity rate has also seen a constant decline in the last seven days. From 1.89 per cent on February 1, it has dropped to 1.9 per cent on Thursday, it said. A total of 94,22,228 vaccine doses have been given to beneficiaries through 1,99,305 sessions till 8 am on February 18, as per the provisional report. These include 61,96,641 HCWs (first dose), 3,69,167 HCWs (second dose) and 28,56,420 FLWs (first dose). The administration of the second dose of COVID-19 vaccination started on February 13 for those beneficiaries who had completed 28 days after receipt of the first dose. The vaccination of the FLWs started from February 2.

(N.I.E., 18/02)

More fiscal powers for command & deputy chiefs

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved enhanced delegation of financial powers under capital procurement to deputy chiefs and command chiefs of the armed forces. This will make upgrades, modernisation and refit quicker in the armed forces. This is the first time that financial powers have been devolved below the vice chief level for specified items of capital nature to meet emerging security challenges, said the Ministry of Defence. Orders up to Rs 200 crore have been delegated to Deputy Chief of Army Staff (CD & S)/ MGS (Master General Sustenance), COM (Chief of Material), Air Officer Maintenance, Deputy Chief Integrated Defence Staff and Additional Director General Indian Coast Guard. Financial powers up to Rs

100 crore have been delegated to General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Services Command and regional commanders, Coast Guard. There are a total of seven commands each in Army and Air Force and three commands in the Navy. The Coast Guard has two regional commands. The defence ministry had enhanced the financial powers of the three vice chiefs from Rs 100 crore to Rs 500 crore in 2018.

(N.I.E., 18/02)

India to gift 2 lakh vaccine doses to UN peacekeepers

India on Wednesday announced a gift of 2 lakh doses of vaccines to UN Peacekeeping forces. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar made the announcement while delivering an address at the UNSC Open Debate on the fight against Covid. The minister also made a nine-point suggestion to effectively tackle the pandemic. The suggestions include persistence with the vaccination drive, collaboration on genomic surveillance and exchange information, effectively addressing public resistance to vaccines, improvement of public health infrastructure and building capacity, stopping 'vaccine nationalism' and promotion of, strengthening of the COVAX to ensure equitable distribution, urgent resumption of immunization programmes among others. The minister also highlighted five points that were hampering the fight against the pandemic.

(N.I.E., 18/02)

Centre issues new Covid guidelines: RT-PCR test must for foreign arrivals

Tests will be mandatory on arrival for passengers coming from the UK, Europe and the Middle East, with the Centre issuing new guidelines for international flight arrivals after mutant variants of Covid from South Africa and Brazil were detected in India. The new SOP will come into effect from February 22. The latest guidelines cover all international travellers coming or transiting through flights originating in the UK, Europe and the Middle East. Though no new strain has been detected in the Middle East, travellers from Brazil and South Africa transit through the region to reach India as there are no direct flights to the two countries. The government has suspended international scheduled flights until February 28. Overseas flights are currently operated as per air bubble agreements with various countries. "All international travellers arriving in India will have to present a negative RT-PCR test, conducted not more than 72 hours before undertaking the journey," said the guidelines. For travellers coming from destinations other than the UK, Europe and the Middle East, this condition will be waived if they are travelling due to exigent circumstances, it said.

(N.I.E., 19/02)

Modi moots spl visas for docs, nurses in India's neighbourhood

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday suggested the creation of special visas for doctors and nurses in neighbouring countries to help them respond to health emergencies in the region

more effectively. The prime minister was addressing a workshop, initiated by India, on Covid management. “Over the past year, our health cooperation has already achieved so much. Can we now think of raising our ambition further? Can we consider creating a special visa scheme for our doctors and nurses, so that they can travel quickly within our region during health emergencies, on the request of the receiving country?” he said. The workshop assumed significance as for the first time in years, Pakistan attended an event initiated by India. Representatives of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mauritius, Nepal, Seychelles and Sri Lanka participated. Modi made a slew of other suggestions, including the creation of an air ambulance agreement and a platform for collating, compiling and studying data about the effectiveness of Covid vaccines among the population. Recalling how a Covid-19 Emergency Fund was created last year by the SAARC member states, he sought cooperation for rapid deployment of vaccines.

(N.I.E., 19/02)

N440K coronavirus variant spreading more in southern Indian states

A new coronavirus variant with escape ability, N440K, is spreading faster in some states, and virus mutation will result in new variants, as per a CSIR-CCMB study. The novel variants that are worrying many countries globally, have been identified with only a low prevalence in India so far. These include the variants with immune-escape E484K mutation and the N501Y mutation with higher transmission rate. “However, their apparent low prevalence might be simply because not enough sequencing has been done. More coronavirus genomes need to be sequenced across the country to accurately identify the emergence of these and other new variants”, said Dr Rakesh Mishra, Director, CCMB and corresponding author on the study. The study also finds that a few novel variants are spreading more in some states of India. The recently discovered variants in many countries have raised concerns because of their mutations in the Spike protein that makes the coat of the virus and come in contact with the human cells. Some of these coronavirus variants can also be immune-escape, and cause reinfection.

(N.I.E., 20/02)

Ministry of Civil Aviation allows drone use to gather agriculture data

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has allowed drone deployment by the agriculture ministry for remote sensing data collection in 100 districts of the country, for gram panchayat level yield estimation, under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. Earlier, the agriculture ministry had sought nod for allowing short-listed private agencies to operate drones to capture images of rice fields in these districts to assess crop yields. A government official said drone-based images are important inputs in the models for crop yield estimation and validation. Remote sensing data captured through drones will help get accurate information on crop conditions and losses to farmers, and shorten the time for crop insurance claims. Getting right information is important at the right time in order to make accurate decisions. Drone data helps insurance companies and agents to ensure that a farmer gets help in time when in need.

(N.I.E., 20/02)

Over 1 crore COVID vaccine doses administered in India: Health Ministry

Over one crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in the country till now with the highest single-day vaccinations of more than 6 lakh jabs given on Thursday, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday. Of the 1,04,49,942 doses administered, Joint Secretary in the Union Health Ministry, Mandeep Bhandari, said 70,52,845 vaccine doses were administered to healthcare workers and 33,97,097 to frontline workers whose vaccination started on February 2. Of the 70,52,845 vaccination doses, 62,95,903 healthcare workers were administered the first dose, while 7,56,942 healthcare workers were given the second dose.

(N.I.E., 20/02)

Govt working on 'one nation, one standard' for quality product: Goyal

Like 'one nation, one ration card', the Government is working to have 'one nation, one standard' in order to ensure quality products in the country. Reviewing the work of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said, it's time to embark on Mission one nation one standard and make India the leader in setting global benchmarks in setting standards. Goyal said, no one should feel the need to go abroad to get quality certification. Saying lab testing in India should be of world standards, Goyal said, modern equipment and latest technologies should be used there. The Minister stressed that strength and character of nation is often exemplified by the standards it sets for the quality of its products and services. Currently, the Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) is the only national body that frames standards. It has come out with over 20,000 standards for various products and services so far. There are also about 50-odd agencies that have framed about 400 standards in the country.

(P., 21/02)

UN chief voices appreciation for India's leadership in fight against COVID-19, vaccine assistance

UN chief Antonio Guterres has voiced appreciation for India's leadership in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its efforts to bring a "much-needed supply" of the COVID-19 vaccines to the world market. India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T S Tirumurti tweeted on Saturday that Guterres, in a letter dated February 17, "extends his personal gratitude" to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for "India's offer of 200,000 doses" of COVID-19 vaccines for UN peacekeepers. The Secretary-General says "India has been a global leader in pandemic response efforts", Tirumurti tweeted, expressing his gratitude to the UN Chief. In an excerpt of the letter tweeted by Tirumurti, Guterres says, "Indeed, India has been a global leader in pandemic response efforts having provided critical medicines, diagnostic kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment to more than 150 countries. On Wednesday, India, which has been hailed as the pharmacy of the world, announced the gift of 200,000 COVID-19 doses for UN peacekeepers.

(N.I.E., 21/02)

India and China to push for mutually acceptable solution

India and China decided to push for a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues in a “steady and orderly manner”, during the 10th round of China-India Corps Commander level meeting. "The two sides agreed to follow the important consensus of their state leaders, continue their communication and dialogue, stabilise and control the situation on the ground, push for a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues in a steady and orderly manner, so as to jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas," said a statement released jointly on Sunday. The two sides had candid and in-depth exchange of views on other issues along the LAC in the Western Sector and admitted that disengagement at Pangong Tso area is a significant step towards solving other issues in Eastern Ladakh, which comes in the Western Sector of the 3,488-km LAC. The official statement said: "The two sides positively appraised the smooth completion of disengagement of frontline troops in the Pangong Lake area, noting that it was a significant step forward that provided a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC."

(N.I.E., 22/02)

Govt to complete defence acquisitions within 2 years, promote private participation: Union Minister Rajnath Singh

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said that the Centre will make efforts to complete the pending defence acquisitions within two years and to promote private participation in the defence sector. Addressing a Webinar on 'Budget Announcements 2021-22', Singh said, "Government of India has brought many reforms in last 6 years. There is a clear focus of the government on 'Ease of Doing Business' to encourage foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEMs), to set up manufacturing units in India, develop joint ventures and promote private participation in the defence sector." "Ministry is also working on bringing down the delays in timelines of capital acquisition. We will make efforts to complete the defence acquisition within 2 years, instead of the existing 3-4 years being taken on the average," Defence Minister added. Over the implementation of Union Budget provisions in the Defence Sector, Rajnath Singh said, "Ministry of Defence aims to achieve a turnover of Rs 1,75,000 Crore (USD 25 billion) including export of Rs 35,000 Crores (US\$ 5 Bn) in aerospace and defence goods and services by the year 2024."

(N.I.E., 22/02)

Guidelines launched for integrating non-alcoholic fatty liver disease with NPCDCS for better mgmt

In view of increase in the Non-alcoholic fatty liver diseases in the country, the Union Health Ministry on Monday launched the operational guidelines for the integration of the non-communicable diseases with NPCDCS (National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke) for its better management. Dr Harsh Vardhan said, “NAFLD, the abnormal accumulation of fat in the liver in the absence of

secondary causes of fatty liver, such as harmful alcohol use, viral hepatitis, or medications is a serious health concern as it encompasses a spectrum of liver abnormalities, from a simple non-alcoholic fatty liver (NAFL, simple fatty liver disease) to more advanced ones like non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), cirrhosis and even liver cancer. “Globally, NASH caused 40 lakh prevalent cases of compensated cirrhosis in 1990, which increased to 94 lakh cases in 2017.” Underscoring the importance of tackling NAFLD as a step to tackling the country's burden of non-communicable diseases, he noted. “Epidemiological studies suggest the prevalence of NAFLD is around 9 per cent to 32 per cent of the general population in India with a higher prevalence in those with overweight or obesity and those with diabetes or prediabetes. Researchers have found NAFLD in 40 per cent to 80 per cent of people who have type 2 diabetes and in 30 per cent to 90 per cent of people who are obese,” Harsh Vardhan said.

(P., 23/02)

India on its way to export weapons to world

Stressing the need for self-reliance in defence manufacturing, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said here India is developing its capabilities to produce low cost and high quality weapon systems to emerge as one of the biggest exporters. Making these remarks in a webinar organised by the defence ministry, he also invited the private sector to play a major role in defence production. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the ministry has kept aside nearly ₹70,000 crore of the total capital outlay this fiscal to procure weapon systems manufactured in India. He also said the Government will soon issue a second negative list of items which can only be procured locally by the Services. Last year, for the first time, the Government introduced a separate allocation for domestic procurement within the defence budget and had reserved ₹52,000 crore for 2020-21. “My Ministry has planned to invest, about 63% of the outlay for 2021-22 on domestic procurement, i.e. about ₹70,221 crore for domestic defence procurement during for 2021-22,” Rajnath said at a webinar organised by Department of Defence Production and Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers. The total capital outlay is ₹1.35 lakh crores. The total budget for the coming fiscal is ₹4.78 lakh crore. Addressing the webinar on the effective implementation of the Union Budget’s provisions in the defence sector, Modi listed a series of measures taken by his Government to boost self-reliance in the defence sector and rued the fact that the country is amongst the biggest defence importers in the world.

(P., 23/02)

SC farm panel seeks farmers’ views on laws

The Supreme Court-appointed expert committee on Tuesday held discussions with representatives of the All India Kisan Coordination Committee (AIKCC) and sought their viewpoints on the farm legislations. This was the 12th round of meeting of the committee members with stakeholders engaged in the agriculture sector. In December last year, a

delegation of farmers led by AIKCC met Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar to extend support to the farm laws. The meeting came about even as the agitating farmers' unions observed 'pagdi sambhal divas', have asked supporters across the globe to wear a green pagri/dupatta and post their pictures on social media with the hashtag 'Go green for farmers' and decided that five farmers from each Uttar Pradesh village will fast for eight hours daily. The committee members requested the participating office bearers of AIKCC to give their detailed views on the three laws -- The Farmers' Produce Trade & Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020."All the participating office bearers of All India Kisan Coordination Committee gave their detailed views, suggestions and submissions on the three Farm Acts, before the Committee," the committee said in a statement.

(P., 24/02)

Modi lauds role of traditional Indian medicines in Covid fight

A day after the Indian Medical Association (IMA) slammed Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev's Patanjali's claim that its herbal Coronil tablets are effective against the Covid-19 virus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday hailed the contribution of traditional Indian medicines in the fight against the pandemic. He said that the benefits of domestic spices and decoctions have been noticed by people around the world. "In addition to India's medicines and vaccines, the world has witnessed the contribution of our spices and decoctions as well. Our traditional medicines have established their place in the world," said Modi during a webinar on budget implementation to the health sector. The Prime Minister's remark comes in the backdrop of amid the controversy surrounding Patanjali's claim that its Coronil tablets are effective against the COVID-19 virus. Patanjali had claimed that its product is the "first evidence-based medicine for corona". In his address, PM Modi lauded the efforts of the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH). "Our network of AYUSH has done excellent work in the 'Corona era'. The infrastructure of AYUSH has been useful not just for human research but also for immunity and scientific research," he said. "The country needs wellness centres, district hospitals, critical care units, health surveillance infrastructure, modern labs and telemedicine. We have to work at every level," Modi added.

(P., 24/02)

60+ or 45+ with co-morbidities? Your Covid-19 vaccine jab window opens on March 1

The Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the launch of Covid-19 vaccination for the third priority group from March 1, which includes people above 60 years and those above 45 years with comorbidities, and involves the private sector. The vaccines will be administered at 10,000 government facilities free of cost and at 20,000 paid private facilities. The cost of the vaccines at private hospitals will be decided in three-four days after a meeting with manufacturers and representatives of hospitals, said Union minister Prakash Javadekar. "From March 1, people above 60 years of age and

those above 45 years of age with comorbidities will be vaccinated at 10,000 government and over 20,000 private vaccination centres. The vaccine will be given free of cost at government centres,” said Javadekar in a press briefing on the Cabinet’s decisions. The government is yet to make public the clinical criteria for those with underlying conditions to qualify for vaccinations against coronavirus but sources in the Union health ministry told this newspaper that these include diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, stroke, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases.

(N.I.E., 25/02)

Farmers' protest: Samyukt Kisan Morcha writes to President Kovind, seeks end to 'repression'

The umbrella body of protesting farmer unions, Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), on Wednesday sent a letter to President Ram Nath Kovind demanding an end to the government’s ‘repression’ against the farmers and their supporters. Hundreds of “innocent” farmers and others who are supporting their agitation have been lodged in jails and false cases registered against them. They should be immediately and unconditionally released, the Morcha stated. Notices being sent by police and other probe agencies to the farmers should also be stopped, it added. The communication was sent to the President on the occasion of ‘Daman Pratirodh Diwas’. Several other associated organisations also took up taluka and district-level protests in hundreds of locations across the country to submit the memorandum to the President, a press note stated. The Morcha also welcomed activist Disha Ravi’s release on bail in the ‘toolkit’ case and demanded action against the Delhi Police claiming it “flouted many norms” and arrested Disha in an “illegal and extra-constitutional manner”.

(N.I.E., 25/02)

India sent over 361 lakh anti-coronavirus vaccine doses to various countries: MEA

India has provided 361.94 lakh doses of anti-coronavirus vaccines to various countries, out of which 67.5 lakh doses have been supplied as grant assistance and 294.44 lakh on commercial basis, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said the supply of vaccines to countries will continue in the coming weeks and months in a phased manner but it will be ensured that domestic requirements for the national vaccination programme are kept in mind. "As of now, we have provided a total of 361.94 lakh doses to various countries. This includes 67.5 lakh doses supplied under grant assistance and 294.44 lakh doses under various commercial contracts," he said at an online briefing. India has sent consignments of anti-coronavirus vaccine doses as gifts to countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Oman, Afghanistan, Barbados and Dominica. Countries which received vaccines on commercial basis include Brazil, Morocco, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Egypt, Algeria, South Africa, Kuwait and the UAE.

(P., 26/02)

New rules for social media, OTT require right implementation: Nasscom

IT industry body Nasscom on Friday said the new rules for social media, OTT and digital media players aim to address concerns like grievance redressal, fake news and online safety, but will require the right implementation to ensure that they do not become onerous for the platforms. There are, however, sections of the industry, including tech firm Mozilla, which felt that certain provisions could “harm” freedom of expression. Nasscom noted that technology is becoming all pervasive and it is important that there is responsible use and building of technology for all stakeholders government, industry, start-ups and citizens. Nasscom also highlighted it is imperative that there is a balance between regulation and innovation as the world is in a phase of accelerated technology shifts. “...Code aims to address many of the concern areas of grievance redressal, fake news, online safety and parity with existing laws. “From a user perspective... The option of voluntary self-verification of user accounts and the right to receive an explanatory notification on removal or disablement of access and to seek remedy against the action being taken by the intermediaries should be helpful,” Nasscom said.

(P., 27/02)

SCPCR to conduct seminar for all child commissions across country

The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) would conduct a two-day seminar in Uttarakhand inviting the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and all the child rights commissions across the country. Considering the drug addiction among youth a serious issue in many states of the country, the SCPCR has decided to conduct a two-day seminar on March 16 and March 17, informed SCPCR chief, Usha Negi. The SCPCR recently also organised a one-day workshop with reformed young addicts and students of various colleges and universities under the Drug-Free Uttarakhand campaign along with some officials in order to use worthy recommendations to make guidelines against substance abuse at State as well as the national level. She said that the suggestions made in the recent workshop will be sent to the Central Government for consideration and the same would be done after this two-day seminar in March. According to her, every state would have some thoughts and plans to tackle the drug addiction issue which can be shared in the seminar. "Every child commission will share what they have been doing against drug addiction and rehabilitation in their respective states. The representatives will suggest various ideas which can be used to make strategies to fight drug addiction across the country," said Negi.

(P., 27/02)

National action plan to boost toy industry: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the Government has prepared a ‘National Toy Action Plan’ that includes 15 ministries and departments to make the industry competitive and provide it with a global platform. The Prime Minister said the ancient toy culture of the country reflects the practice of reuse and recycling, which is part of the Indian lifestyle. He said India has the potential to take the world back to eco-friendly toys. The fair that will continue from February 27 to March 2 aims to bring together all stakeholders including

buyers, sellers, students, teachers, designers, etc on a virtual platform to create sustainable linkages and encourage dialogue for the overall development of the industry, according to a Government statement. Speaking at the India Toy Fair 2021 here that he also inaugurated, the Prime Minister said the Government has prepared a National Toy Action Plan. It includes 15 ministries and departments to make the industry competitive, 'Aatmanirbhar', and to provide it with a global platform. "This first Toy Fair is not just a business or economic event. This programme is a link to strengthen the country's age-old culture of sports and gaiety. India toy culture is as old as the Indus Valley Civilisation. The world has studied the toys of the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappan era," he said. Prime Minister had in his 'Ma'am ki baat' radio programme also stressed the role played by the toys in shaping mind and reflected on the rich and varied Indian tradition of toy Making. Addressing the Toy Fair that he inaugurated, the Prime Minister said that India has given the world some of the most popular games like Chess and ludo.

(P., 28/02)

Govt finalises products under scheme to increase farmer income, exports

The Government on Saturday said it has finalised a list of products from agriculture and allied sectors that will be promoted in a cluster approach in 728 districts across the country as part of its effort to boost farm exports and enhance farmers income. The agriculture ministry, in consultation with food processing industries ministry, has finalised the products for 'One District One Focus Product' (ODOFP), an official statement said. Inputs from the States/UTs and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) have also been taken to prepare the list. "The products have been identified from agricultural, horticultural, animal, poultry, milk, fisheries and aquaculture, marine sectors for 728 districts across the country," the statement said.

(P., 28/02)

NEWS FROM OTHER STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Unions oppose move to sell steel plant

The proposed strategic sale of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, appears to be heading towards a showdown between the trade unions and the Union government. On Friday, hundreds of VSP employees, affiliated to various trade unions, organised a rally from Kurmannapalem to the Gandhi statue near the GVMC office, to stage a protest and demand the immediate rescinding of the proposal. The steel plant was set up after a sustained agitation in the early 1970s under the slogan 'Visakha Ukku - Andhrula Hakku', and 32 persons lost their lives in the struggle. They would not let the strategic sale happen, said CITU State president Ch. Narasinga Rao. All trade unions such as CITU, AITUC, INTUC and even YSRC Party Trade Union have joined hands to stage the protest and they collectively took a decision to oppose the sale. Speaking at the protest camp, Mr. Narasinga Rao said that the plan to privatise RINL was sown since day one of its inception. But somehow, the employees and the trade unions didn't allow it to happen.

(H.,06/02)

Andhra farmers to get app to track consumption, payment

The three power distribution companies (Discoms) — APSPDCL, APCPDCL and APEPDCL — are set to invite tenders for supply and installation of 17.07 lakh smart energy meters as a part of Dr YSR Free Agriculture Power Scheme. The three Discoms added additional features including development of mobile application for farmers in the tenders that have been sent for judicial preview. Though the three Discoms had sent the tender documents for judicial preview in November last year, they have added more features and resubmitted them on Tuesday. "We had included IRDA/Bluetooth, mobile application development for farmers and other features and sent for judicial vetting. If there are any objections/views, they can be submitted before March 3," Chairman and Managing Director of APCPDCL J Padma Janardhan Reddy said. The mobile application would be installed for all agriculture connection holders so that the consumer can view all the details of consumption, payment and other related information.

(N.I.E.,25/02)

ASSAM

Assam recruits 29,701 teachers ahead of polls

The Assam government on Friday handed out appointment letters to 29,701 teachers. Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed that the recruitment drive, timed ahead of

the Assembly elections, was the largest ever. Of the new recruits, 16,484 had been serving in non-provincialised schools for years. Some of them barely have two years of service left. The remaining 13,217 are fresh recruits who had cleared the Teachers' Eligibility Test. "Our primary responsibility is ensuring education and health to the people. Some of you will attain the age of retirement soon. The situation created by the previous governments made you waste the prime time of your lives," Dr. Sarma said at the job distribution programme at the Sarusajai Stadium in Guwahati. Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, who attended the programme, said he had made an announcement on August 15, 2020, that the State government would give 50,000 jobs.

(H.,06/02)

Assam to take steps to increase pension of State's freedom fighters

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday announced that steps would be taken to increase the monthly pension of freedom fighters in the state to Rs 25,000 and provide them with free healthcare. At present, freedom fighters of the northeastern state get Rs 21,000 as pension every month. Sonowal made the announcement during a meeting with representatives of Asom State Freedom Fighters Association, a government release said. The Chief Minister also assured them that an initiative would be made for providing Rs five lakh each to the families of 19 freedom fighters of the state, the release said. He also directed officials to urge deputy commissioners to ensure that last rites of the freedom fighters are conducted in a dignified manner.

(P.,21/02)

BIHAR

Bihar Govt to prepare strategy for low carbon development pathway

Bihar is all set to prepare a strategy for climate resilient and low carbon development pathway with the support of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). An MoU was signed by the Bihar Government and UNEP on Friday. While Union Minister of State, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Babul Supriyo graced the occasion as chief guest on a virtual platform, the agreement was reached in presence of Bihar Dy Chief Minister Tarakishore Prasad, State Environment Minister Neeraj Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary to Bihar Government Dipak Kumar Singh (IAS) and UNEP Country Head Atul Bagai amongst various other representatives from Centre, United Nations, External Affairs Ministry and Bihar Government at the UN office in national Capital. Satya S Tripathi, UN Assistant Secretary-General was also present. This UNEP supported initiative by the Government of Bihar will also pave the way for other States to embark on this journey of climate resilience and low carbon development.

(P., 13/02)

Amid rise in fuel prices, CM Nitish Kumar asks people to switch to electric vehicles in Bihar

Seeing the rise in prices of petrol and diesel in the country, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar suggested an alternative plan that would keep people unaffected at such times. On Tuesday, Kumar advised people to switch to electric vehicles as their chosen mode of transportation wherever possible. Speaking to the media, Nitish Kumar admitted the rise in rates of petrol and diesel and said people would like it if these prices were reduced. Citing his own example, Nitish said that he has been using electric vehicle and others should also prefer the eco-friendly mode of transportation. "The electric-vehicle is also better for the environment", he further added. Nitish Kumar started using an electric vehicle back in 2019 when he reached the Bihar Assembly in an electric car. The electric car used by CM Nitish Kumar has the capacity to cover a distance 150 km once it is recharged for four hours. It was bought at the cost of 11 lakhs and causes almost zero carbon emission. Finding electric cars viable and eco-friendly, Nitish Kumar has asked the heads of five other government departments to adopt the use of electric vehicles.

(N.I.E., 17/02)

10 lakh school children dropped out from schools in Bihar due to Covid-19 lockdown

Official data shows that a total of 10 lakh children dropped out of school from various districts of Bihar due to the COVID-19 lockdown in the state. Six lakh children, enrolled in classes 5 to 6 of government schools, dropped out while four lakh children from classes 8 and 9 left their respective schools. To bring these students back into classrooms, the education department of Bihar government has decided to launch 'Admission Drive' across the state from April 1. Sharing this news, Director of Primary Education Department Dr Ranjit K Singh said that the special admission drive to bring back all dropouts back to school will be carried out from April. School headmasters, of primary to high school level, have been given the task to carry out the admission drive on a larger scale to reduce student dropouts. Dr Singh said "we have also finalised to conduct bridge-courses for all students in schools, whose courses could not be completed due to lockdown in the state." He further added that the bridge course will continue for three months between April and June, for all classes.

(N.I.E.,20/02)

'E-Sanjeevani, Ashwini portal': Bihar government launches technology-based health care services

Bihar on Sunday took a leap in providing health care facilities including telemedicine and other digital health care platforms as Chief Minister Nitish Kumar inaugurated the services of E-Sanjeevani, Ashwini portal, the Wonder-App and the Referral Transport Tracking system at

a function organised by the State Health Department. "Ensuring better healthcare facility to the people of the state is our prime concern and we have been working on it since came into power in the state. The technology based health services started here today will go a long way in providing good health care facilities to the people," Kumar said after stating the services. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed in the presence of Nitish and CEO of the Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (BRLPS) alias JEEVIKA, Bala Murgan D and Executive Director of Health Services Manoj Kumar for running the first of its kind kitchen called 'Didi Ki Rasoi' in every government hospitals to provide free foods to admitted patients and their attendants at cheaper rates.

(N.I.E.,22/02)

1.6 crore school students to be promoted sans exams in Bihar

The Education Department of Bihar, headed by CM Nitish Kumar, will promote the students of nearly 78,000 government primary, middle and high schools to the next classes. Education Minister Vijay K Chaudhary told the Assembly on Tuesday that the state government has taken this decision considering the future of school students in the aftermath of the lockdown. The number of students to be promoted without appearing in exams will be around 1.66 crore. The education department has also decided to reopen primary schools for Classes I to V from March 1. Replying to a question, the Education Minister said higher secondary schools have opened in 8385 panchayats.

(N.I.E.,24/02)

CHANDIGARH

PGIMER launches India's first 'amputee clinic'

The PGIMER on Monday launched its 'PGI Amputee Clinic', the first in India. The clinic, a collective effort of various experts and departments of the institute, strives to provide social, mental and physical support to its patients. PGIMER Director Prof. Jagat Ram formally inaugurated the clinic, which is being set up to improve amputation patient care by providing a host of services under one roof and with significant coordination. "The basic intent of this initiative is to send the amputee as a near normal functional human being to society." The Amputee Clinic, he added, would attempt to unify all diverse sections in PGIMER, with some upgradations where needed, to provide appropriate management to amputees to guide them in their path to rehabilitation in society. "Some modalities would be worked out under the initiative to extend financial support for the medical as well as rehabilitation of amputees who cannot afford the cost," added Prof. Ram. Prof. M S Dhillon, head, department of orthopaedics, who spearheaded the initiative, said, "This is the first of its kind clinic in the country and no such clinic exists elsewhere. Over the last few years, it has been our endeavour to provide comprehensive care to post-trauma amputees, with various aspects of multidisciplinary care.

For the last 1.5 years, we have combined all the specialities that help in patient care and rehab under one roof; we now have formalized this as PGI Amputee Clinic, comprising specialists from various departments i.e. orthopaedics, PMR (Physical and Medical Rehabilitation), occupational/ physiotherapy, prosthetists, psychologists and nursing department, who had already been providing care, but as individual entities.”

(I.E.,02/02)

DELHI

More women have developed antibodies compared to men in Delhi

More women were found to have developed antibodies against COVID-19 compared to men in the fifth and the largest serological survey done by the Delhi government, said Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Tuesday. Many experts and the Minister said the city is getting closer to attaining herd immunity, but people should still take vaccines as it will provide a better immune response against the virus and also continue to take all precautions. About 56.13% of over 28,000 people, whose blood samples were collected, have developed antibodies against COVID-19, the results show. This means that 56.13% of the people surveyed had caught the infection at some point and have recovered from it, Mr. Jain said. When a larger part of the population develops antibodies and becomes immune to the virus, the chain of transmission is broken which reduces the spread of the disease which is called herd immunity. So, a higher value of sero prevalence is favourable.

(H.,03/02)

Cabinet okays Bill on powers of Delhi L-G

The Union Home Ministry is all set to introduce legislation in the Budget session of Parliament to amend a 1991 Act pertaining to the powers and functions of the Delhi government and the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G). The proposed legislation received the Union Cabinet’s approval on Wednesday. The Bill is likely to clearly define the powers of the L-G and the Delhi government on the lines of the Supreme Court judgment of February 2019. It is likely to give more teeth to the LG’s office. A Supreme Court Bench of Justices A.K. Sikri and Ashok Bhushan had, other than the question of services, given a unanimous verdict on the role of the two authorities. The services plea has been referred to a larger Bench of the court and the hearing is yet to conclude. In the February 14, 2019 verdict, the court upheld as “legal” the Ministry’s May 21 and July 23, 2015 notifications authorising the L-G to exercise powers in relation to services and directing the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) police not to take cognisance of offences against Central government officials.

(H., 05/02)

Delhi Assembly questions Facebook’s reservation to comply with summons

The Delhi Assembly on Thursday questioned Facebook’s reservation to comply with a summons issued by its Committee “to discuss peace, harmony and democracy” in the aftermath of the riots which rocked the Capital in February last year. The Assembly said its summons did no harm compared to the ‘draconian’ actions being taken by the Centre against some social media platforms. “The Delhi Assembly is not doing anything to Facebook compared to what Centre is doing with other platforms which is completely draconian in nature. This is a fanciful case here,” senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, for the Assembly, submitted before a Bench led by Justice S.K. Kaul. The hearing was based on a petition filed by senior Facebook official Ajit Mohan challenging the summons issued to him by the Assembly’s Committee on Peace and Harmony inquiring into the circumstances which led to the riots. He invoked his right to silence and questioned the jurisdiction of the Committee to summon a private person under a threat of breach of privilege action against him. Mr. Singhvi submitted that the earlier notice issued to Mr. Mohan has been withdrawn by the Committee. A fresh notice has been issued. The court recorded his submission.

(H., 05/02)

Delhi government eases restrictions on departmental spending

The Delhi government has eased restrictions, which were put on its expenditures after the coronavirus pandemic crisis aggravated in July. After a review of the outbreak and its impact on economic conditions, the Finance Department on Tuesday issued a set of guidelines to ‘streamline the process of expenditure proposals’ made by the various departments. According to the fresh order, for all expenditures up to Rs 1 crore, within delegated power of secretary or head of the department; prior relaxation from the finance department is not required. If the expenditure proposal is for more than ₹1 crore, the competent authority—Secretary or HoD, will place a cabinet note directly before the council of ministers through the concerned minister. The officials will not need to send the cabinet note to the Finance, Law, and Planning department to seek their ‘views’ anymore. The order says if the proposal having financial implication upto Rs 1 crore, not within delegated power of secretary or head of the department (HoD) but the finance department, the competent authority will continue to send the proposal to the finance department for concurrence as per the procedure.

(N.I.E.,11/02)

GUJARAT

Gujarat Govt brings 30L people under National Food Security Act

The Vijay Rupani Government in Gujarat has added 30 lakh beneficiaries under the food law in the recent past and it is in the process of identifying more people for coverage under this Act. The State Government informed this in a review meeting of the implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), under which 5 kg of wheat and rice are being provided per person per

month at a highly subsidised rate of Rs 2-3 per kg. Over 80 crore people are covered under this Act. Union Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey reviewed the NFSA implementation and other allied matters with the Gujarat Government at Gandhinagar, an official statement said. During the meeting, he said there is possibility of including more beneficiaries under the NFSA. As production of both wheat and paddy is higher than annual requirement of foodgrains of Gujarat State under the NFSA, it was observed that there is potential of augmenting procurement. "It was emphasised that State Government should target procuring to the extent of annual requirement which would not only benefit local farmers but also save the transportation cost which is incurred in bringing food grains from other States," the statement said, adding that the acceptance of locally cultivated food grains would also be higher among local population.

(P.,21/02)

HARYANA

Huge turnout of women farmers at mahapanchayats

A huge turnout of women farmers on Sunday marked the mahapanchayats (gatherings) against the farm laws in Hariyana's Jat belt and among the Meo Muslims of the Mewat region in Rajasthan. Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, addressing the gathering in Hariyana, said that the agitation was mass movement and would not fail. The two massive rallies, held simultaneously, were addressed by prominent farmer leaders spearheading in agitation, including BKU (Rajewal) president Balbir Singh Rajewal and BKU general-secretary Yudhvir Singh, apart from Mr. Tikait. Representatives of khaps, religious leaders, and political leaders were present. Speaking at Hariyana's Charkhi Dadri, Mr. Tikait said the ongoing agitation was a movement for farmer's freedom and did not belong to a particular caste or community.

(H., 08/02)

Haryana Government announces exemption in MV tax to autos, cabs operating in NCR, incentives for sportspersons

The Haryana government decided to grant exemption in motor vehicle tax to auto rickshaws and taxis operating within the Delhi-national capital region (NCR), an official statement said. To encourage sportspersons, especially those who are economically weak but have qualified for the Olympic Games, the government will be providing them a grant of Rs 5 lakh as "preparation money" for better diet, training and capacity building, it said. The decisions were taken during a meeting of the state cabinet held here under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. The exemption in motor vehicle tax was granted as per the contract carriage permit issued by the NCR states other than Haryana under the reciprocal common transport agreement (contract carriage), the statement said. At present, auto rickshaws and taxis registered in Haryana and having contract carriage permits under the RCTA are not required to pay tax while entering and operating in NCR states - Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi - with Haryana being an exception. It will ensure seamless movement of cabs and auto rickshaws in NCR and provide better and efficient transport services to people, it said.

(N.I.E.,11/02)

Haryana farmers destroy crop in protest against agri laws

Some farmers in Haryana destroyed their wheat crop in protest against the Centre's new agriculture laws, prompting political and farmer leaders to appeal to them not to resort to such drastic measures. Some farmers in the state's Karnal, Jind and Ambala districts had destroyed wheat crops over two to four acres of their land. In Karnal's Mundigarhi village, a farmer destroyed his wheat crop on four acres on Tuesday. The farmer told reporters that he did it in protest against the new farm laws. Another farmer at Manakpur village, around 3 km from Ambala City, flattened his wheat crop over one acre. Gurpreet Singh, who wanted to destroy the crop over five acres, was prevented from doing so by local BKU leader Gulab Singh. Gurpreet told reporters that he was annoyed over the attitude of the Union government as it was not repealing the farm laws. In the past a couple of days, some farmers destroyed their crop on few patches of land using their tractors, prompting Haryana BKU chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni to appeal to them not to take such a step. Chaduni appealed to them not to take such a step, saying the Centre will not be moved by such measures.

(N.I.E.,24/02)

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Trains back on track in J&K after 11 months

After a gap of 11 long months the local trains in Jammu and Kashmir resumed their services from Monday. These train services remained suspended during covid-19 pandemic. In Kashmir valley, the train services between Banihal to Baramulla were resumed with only one pair of rail while in Jammu region DMU services were made operational between Pathankot and Udhampur. Majority of government employees and local businessmen availing the services heaved a sigh of relief as they boarded trains to reach their workplaces. Chief Area Manager Northern Railways in Srinagar, Saqib Yousuf said initially only two trains will operate and the number of trains will be increased in the days to come. The local train between Banihal and Baramulla covers a distance of 137 km across 16 stations. Large number of people along the route rely on the services to commute in the absence of proper road connectivity. Before the launch of the train services in Kashmir valley, a road opening party also detected an Improvised explosive device, a few hundred meters away from the Nowgam railway station near a bridge. Vehicular traffic was also suspended in the area till the teams of Bomb disposal squad defused the IED in a controlled manner.

(P.,23/02)

JHARKHAND

STEM-Labs to promote innovation in Jharkhand govt schools

To ensure children get the international standard of education and become innovative, STEM-labs are being developed in government schools of Jharkhand. Focusing on students who have

a knack for math, science, and technology-related subjects, the labs will help impart students with practical learning and problem-solving ability based on the theories taught in regular classes. STEM is a curriculum based on the idea of educating students in four specific disciplines -- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) through an interdisciplinary and applied approach. Rather than teaching the four disciplines as a separate module, STEM integrates them into a cohesive learning paradigm based on real-world applications. Notably, STEM labs have become a norm in developed and developing countries around the world, but it is yet to become a regular practice in Indian schools. According to officials, the labs will be open to students in all government schools in the respective block. After evaluating the impact of this project, similar labs will be set up in all the blocks.

(N.I.E., 16/02)

Saturday, No Car Day from March 13

Municipal Commissioner of Ranchi Mukesh Kumar has appealed to the residents of Capital City to use bicycles at least one day in a week, on Saturday. This move will ensure that they will be healthy and the environment of the Capital city will be clean, he said in at a meeting organized to encourage cycling. Kumar said that the program “Saturday, no car” would be started from Saturday, 13 March 2021 at Morhabadi ground. Speaking at a meeting based on ‘India Cycle for Change Challenge’ and ‘Street for People’ programme, at the Municipal Corporation Office, the Municipal Commissioner revealed the programme on Thursday. Several issues were discussed in the meeting to make the roads of the capital bicycle friendly and directions were also given to move towards the solution of problems. The Municipal Commissioner appealing to the people of the city, the officials and employees of all government, non-government offices said that everyone should accept bicycle as an urban transport for the city, at least on Saturday.

(P.,26/02)

KARNATAKA

Sanctuary tag ideal for Madiwala Lake, but stuck in red tape

In a bid to protect water bodies and biodiversity, the Karnataka Forest Department has penned a letter to the State Government, requesting it to declare Madiwala Lake as a bird sanctuary and conservation reserve. The department is also asking the BBMP to return the lake to it so that it can rejuvenate, protect and maintain the water body. The proposal has been drawn on the lines of Puttenahalli Lake in Yelahanka, the first and only lake in the city to be declared a bird conservation reserve. Madiwala Lake is not part of the list prepared by BBMP for rejuvenation of water bodies under Bengaluru Mission 2022. It was not included as the BBMP lacks adequate funds to take up revival work of all lakes. The department had worked extensively with the previous Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority, and Prof C R Babu — Professor Emeritus CEMDE, School of Environment Studies, University of Delhi, and former member of the Knowledge Commission — to develop the lake, create another mini pond towards Sarakki lake. A biodiversity park has also been created at Madiwala Lake

under the guidance of Prof Babu. Many resident welfare associations had also joined hands with KLCDA to protect the water body. Bengaluru Urban, Deputy Conservator of Forests, S S Ravishankar, said that the move was required, and the file was stuck between various departments. BBMP DCF V Ranganatha Swamy said though the BBMP has funds for lake-related work, it will be better if the proposal is implemented by the forest department.

(N.I.E., 01/02)

Golden Chariot chugs again

Karnataka's luxury train Golden Chariot hit the tracks again after a break of more than 3 years and reached Mysuru on Sunday with the tourists. The response to the 6N/7D trip was encouraging and the occupancy is high, according to an IRCTC official who said that the next departure is scheduled for March 21. The train was flagged off from Yeshwanthpur Railway Station by senior officials of the IRCTC and KSTDC and will cover places of tourist interest in Mysuru including Bandipur, Halebid, Chikkamagaluru plantations, Hampi, Pattadakal and Aihole and Goa before terminating at Bengaluru on Saturday. The interiors of the train has been redone with renovated cabins, new upholstery etc.

(H., 07/02)

Anti-cow slaughter Bill passed in Karnataka

Amid uproarious scenes with Opposition members tearing copies of the Bill and protesting in the Well of the House, The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill, 2020, was passed by voice vote on Monday in the Legislative Council. This was even as the Opposition Congress and the Janata Dal (S), whose combined strength forms a majority in the House, demanded a division of vote. It may be recalled that with no support from the Janata Dal (S), the BJP had failed to get the Bill passed in the council during the last session in December 2020, forcing the government to promulgate an ordinance. The Bill was tabled again in the council on Monday. B.K. Hariprasad, Congress MLC, told presspersons that the government had "bulldozed" its way through and passed the Bill and the Opposition would continue the protest on Tuesday. Significantly, the Janata Dal (S), that is in alliance with the BJP for the Council Chairman's election scheduled to be held on Tuesday, also opposed the Bill

(H., 09/02)

₹16 crore drug is their only hope of survival

A gene therapy costing ₹16 crore is the only shot at life for nearly 200 children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type 1, a rare genetic disease, in Karnataka. Last month, the therapy - Zolgensma - was offered free to a 14-month-old baby from Bhatkal (Uttara Kannada) who was the lucky winner of a lottery through a compassionate access programme by Novartis, the Swiss drugmaker. This lottery is held once in two weeks for SMA children across the world and doctors at Baptist Hospital, that has a dedicated paediatric Neuromuscular Service, are hoping more

children will benefit. “The therapy is a one-time infusion that takes about an hour,” Ann Agnes Mathew, consultant paediatric neurologist and neuromuscular specialist, at Baptist Hospital told. The Therapy was approved by U.S. regulators in May 2019 and has since then turned into a miracle drug for this rare disorder that destroys a baby’s muscle control.

(H.,12/02)

Karnataka aims to have Jan Aushadi centres in all govt hospitals

Karnataka may well become the first state in the country to have Jan Aushadi centres in all government hospitals. With the Union Government planning to start such centres in all government hospitals across the country, Karnataka is likely to take the lead in taking up the initiative to make medicines available at affordable prices to more people. Currently, under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP), there are nearly 7,500 Jan Aushadi Kendras in the country, of which 850, accounting for over 10 per cent, are in Karnataka. The State Government is targeting to have 1,000 centres by end of this year. On an average, 20 new Kendras are being opened in Karnataka every month. Bengaluru Urban district alone has 211 centres, followed by Dakshina Kannada with 76 centres. As on date, the state has recorded Rs 118 crore business from these centres for the year 2020-21. The government is hoping to touch Rs 125-130 crore turnover by the end of March 2021. The state will have main distribution centres at Bengaluru, Hubballi, one in Coastal Karnataka and also in Kalyana Karnataka. “Distribution of medicines to centres will be done from here,” said the sources.

(N.I.E.,20/02)

MAHARASHTRA

Mitwaa sessions in Mumbai to counsel teenagers with HIV

THE MUMBAI District AIDS Control Society (MDACS), run under the National AIDS Control Society (NACO), has started ‘Mitwaa’ – a counselling programme that will help teenagers infected with AIDS deal with the psycho-social impact of the disease on their lives. At least 821 teens, aged 15 to 19 years, have registered with NACO in Mumbai will be part of Mitwaa. “I remember meeting a 20-year-old youth two years ago. His parents never told him he had HIV. When he fell ill and underwent a battery of tests, he came to know that he was HIV positive. He was furious with his parents for hiding this. Eventually, he developed suicidal thoughts and refused medication,” said Smita Ayun Indalkar, a counsellor at Babasaheb Kandivali Shatabdi hospital. Indalkar required two weeks to calm him down, then counselled him to start medicines and explained to his parents the best ways to handle his mood swings. Both parents were HIV positive and were undergoing medication for over two decades. The youth eventually began taking medicines regularly. This year, he finished graduation and has started working. There are 19 anti-retroviral therapy (ART) centres, but only one centre in Sion hospital exclusively deals with paediatric counselling.

(I.E.,01/02)

BMC wants to be Mumbai's sole planning authority

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) shrinking revenue stream has caused concern for the country's richest municipal body. While the agency has claimed that the decline in revenues was due to decisions taken to combat the pandemic and provide relief to the affected sectors, it has also hinted that fellow government agencies, like the Maharashtra Housing & Area Development Authority (MHADA), are eating into its revenue stream. Therefore, the BMC in its budget has sought to be appointed as the single planning authority for Mumbai City. "As of now for Mumbai City, apart from the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), there are other planning authorities such as the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), MHADA, Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC), Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) and Mumbai Port Trust etc. These authorities plan the development of the layouts in their possession, while the MCGM provides all infrastructural facilities such as water supply, sewerage facility, roads, street lights and SWM services. This leads to the MCGM's revenue loss and citizens have to suffer in case of any obstacle that may arise in the infrastructural facilities," Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal said in his budget speech. The Budget estimates for the financial year 2021-22 for revenue income is proposed to be Rs 27,811.57 crore, which is Rs 636.73 crore less than the Budget estimates of 2020-21. Last year, the BMC's revenue estimate was Rs 28,448.30 crore, which it has subsequently revised to Rs 22,572.13 crore, a reduction by Rs 5,876.17 crore.

(I.E.,04/02)

Maharashtra unveils caravan policy to boost tourism

In an effort to attract tourists to Maharashtra in a big way, the Shiv Sena-led MVA government on Wednesday approved its own Caravan policy to promote leisure travel and tourism in the State. In line with the existing Caravan tourism policy of the Government of India, the Uddhav Thackeray dispensation unveiled its own Caravan policy – under which the state-run Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) will allow private players to construct Caravan Parks, accommodations for tourists and operate camper vans in around the designated tourist destinations. At a weekly Cabinet meeting presided over by chief minister Uddhav Thackeray here, the state Cabinet cleared the Caravan Tourism Policy which the state government intends to implement during the post-Covid-19 period in an elaborate way. State Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray, who is pushing the implementation of the policy, said: "Caravan Tourism will add to the experiences offered by the State government to the tourists". The caravan and caravan park professionals shall be trained in marketing, hygiene, and management of the new niche sector through the Directorate of Tourism. It may be recalled that the MTDC had released a draft Caravan Tourism Policy in September last year and sought suggestions and objections from various stake-holders.

(P.,18/02)

Partial lockdown imposed in parts of Maharashtra

In view of rising COVID-19 cases, Maharashtra government has declared partial lockdown in some parts of the Vidarbha region. Whether the same is to be done in other parts of the state will be decided over the next eight days. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray in an address to the residents of Maharashtra on Sunday evening said people have to decide whether they want the lockdown or not? "Covid-19 cases are increasing and this could be the second wave. People should follow social distancing and use face masks if they don't want a lockdown again. If the cases continue to rise, they have to take a call on lockdown in the next eight days," Thackeray said. In Amaravati, Akola and Pune, local authorities have declared partial lockdowns. Deputy Chief Minister and Guardian Minister of Pune, Ajit Pawar said except for essential services, people's movements are restricted between 11 pm to 6 am in Pune. He said Pune schools and colleges will remain shut until February 28. The chief minister also announced prohibition of political rallies, social gatherings and large protests for the next few days. He said every party wants to increase its base, but now they have to work to contain the spread of the virus.

(N.I.E.,22/02)

Maharashtra govt to launch women empowerment scheme on March 8

In a bid to empower women in rural Maharashtra, the state government on Wednesday announced the Mahasamruddhi Mahila Sashaktikaran scheme, which is set to be launched on March 8. "To boost the confidence of women, we will promote listing the names of wives alongside their husbands on the 7/12 extract, which is the official agricultural land record of an individual or family registered with the state government's revenue department. The inclusion of wives' names on house property documents will also be promoted," Maharashtra Rural Development Minister Hasan Mushrif said on Wednesday. While the state Rural Development department will be the nodal body for implementing the scheme, all other government departments will also be involved. Under the scheme, which will commence on International Women's Day, self-help groups will organise exhibitions to display rural women's work and encourage greater participation across fields. Members of women cells at the village level and the state rural livelihood mission will also be involved.

(I.E.,25/02)

NAGALAND

Nagaland assembly resolves to unitedly work for resolution of protracted Naga problem

The Nagaland Legislative Assembly on Thursday adopted a four-point resolution on decades old Naga political struggle with the 60-member House resolving to work unitedly in facilitating ongoing negotiations for a final solution between the Centre and Naga political groups. The union government has been holding two separate parleys with the Naga

negotiators NSCN(IM) since 1997 and Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) comprising of seven groups since 2017. The centre signed the framework agreement with NSCN(IM) on August 3, 2015 and also entered into an agreed position with NNPGs in December 2017. However, the final conclusion of the talks is yet to be achieved. The assembly resolution on Naga political issue was moved by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and seconded by Leader of Opposition T R Zeliang following a day-long discussion in the house Tuesday.

(N.I.E.,19/02)

PUNJAB

Punjab 13th State to implement ‘One Nation One Ration Card’

Punjab has become the 13th State in the country to successfully undertake “One Nation One Ration Card system” reform. The State has become eligible to mobilise additional financial resources of Rs 1,516 crore rupees through Open Market Borrowings. According to the Ministry of Finance, permission for the same was issued by the Department of Expenditure. The other 12 States which have completed this reform are Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh. Till now, 17 States have carried out at least one of the four stipulated reforms and have been granted reform linked borrowing permissions. On completion of One Nation One Ration Card system reform, these 13 states have been granted additional borrowing permission of Rs 34,956 crore by the Department of Expenditure. Out of these, 13 states have implemented the one nation one ration card system, 12 states have done ease of doing business reforms, 6 states have done local body reforms and 2 states have undertaken power sector reforms. Total reform linked additional borrowing permission issued so far to the states stands at Rs 76,512 crore. The implementation of One Nation One Ration Card System ensures availability of ration to beneficiaries under National Food Security Act and other welfare schemes at any Fair Price Shop across the country.

(P., 14/02)

Punjab implements 301 reforms, reducing 300 compliances

To give a further boost to the industry and trade in the border state of Punjab, the State Government on Thursday maintained that it has successfully implemented 301 reforms while the reduction of 300 compliances by 17 different departments was in progress. The reforms were part of the State Reforms Action Plan (SRAP) 2020-21, implemented across different departments. The state Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan reviewed the implementation of SRAP while chairing a meeting of the concerned Administrative Secretaries on Thursday. Mahajan directed the Department heads to ensure proper implementation of all reforms and reduce the compliance burden for industries so that Punjab shall lead the country in ‘ease of doing business’ for the

industry and trade as well as for citizen-centric services providing 'ease of living' for the people in the State. The state Principal Secretary (Industries and Commerce) Alok Shekhar informed that these 301 reforms have been implemented by the concerned departments and all evidences have been submitted to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) within the stipulated time by January 31. The DPIIT will rank the states based on the user feedback against these 301 reforms for which user data from November 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021, will be considered. Till date, more than 4,000 satisfied users have been generated across various services by the respective departments with customer feedback.

(P.,26/02)

TELENGANA

Telangana to submit project report on Nizamabad Spices Park to Centre soon

The government of Telangana has finalised the detailed project report (DPR) for establishing a Spices Park at Velpur in Nizamabad district and will soon submit it under the Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. This was revealed by Spices Board Chairman and Secretary D Sathyan during a virtual Buyer Seller Meet (BSM) organised by Spices Board, Nizamabad Regional Office on Wednesday. The interactive meet attracted 119 participants, including the turmeric farmers (sellers). Stating that export of spices, especially turmeric, has witnessed an upward trend, Sathyan said: "Telangana's potential in turmeric cultivation is very high and there is tremendous scope for increasing the volume of exports." Earlier in his inaugural speech, MP Dharmapuri Arvind expressed delight at Spices Board's Regional Office, Nizamabad conducting the BSM programme. He also assured to extend all the required support to the exporters, farmers and other stake holders for the overall development of turmeric industry. L Venkatram Reddy, Director of Horticulture and Sericulture of Telangana, said that there is a significant difference between the turmeric prices at Nizamabad market and Sangli (Maharashtra) market and stressed the need to take necessary remedial measures to rectify price parity. Meanwhile, Horticulture Director (Central) A B Remashree said that the ministry's approval is awaited.

(N.I.E., 04/02)

Telangana announces decision to implement 10% quota for economically weaker sections

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Thursday announced the State government's decision to implement 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections in education and employment. The quota will be implemented for EWS, without any change in the reservation already enjoyed by other sections, a release of the CMO said. Mr. Rao said an official meeting, presided by him, will

discuss the issue in a couple of days and issue orders. He stressed on the necessity for 10% reservation to EWS in education and employment. The quota for EWS will take the reservations for various downtrodden sections in the State up to 60%. The State government was already implementing 50% reservations for SCs, STs and BCs, the release added.

(H., 09/02)

Telangana plans policy for citizens living abroad

A policy to deal with various problems faced by the citizens of Telangana living abroad will be brought out soon. In this regard, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar held a meeting with officials concerned at BRKR Bhavan on Tuesday. Many from Telangana have migrated to various countries across the world, particularly to Gulf countries. The Chief Secretary asked the officials to give their suggestions for resolving the issues faced by these NRIs. The suggestions would be presented to Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and Minister for NRI Affairs KT Rama Rao, so that an appropriate policy and procedures could be developed. He reiterated that Chief Minister was committed to the welfare of the non-resident Telanganites. It may be recalled that earlier, Somesh Kumar and others, visited Kerala to study various schemes and policies brought out by the State for the welfare of those living abroad.

(N.I.E., 17/02)

Telangana Women's Commission portal defunct

As a result of two years of relentless campaigning by activists and woman volunteers from across the State, the Telangana government, in November 2020, had launched a portal for the State Women's Commission, which was introduced to help women lodge complaints online. Unfortunately, several months have passed since the launch, but the portal remains non-functional till date. While officials of the Commission blame technical glitches for the portal's inactivity, many women activists allege that the authorities are merely lackadaisical. In July 2018, Hyderabad-based women's rights activist Spurthi Kolipaka had floated a Change.org petition urging Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development (MAUD) KT Rama Rao to appoint a chairperson for the State Women's Commission and to ensure that a portal was launched to help women register complaints online. The petition was signed by more than 30,000 persons from across the State. The Commission finally got its own website in November 2020, and a new chairperson was appointed in January this year.

(N.I.E.,19/02)

UTTARAKHAND

197 still missing as Uttarakhand avalanche toll touches 32

The operation to rescue about 35 workers trapped inside a 2.5 km NTPC hydel project tunnel in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand continued on Tuesday, while the death toll in the

aftermath of what Union Home Minister Amit Shah, described in Parliament as a snow avalanche, rose to 32. More than 197 people, including the trapped labourers, are still missing. "It is observed from the satellite data (Planet Lab) of February 7, 2021, in the catchment of the Rishi Ganga river — at the terminus of the glacier at an altitude of 5,600 metres — a landslide triggered a snow avalanche covering approximately 14-sq.km area and causing a flash flood in the downstream of Rishi Ganga river," Mr. Shah told Parliament. He said the avalanche led to a sudden rise in the water level that triggered a flash flood, destroying the functional Rishi Ganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW and also affecting the under construction 520 MW NTPC hydro-power project, downstream at Tapovan on the Dhauli Ganga river. While 12 persons were rescued by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel from a small tunnel at the NTPC project site, 15 were saved at the Rishi Ganga project on Sunday. Four more bodies were found close to the Rishi Ganga project site on Tuesday morning.

(H., 10/02)

GLOF threat: Glacial lakes need to be monitored in Uttarakhand

After a study revealed that 16 out of 78 tehsils of Uttarakhand are vulnerable to Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF), scientists, experts said that continuous monitoring and assessment is needed to determine the threat factor. According to the inventory of Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun the hill state has total of 1,266 glacial lakes. "All of them are not a threat. Formation of a glacial lake is a natural process. Among them, the Moraine Dam poses a threat. But then all Moraine Dam glacial lakes are not dangerous. Only 10-11 may be at risk," says DP Dobhal, a glaciologist with Waisa institute. The glaciologist explained that all lakes are not a threat but 10-12 of those in the category of Moraine lake category of the glacial lakes. "Hemkund Saheb lake is also a glacial lake but it is a stable one. These lakes are part of the ecosystem which is in existence since millennia. We must be vigilant about the lakes which are vulnerable to bursting resulting in GLOF," said Dobhal. Meanwhile, Central Water Commission is conducting simulation studies on the lake formed in the Rishi Ganga river, 8kms upstream from Raini village and also examining the possibility of carrying out a controlled blast to drain out the water.

(N.I.E., 15/02)

UTTAR PRADESH

Ram Temple: Trust launches final drive of fund collection

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust that has been formed to facilitate the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya started the second phase of the fund collection campaign on Monday. The Trust claimed to have collected around Rs 300 crore in the last 17 days in the first phase of the mass contact and contribution drive. The second and last phase

will continue till February 27, which is also the day of Magh Purnima, when the first “holy bath” of the Kumbh Mela takes place. Sant Ravidass Jayanti will also be observed that day. The Trust said the volunteers would go door to door to collect contributions ranging from Rs 10 to Rs 1,000 and more. According to Trust officials, so far they went to specific and prominent people interested in donating Rs 2,000 or more. Earlier in the day, kicking off the second phase from Ayodhya’s Rekabganj area, Trust General Secretary Champat Rai reached out to local street vendors and appealed for contributions for the construction of the temple. He said the second phase was started to ensure that people in relatively weaker economic situations can also participate in the construction of the grand temple. The official in charge of the Trust office in Ayodhya, Prakash Gupta, told The Indian Express that until now the campaign was taking money from prominent people and giving them receipts.

(N.I.E., 02/02)

CM Adityanath launches free tutorial scheme for competitive exam aspirants

Offering the youth of the state coaching for various competitive exams, UP CM Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the Abhyudaya scheme via video links on Monday. While interacting with the aspirants, around 5 lakh of whom have already registered for the facility, the CM emphasised that the scheme would help aspirants, who were not able to access good study material and other means, prepare for these examinations. “We will ensure holistic development by providing coaching facilities similar to that of Kota and Prayagraj to candidates in other parts of the state who are not able to avail those services,” said the CM. He termed the scheme path pradarshak (guiding light) for the candidates. “We decided to introduce such a facility when we came across about 30,000 competitive exam prospects stuck in Kota and Prayagraj due to Covid.” Under the Abhyudaya scheme, free coaching will be provided by the UP government across 75 districts and 18 divisions. Initially, coaching centres will operate at divisional headquarters. Later, they will be spread to the districts. This programme is aimed especially at those who cannot afford proper coaching due to financial problems. The coaching institutes will start functioning from Tuesday.

(N.I.E., 16/02)

Atal Bhujal Yojana to be extended across UP

After the initial success of the Uttar Pradesh Atal Bhujal Yojana, the Yogi Adityanath Government has decided to extend it across the State. The scheme, which aims at ensuring public participation and improvement in groundwater conservation and management, was introduced as a pilot project in 10 districts Mahoba, Jhansi, Banda, Hamirpur, Chitrakoot, Lalitpur, Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, Baghpat and Meerut. "After getting a favourable response, the government has decided to implement the scheme in other 65 districts as well. Now, the scheme will be implemented all over the state," a senior official said. A government order (GO) in this regard has been issued. It says that barring the work under convergence, the

budget on other works will be borne by the departmental budget. Out of the 826 blocks in the state, the scheme was implemented in only 26 groundwater-stressed blocks but from April 1, 2021, all 826 blocks would be covered by this scheme, a government statement said. The scheme has been designed with the principal objective of strengthening the institutional framework for participatory groundwater management and for bringing about behavioural changes at the community level for sustainable groundwater resource management.

(P.,18/02)

Sanskrit schools to provide free meals to under privileged

With the aim to popularise Sanskrit, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued directives to provide free meals and accommodation to underprivileged students in Sanskrit schools similar to the Gurukul system. "This step will serve as a solution to all the problems faced by the school administration in providing food to so many children," a senior official said here on Friday. He said for opening up the digital landscape of an advanced learning forum for students, the government had also decided to install computers in over 200 Sanskrit schools where computers are not installed. Last year, computers were installed by the UP Sanskrit Sansthan in Sanskrit schools in 72 districts. The remaining schools in the state will be computerised by the Sanskrit Sansthan this year. "Educational institutions that have a higher enrollment will be upgraded on priority and the Sanskrit Education Council has started to draft the list of such schools," the official said. Acharya Dr Vachaspati Mishra, president of Uttar Pradesh Sanskrit Sansthan, Lucknow, said that all educational institutions under the flagship of UP Sanskrit Sansthan had experienced a digital upgrade. He appreciated the decision of the state government of issuing press releases in Sanskrit in order to make the language popular among larger and diverse groups.

(P.,27/02)

Village ponds to be named after meritorious girls

The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh is all set to celebrate this year's International Women's Day in the most distinctive way to glorify the women of the state by naming village ponds after talented girl students for one year. The government will also dedicate a plantation drive in every district to celebrate the noteworthy role of talented women of the state in UP's development and to encourage campaigns like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. "To glorify the achievements of the meritorious daughters of classes 10 and 12, a pond will be renamed after them for a span of an entire year in every gram sabha," an official said here on Friday. The beautification of the ponds having boards with the name of meritorious daughters will be done under MGNREGA. The Yogi government, with its commitment to uplifting the weaker and deprived women of the state, will also set up women help desks at village, block, tehsil and district levels to not only address the grievances of women from various sections but also to fulfill their hopes by finding appropriate solutions for them. "Information related to women rights in the revenue laws and other online facilities for women will be provided by the Revenue Department," the official

said. The women help desk will also allot land pattas approved in the financial year 2020-21 to the eligible and needy women coming from rural backgrounds on March 8 the International Women's Day. The help desk will also distribute free-of-cost copies of khataunis to the registered women account and co-account holders. (P.,27/02)

Self-printing of e-stamps allowed for panchayat polls

The Uttar Pradesh government, to prevent the black-marketing of stamp papers during the panchayat elections, has allowed self-printing of e-stamps of the denominations of Rs 10, Rs 50, Rs 100 and Rs 500. The Stamps and Registration Department has allowed the self-printing of stamp papers. Self-printing of e-stamp papers will be permitted only for the stamp papers up to Rs 500 only. Official sources said a huge demand for stamp papers was expected during the panchayat elections as affidavits would have to be filed along with lakhs of nomination papers to be filed by the candidates for the three-tier panchayat institutions. As per the new system formalised by the Stamps and Registration Department, the candidates, after depositing the money, can self-print the stamp papers from the website of the Stock Holding Corporation of India. The candidate will have to make online payment to the Stock Holding Corporation of India. The person opting for the self-printing of the stamp papers will have to specify the purpose for which the stamp paper is being purchased.

(P.,28/02)

Financial assistance to MSMEs created 65L private jobs in UP

About 14 per cent of the country's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) are operational in UP and as many as 13 lakh MSME units have been given loans worth Rs 42,700 crore in the 2020-21 financial year. This is for the first time in the history of the state that such a large amount of loan has been given to the MSME sector in a year. This has also generated 65 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities in the private sector. Additional Chief Secretary (MSME) Navneet Sehgal recently reviewed the steering sub-committee of the State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC) and gave instructions for early disposal of pending applications for acceptance and distribution at the bank-level under various government schemes including Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), ODOP Scheme, Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarajgar Yojana (MYSY). Instructions have also been given to take necessary action for the disposal of the cases related to banks on the MSME Sathi app. About 41.16 per cent of bank accounts have been covered under the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) against the total Jan Dhan accounts in UP, according to the additional chief secretary. "The state government's one gram panchayat, one bank correspondent' programme has started under which the process of appointment of 58,000 Bank Correspondent Sakhi is underway. In addition, a loan of over Rs 1.45 crore has been distributed under the annual loan scheme till the end of the current fiscal," SLBC convenor Brajesh Kumar Singh said.

(P.,28/02)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Military stages coup in Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi detained

Myanmar military television says the military has taken control of the country for one year. An announcer on military-owned Myawaddy TV made the announcement Monday morning. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi was detained under house arrest, reports said, as communications were cut to the capital. Phone and internet access to Naypyitaw was lost and Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party could not be reached. The US, Australia and others were concerned by the reports and urged Myanmar's military to respect the rule of law. Myanmar lawmakers were to gather Monday in the capital Naypyitaw for the first session of Parliament since last year's election. Online news portal Myanmar Now cited unidentified sources about the arrest of Suu Kyi and the NLD's chairperson around dawn and did not have further details. Myanmar Visual Television and Myanmar Voice Radio posted on Facebook around 6:30 a.m. that their programs were not available to broadcast regularly. The 75-year-old Suu Kyi is by far the country's most dominant politician, and became the country's leader after leading a decades-long nonviolent struggle against military rule.

(I.E, 01/02)

WHO teams visit Wuhan food market in search of COVID origin clues

A World Health Organisation team looking into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic on Sunday visited a market known to be the food distribution center for the Chinese city of Wuhan during the 76-day lockdown last year. The team members were seen walking through sections of the Baishazhou market, one of the largest wet markets in Wuhan, surrounded by a large entourage of Chinese officials and representatives. The members, with expertise in veterinarian, virology, food safety and epidemiology, have so far visited two hospitals at the center of the early outbreak, Wuhan Jinyintan Hospital and the Hubei Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine Hospital. On Saturday, they also visited a museum exhibition dedicated to the early history of COVID-19. The Geneva-based WHO said on Twitter last Thursday that the team plans to visit hospitals and markets like the Huanan Seafood Market, which was linked to many of the first cases. They also listed the Wuhan Institute of Virology and laboratories at facilities including the Wuhan Center for Disease Control. The mission has become politically charged, as China seeks to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak.

(N.I.E, 01/02)

Biden threatens sanctions on Myanmar after military coup

President Joe Biden on Monday threatened new sanctions on Myanmar after its military staged a coup and arrested the civilian leaders of its government, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Biden assailed the country's army for the coup, calling it a "direct assault

on the country's transition to democracy and rule of law." The coup in Myanmar, also known as Burma, has also been roundly condemned internationally. The United States removed sanctions on Burma over the past decade based on progress toward democracy," Biden said in a statement. "The reversal of that progress will necessitate an immediate review of our sanction laws and authorities, followed by appropriate action. The United States will stand up for democracy wherever it is under attack. Myanmar has been a Western democracy promotion project for decades and had been a symbol of some success. But over the past several years, there have been growing concerns about its backsliding into authoritarianism. Disappointment with Suu Kyi, the former opposition leader, has run high, especially over her resistance to reining in repression of Rohingya Muslims in the country's west. Myanmar had been emerging from decades of strict military rule and international isolation that began in 1962, and Monday's events were a shocking fall from power for Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her work promoting democracy and human rights. She had lived under house arrest for years as she tried to push her country toward democracy and then became its de facto leader after her National League for Democracy won elections in 2015.

(I.E, 02/02)

Google pays USD 3.8 million to settle complaint on pay-hiring bias against Asians, women

US labor regulators late Monday said Google has agreed to pay \$3.8 million to resolve allegations it discriminated against women engineers and Asian job-seekers. The US Department of Labor said most of the settlement money will go to 2,565 female employees in engineering positions as back pay and interest, and to nearly 3,000 women or candidates of Asian descent who were not chosen for engineering jobs. Google said the discrepancies were turned up during a routine internal analysis and it agreed to the settlement to correct the situation, denying it violated any laws. "We believe everyone should be paid based upon the work they do, not who they are, and invest heavily to make our hiring and compensation processes fair and unbiased," a Google spokeswoman said in response to an AFP inquiry. She added that Google has annually analyzed its payroll data to look for discrepancies and was "pleased" to resolve these allegations. An evaluation found gender pay disparities for software engineers at Google facilities in Silicon Valley and in Washington state, according to the labor department. "Pay discrimination remains a systemic problem," Jenny Yang, the head of the office of federal contract compliance programs, said in a release. The agency also said that it uncovered "hiring rate differences" that put female and Asian applicants at disadvantages for software engineering positions. As part of the settlement, Google has agreed to review its policies, procedures and practices related to hiring and compensation, according to the labor department. Google-parent Alphabet late last year announced moves to address sexual misconduct in its divisions, putting in place changes worked out to settle a lawsuit filed by shareholders.

(N.I.E, 02/02)

Biden to sign orders reviewing Trump's policies on migration

U.S. President Joe Biden, who has begun his second full week in office, will sign executive orders reviewing - and in some cases rescinding - his predecessor Donald Trump's policies. These will include the establishment of a taskforce to unite minor children who had been separated from their parents at the southern border during the Trump administration, actions to address migration via the Southern border and orders regarding legal migration which could impact Indian citizens seeking work visas to the U.S. One of Mr Biden's three executive orders will create a task force that will make recommendations to him and federal agencies on how families can be reunited. It will also be required to report to him regularly on how family separations can be avoided, according to statement from the White House. The Trump administration's 'zero tolerance' policy of detaining adults as they attempted to cross the southern U.S. border resulted in 3,000 children being taken from their parents in 2018. Six hundred and eleven of these children are still away from their parents according to a recent court filing. Mr Biden will also order a review of the Migrant Protection Program - Mr Trump's policy to return asylum seekers to Mexico while their applications are reviewed. The Biden administration had already stopped accepting new entrants into the program. The order will also seek to restore the U.S.'s asylum program. Third, Mr Biden will order a "top to bottom" review of Trump administration regulations that have hampered legal migration, the White House statement said.

(H., 03/02)

Myanmar's Generals tighten control after seizing power

Myanmar's Generals were in firm control on Tuesday after a surgical coup that saw democracy heroine Aung San Suu Kyi detained, although her party issued a defiant demand she be released and global outrage built over the power grab. Armed troops patrolled the capital of Naypyidaw, where Ms. Suu Kyi and other National League for Democracy (NLD) party leaders were detained in pre-dawn raids on Monday just ahead of the scheduled resumption of Parliament. Soldiers were also stationed on Tuesday outside the dormitories for parliamentarians in Naypyidaw, with one NLD MP describing it as "an open-air detention centre", though by nightfall some lawmakers said they were free to leave. Ms. Suu Kyi and President Win Myint remained under house arrest, the lawmaker told AFP. "According to her neighbour we contacted, she walks sometimes in her compound to let others know she's in good health," NLD press officer Kyi Toe said. Despite the intimidation, a statement was posted on the NLD's verified Facebook page on Tuesday, calling for the release of Ms. Suu Kyi's and others. "We see this as a stain on the history of the State and the Tatmadaw," it added, referring to the military by its Burmese name.

(H., 03/02)

Britain trial to test combining Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines in two-shot regimen

Britain on Thursday launched a trial to assess the immune responses generated if doses of the COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca Plc are combined in a two-shot schedule. The British researchers behind the trial said data on vaccinating people with the two different types of coronavirus vaccines could help understanding of whether shots can be rolled out with greater flexibility around the world. Initial data on immune responses are expected to be generated around June. The trial will examine the immune responses of an initial dose of Pfizer vaccine followed by a booster of AstraZeneca's, as well as vice versa, with intervals of 4 and 12 weeks. Both the mRNA shot developed by Pfizer and Biontech and the adenovirus viral vector vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca are currently being rolled out in Britain, with a 12-week gap between two doses of the same vaccine. It is expected more vaccines will be added to the trial when they are approved and rolled out. Recruitment for the study starts on Thursday, with over 800 participants expected to take part, the researchers said. That makes it much smaller than the clinical trials that have been used to determine the efficacy of the vaccines individually. The trial will not assess the overall efficacy of the shot combinations, but researchers will measure antibody and T-cell responses, as well as monitor for any unexpected side effects. Matthew Snape, an Oxford vaccinologist who is leading the trial, said initial results could inform vaccine deployment in the second half of the year.

(I.E., 04/02)

Rights groups urges world to boycott Beijing Olympics over Uighur crackdown

A coalition of campaign groups issued an open letter Wednesday calling on world leaders to boycott the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics over China's rights record. The Games are scheduled to begin on February 4 next year, just six months after the delayed summer Tokyo Olympics, but preparations have been overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. China is also facing global scrutiny over a range of issues, notably the mass internment of Uighur Muslims in the western region of Xinjiang, and its clampdown in Hong Kong. About 180 campaign groups signed the open letter, which called on world leaders to boycott the Beijing Winter Games "to ensure they are not used to embolden the Chinese government's appalling rights abuses and crackdowns on dissent". The coalition, which includes the World Uyghur Congress and International Tibet Network, said that since Beijing was awarded the Games in 2015, "President Xi Jinping has unleashed an unrelenting crackdown on basic freedom and human rights". In a statement to AFP, the International Olympic Committee said that concerns raised by campaign groups, including over rights, "were and are raised with the government and local authorities". China has been under growing pressure, particularly over the fate of its Uighur minority. Rights groups believe that at least one million Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslim minorities are incarcerated in camps in Xinjiang. After initially

denying the camps existed, the Chinese government abruptly acknowledged them, saying they were vocational training centres aimed at reducing the allure of Islamic extremism.

(N.I.E, 04/02)

International Criminal Court convicts Ugandan rebel commander for war crimes

The International Criminal Court on Thursday convicted a Ugandan child soldier-turned-Lord's Resistance Army commander of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Dominic Ongwen, 45, was found guilty of 61 charges over a reign of terror in the early 2000s, including the first conviction by the ICC for the crime of forced pregnancy. The court said Ongwen ordered attacks on refugee camps as a senior commander in the LRA, which under its fugitive chief Joseph Kony waged a bloody campaign in four African nations to set up a state based on the Bible's Ten Commandments. "His guilt has been established beyond any reasonable doubt," presiding Judge Bertram Schmitt said as he read out the verdict in the tribunal in The Hague. Ongwen, nicknamed "White Ant", was convicted of charges including murder, rape, sexual enslavement and the conscription of child soldiers. He had denied all the charges. Judges rejected defence arguments that Ongwen was himself a victim, as he had been abducted by the LRA at the age of around nine and suffered psychological damage as a result. "The chamber is aware that he suffered much," Judge Schmitt said. "However this case is about crimes committed by Dominic Ongwen as a responsible adult and a commander of the Lord's Resistance Army. "The chamber did not find evidence for the claim by the defence that he suffered from any mental disease or that he committed the crimes under duress," the Judge said.

(H., 05/02)

Over 200 arrested in Nepal strike

Over 200 people were arrested on Thursday for their involvement in arson and vandalism during a general strike called by the Nepal Communist Party's splinter faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' that paralysed normal life across the country. The strike was called by Prachanda-led faction to oppose the appointment of office bearers and members of various constitutional bodies by Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli-led caretaker government. Major markets, educational institutions, offices and factories were shut down while transport services were disrupted during the strike. The government had mobilised at least 5,000 security personnel in Kathmandu to prevent any untoward incident. Only few motorbikes were seen moving around the capital city. Over 200 cadres and leaders of the Prachanda-led faction were arrested for their involvement in vandalism, arson, and other prohibited activities in different parts of the country, My Republica newspaper reported.

(H., 05/02)

Hundreds protest in Myanmar amid arrest of key Suu Kyi aide

Several hundred teachers and students protested at a Myanmar university on Friday as the military widened a dragnet against officials ousted in a coup that has drawn global condemnation and the threat of new sanctions. The rally took place after the arrest Win Htein, a key aide to de facto leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi, who has not been seen in public since being detained along with President Win Myint. A representative of Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy said on Friday she was being held at her residence in Naypyitaw, the country's capital, and was "in good health". "As far as I know, she's under house arrest and has not been taken to another place yet," NLD press officer Kyi Toe told AFP. Monday's putsch ended the country's 10-year dalliance with democracy that followed decades of oppressive junta rule, and sparked outrage and calls by U.S. President Joe Biden for the generals to relinquish power. On Friday, around 200 teachers and students at Yangon's Dagon University staged a rally, where they displayed a three-finger salute borrowed from Thailand's democracy movements, and sang a popular revolution song.

(H., 06/02)

Indonesia bans 'hijab' in schools

Indonesia has banned schools from forcing girls to wear Islamic "hijab" headscarves after the case of a Christian pupil pressured to cover up sparked outrage in the world's most populous Muslim nation. The move was applauded on Friday by activists, who say non-Muslim girls have been forced for years to wear a hijab in parts of the country. State schools will face sanctions if they fail to comply with the edict from Education Minister Nadiem Makarim. Schools that violate the rules could see their government funding cut, he added.

(H., 06/02)

Central Bank of Sri Lanka repays swap line facility with RBI

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) settled a \$ 400 million currency swap facility from the Reserve Bank (RBI) of India last week, meeting the terms that the two countries had agreed upon. The update sparked speculation in local media that India may have "abruptly terminated" the agreement, following Colombo's decision to pull out of a 2019 agreement to develop a Colombo Port terminal jointly with India and Japan. However, both countries clarified that the developments were not linked. "The CBSL settled its swap facility with Reserve Bank of India as scheduled. There was no special request from India for a premature settlement as erroneously reported by certain media outlets. Discussions on future collaboration continue," the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said in a tweet on Friday.

(H., 07/02)

China approves second domestic vaccine

China's drug authorities have given "conditional" approval for a second COVID-19 vaccine, Sinovac's CoronaVac jab, the pharmaceutical company said on Saturday. The vaccine has already been rolled out to key groups at higher risk of exposure to coronavirus but Saturday's approval allows for its use on the general public. A conditional approval helps speed-up emergency supply of drugs to market in cases where clinical trials are yet to meet normal standards but indicate therapies will work. The approval comes after multiple domestic and overseas trials of the vaccine in countries including Brazil and Turkey, although "efficacy and safety results need to be further confirmed", Sinovac said in a statement. Fellow Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinopharm received a similar conditional green light in December to put its vaccine on the market. Sinovac said trials in Brazil had shown around 50% efficacy in preventing infection and 80% efficacy in preventing cases requiring medical intervention. Sinopharm said in December that its vaccine had a 79.34% efficacy rate, lower than rival jabs developed in the West by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna — with 95 and 94% rates, respectively.

(H., 07/02)

Protests sweep across Myanmar, internet access restored partially

Tens of thousands of protesters poured onto the streets across Myanmar on Sunday in the biggest anti-coup rallies yet, as an Internet black out failed to stifle growing outrage at the military's ouster of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Some estimates put the number of protesters in Yangon at 1,00,000 and there were reports of large demonstrations in other cities condemning the coup that brought Myanmar's 10-year experiment with democracy to a crashing halt. Backed by a din of carhorns, chanting protesters in Yangon held up banners saying "Justice for Myanmar", while others waved the signature red flags of Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party as they marched to City Hall.

(H., 08/02)

Arab world's first probe nears Mars

The first Arab interplanetary mission is expected to reach Mars' orbit on Tuesday in what is considered the most critical part of the journey to unravel the secrets of weather on the Red Planet. The unmanned space probe named "Al Amal", Arabic for "Hope"- blasted off from Japan last year, marking the next step in the United Arab Emirates' ambitious space programme. The UAE has plans to launch an unmanned rover to the moon by 2024 and is also eyeing future mining projects beyond Earth, as well as space tourism.

(H., 08/02)

U.S. moves to rejoin UN rights council

The Biden administration is set to announce this week that it will reengage with the much-maligned U.N. Human Rights Council that former President Donald Trump withdrew from almost three years ago, U.S. officials said Sunday. The decision reverses another Trump-era

move away from multilateral organizations and agreements. U.S. officials say Secretary of State Antony Blinken and a senior U.S. diplomat in Geneva will announce on Monday that Washington will return to the Geneva-based body as an observer with an eye toward seeking election as a full member. The decision is likely to draw criticism from conservative lawmakers and many in the pro-Israel community. Trump pulled out of the world body's main human rights agency in 2018 due to its disproportionate focus on Israel, which has received by far the largest number of critical council resolutions against any country, as well as the number of authoritarian countries among its members and because it failed to meet an extensive list of reforms demanded by then-U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley. In addition to the council's persistent focus on Israel, the Trump administration took issue with the body's membership, which currently includes China, Cuba, Eritrea, Russia and Venezuela, all of which have been accused of human rights abuses.

(H., 09/02)

Sri Lanka clears Chinese energy project, 50 km off Tamil Nadu

Sri Lanka's recent decision to pull out of the East Container Terminal (ECT) deal with India and Japan is not the only challenge to New Delhi's interests emerging this year. A week before reneging on the 2019 Colombo Port terminal agreement, Sri Lanka cleared a Chinese energy project in three islands off Jaffna peninsula that are barely 50 km from the Tamil Nadu coast. On January 18, the Cabinet approved a proposal to involve Sinosoar-Etechwin Joint Venture in China to install 'hybrid renewable energy systems' in Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu, located in the Palk Bay. The islands are connected to the Jaffna peninsula by a limited ferry service, managed mostly by the Sri Lankan Navy. India has not commented on the development, but sources in Colombo said: "concerns were raised", citing the project site's proximity to the Indian coastline. Delft island is one of the closest points to India from northern Sri Lanka. The three islands, where the energy systems are coming up, are home to a few thousand people. Several families residing in these islands fled the civil war, and crossed over to Tamil Nadu in boats, according to residents. Following years of neglect, the islands have remained much less developed compared to Jaffna peninsula.

(H., 09/02)

SARS-CoV-2 'unlikely' to have leaked from lab, says WHO team

The SARS-CoV-2 virus was unlikely to have leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan and the evidence pointed to natural origins, according to a World Health Organisation (WHO) and China joint expert team that concluded a visit to Wuhan, where the COVID-19 pandemic began. The team also concluded there was no indication of the virus being spread among the population there prior to December 2019, when Wuhan's hospitals first began reporting a pneumonia outbreak. The authorities confirmed human-to-human transmission in mid-January. "Our initial findings suggest that the introduction through an intermediary host

species is the most likely pathway and one that will require more studies and more specific, targeted research,” WHO scientist Peter Ben Embarek who led the international team, told reporters on Tuesday. The team of 17 international experts and 17 Chinese scientists had spent the past two weeks visiting hospitals, a seafood market that was one of the earliest clusters, and laboratories in Wuhan. The location of the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in the city had led to theories suggesting the virus may have leaked from a lab, but Mr. Embarek said “the findings suggest that the laboratory incidents hypothesis is extremely unlikely to explain the introduction of the virus to the human population”. The team examined four pathways: direct transmission from wildlife, transmission through intermediate hosts, transmission via cold chain products such as imported seafood, and a lab leak.

(H., 10/02)

A long march in Sri Lanka — to register protest, forge a new alliance

The five-day march for justice held across Sri Lanka’s north and east last week drew attention for more than one reason. After months of restricted movement due to the pandemic, it was the first instance of several thousand people taking to the streets to assert their rights. The ‘Pothuvil to Polikandy’ rally or ‘P2P’, began in the eastern Ampara district and ended in Jaffna in the Northern Province, covering several towns en route. Prominent Tamil and Muslim politicians, activists, students, and residents took part in the march. Departing from past struggles in the north and east that focussed on grievances specific to war-affected Tamils, the rally included key concerns of the Muslim community and Malaiyaha [Hill Country] Tamils working in the tea estates, in the list of ten demands put together by civil society groups. It highlighted land grab in Tamil areas, “government-sponsored” Sinhalese settlements, enforced disappearances, persisting militarisation, intimidation of activists and journalists, the continuing use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the detention of political prisoners without trial. The activists also demanded that the government reverse its enforced cremations policy affecting Muslims, and ensure a fair wage to plantation labourers. Sri Lanka’s Army Commander Shavendra Silva has termed the rally “a show” ahead of the Human Rights Council session in Geneva later this month, where Sri Lanka’s rights record will be reviewed. Action would be taken on those who violated “Covid restrictions”, he said.

(H., 10/02)

Suzanne Clark to become first female CEO of US Chamber of Commerce

The US Chamber of Commerce has appointed Suzanne Clark as its next CEO, the first woman to hold the position. Clark, who's currently president of the US Chamber, will succeed Thomas J Donohue. The position is effective on March 11. Clark was named president in June 2019. She serves on the boards of agricultural equipment maker AGCO and TransUnion, a

global risk and credit information provider. Donohue served as CEO of the US Chamber for 24 years. The Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation, representing more than 3 million businesses as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.

(N.I.E., 11/02)

China harps on 'package solution' for India's bid to become UNSC permanent member

China, which has been blocking India's efforts to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, on Wednesday reiterated its stand on New Delhi's bid, and called for evolving a "package solution" that is acceptable to all to reform the top organ of the global body. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin's comments in response to a question came a day after India and China discussed a wide range of issues relating to top UN body. China is a permanent member of the UNSC while India began its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member on January 1. In August, India is scheduled to serve as the president of the UNSC. Asked about the outcome of the meeting and whether there was any discussion on India's candidature for permanent membership of the UNSC, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang told a media briefing here that during Tuesday's virtual meeting, the two sides held consultations on Security Council issues. The two sides exchanged views on upholding multilateralism, peacekeeping operations and counter-terrorism, he said.

(N.I.E., 11/02)

Lebanon PM-designate quits over Cabinet picks

Lebanon's Prime Minister designate Mustapha Adib quit on Saturday after trying for almost a month to line up a non-partisan Cabinet, dealing a blow to a French bid aimed at rallying sectarian leaders to tackle the worst crisis since the nation's 1975-1990 civil war. Mr. Adib, former Ambassador to Berlin, was picked on August 31 to form a Cabinet after President Emmanuel Macron's intervention secured a consensus among various political factions. Mr. Adib, a Sunni Muslim under the sectarian power sharing system, announced he was stepping down but said Lebanon must not abandon the French plan or squander Mr. Macron's goodwill. The Cabinet formation hit a roadblock over a demand by Lebanon's two main Shi'ite groups, Amal and the heavily armed Iran backed Hezbollah, that they name several Ministers, including finance, a position previously held by a Shi'ite.

(H.,12/02)

Erdogan's call for revamped Constitution stirs suspicious

Four Years after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan assumed sweeping powers, he has wrong-footed his opponents once again by calling for a new Constitution, sparking accusations of trying to set up a diversion from the country's woes. Taking seemingly everyone off guard, Mr. Erdogan mentioned early last week during one of his near-daily speeches that "it may be time for Turkey to reopen the debate about a new Constitution." The

timing aroused immediate suspicions over the intentions of a man who has been at the apex of Turkish political life since 2003, first as Prime Minister and as President since 2014. The 66-year old Turkish leader is facing a sudden burst of student protests, an economy that was under strain even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck last year, and polls showing a melting support base. The current Constitution was changed in a controversial 2017 referendum, which created an executive presidency. It went into force barely a year later when Mr. Erdogan won re-election, with the amendments allowing him to consolidate his power. Since then the only politicians demanding constitutional changes have been members of the opposition, all calling for a return to the previous parliamentary democracy.

(H.,12/02)

U.S. imposes sanctions on Myanmar

Anti-coup protesters on Thursday took to the streets of Myanmar for a sixth consecutive day, after U.S. President Joe Biden announced sanctions against the South east Asian nations's Generals and demanded they relinquish power. There has been an outpouring of anger and defiance since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi last week and detained her along with other senior figures of her National League for Democracy(NLD) party. Security forces have used tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets against the protesters, with isolated reports of live rounds also being fired. Police also ramped up their harassment of the NLD with a raid on its headquarters. But demonstrators again marched peacefully on Thursday in Naypyidaw the capital and military stronghold – as well as Yangon, the largest city and commercial hub, which saw tens of thousands flood into the streets. Western nations have repeatedly denounced the coup, with the U.S. leading calls for the Generals to relinquish power. In the most significant concrete action to pressure the junta, Mr. Biden announced on Wednesday that his administration was cutting off the General's access to \$1 billion in funds in the U.S..

(H.,12/02)

Draghi sworn in as Italy's new PM as country hopes to turn page

Former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi was formally sworn in as Italy's new prime minister on Saturday, against the backdrop of the deadly coronavirus pandemic and a crippling recession. The appointment of the 73-year-old known as "Super Mario" capped weeks of political instability for the country still in the grips of the health crisis that has killed more than 93,000 people. "I swear to be loyal to the Republic," recited Mr. Draghi, as he stood before President Sergio Mattarella in the ornate presidential palace in a televised ceremony. Members of his new cabinet, who include technocrats, veteran politicians and ministers held over from the previous government, each took the oath of office. Draghi was parachuted in by Mattarella after the previous centre-left coalition under premier Giuseppe Conte collapsed, leading Italy rudderless amid the worst recession since World War II. After assembling a broad-based coalition, on Friday night Draghi formally accepted the post of premier, publicly revealing the new cabinet for the first time.

(H., 13/02)

Biden wants to close Guantanamo Bay prison

U.S. President Joe Biden wants to close the Guantanamo Bay prison for terror suspects before the end of his term, the White House said on Friday, echoing an unfulfilled campaign promise from Barack Obama's administration. Asked at a press conference about a possible closure of the prison in Cuba during Mr. Biden's tenure, spokeswoman Jen Psaki said, "That certainly is our goal and our intention." She said the administration was working through the National Security Council to "assess the current state of play that the Biden administration has — well, we've inherited from the previous administration". In his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump expressed willingness to keep the Guantanamo prison open and "fill it with bad guys". The Republican retained this position once elected. However, some detainees were promised their release from Guantanamo under his Democratic predecessor Obama, but he never succeeded in working out a compromise with Congress. Mr. Biden was Obama's Vice-President. The military prison accommodates inmates linked to the U.S. "war on terror", including Pakistani Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, the self-proclaimed mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

(H., 13/02)

Myanmar protests in 2nd week, with neither side backing down

Mass street demonstrations in Myanmar entered their second week Saturday, with neither protesters nor the military government they seek to unseat showing any signs of backing down from confrontations. Protesters in Yangon, the country's biggest city, again congregated at Hleden intersection, a key crossroads from which groups fanned out to other points, including the embassies of the United States and China. They marched despite an order banning gatherings of five or more people. The U.S., especially after President Joe Biden announced sanctions against the military regime, is regarded as an ally in the protesters' struggle against the February 1 coup. China is detested as an ally of the ruling generals, whose support is crucial to them keeping their grip on power. Demonstrations also resumed in Myanmar's second-biggest city, Mandalay, with lawyers making up one large contingent. The military ousted the country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and her government and prevented recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament. Suu Kyi and other senior members of her government and party remain in detention.

(P., 14/02)

World's oldest brewery found in Egypt

American and Egyptian archaeologists have unearthed what could be the oldest known beer factory at one of the most prominent archaeological sites of ancient Egypt, a top antiquities official said. Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the factory was found in Abydos, an ancient burial ground located in the desert west of the Nile River,

over 450 km south of Cairo. He said the factory apparently dates back to the region of King Narmer, who is widely known for his unification of ancient Egypt at the beginning of the First Dynastic Period(3150 BC -2613 BC). Archaeologists found eight huge units – each is 20 metres(about 65 feet) long and 205 meters(about 8 feet) wide. Each unit includes some 40 pottery basins in two rows, which had been used to heat up a mixture of grains and water to produce beer, Waziri said. The joint mission is cochaired by Dr. Matthew Adams of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Debesh Vischak, assistant professor of ancient Egyptian art history and archaeology at Preston University. Adams said the factory was apparently built in this area to provide rural rituals with beer, given that archaeologists found evidences showing the use of beer is sacrificial rites of ancient Egyptians.

(N.I.E., 15/02)

With 15mn vaccinated, UK gears up for next phase

Britain prepared on Sunday, for the next phase of its coronavirus vaccination programme after meeting the government's target of inoculating 15 million of the most vulnerable people with a first dose. Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed hitting the “significant mile stone”, just over two months after the country embarked on its biggest ever Vaccination programme. “This country has achieved an extraordinary feat,” he said in a video message posted on Twitter. “It has been a truly national, UK-wide effort, We have done it together,” Johnson had set the aim of offering a jab to everybody in the top four priority groups of around 15 million people by the end of this week. That comprises all over 70s, care home residents and staff, NHS workers and the extremely clinically vulnerable to the virus. The country will now start administering vaccines from Monday to those aged between 65 and 69 and the clinically vulnerable to Covid -19, with almost 1.2 million already invited to book their jabs, the state-run National Health Service(NHS) said, Britain prepared Sunday for the next phase of its coronavirus vaccination programme after meeting the government's target of inoculating 15 million of the most vulnerable people with a first dose. Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed hitting the “significant milestone” just over two months after the country embarked on its biggest ever vaccination programme.

(N.I.E., 15/02)

Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala becomes first woman, African to lead WTO

Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed Monday to head the World Trade Organization, becoming the first woman and first African to take on the role amid rising protectionism and disagreement over how the body decides cases involving billions in sales and thousands of jobs. Okonjo-Iweala, 66, was named director-general by representatives of the 164 countries that make up the WTO, which deals with the rules of trade between nations. She said during an online news conference that she was taking over at a time when the WTO “is facing so many challenges” and is in need of “deep and wide-ranging reforms.” She said the first priority would be quickly addressing the economic and health consequences of the

COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring that poor countries do not have “to wait in line” for vaccines. “Vaccine nationalism does not pay” she said, because countries that lag in vaccination will be the source of new variants. Other priorities would include reforming the organization’s dispute resolution process and finding ways for trade rules to deal with change such as digitalization and e-commerce. Dispute resolution is key because the WTO is the only place countries can come to have their trade differences settled, she said.

(N.I.E., 16/02)

Bangladesh sends more Rohingya refugees to new island amid criticism from human rights bodies

Bangladesh authorities sent a fourth group of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to a newly developed island in the Bay of Bengal on Monday despite calls by human rights groups for a halt to the process. The roughly 2,000 Rohingya who had been living in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar were sent to Bhasan Char, an island specifically developed to accommodate 100,000 of the 1 million Rohingya who have fled from neighbouring Myanmar, M. Mozammel Haque, a commander of the Bangladesh navy, told reporters. With Monday's group, more than 7,000 refugees have moved to the island since the process started in December. The government has said the arrangement is good for the refugees and the island is designed to offer better living conditions. While human rights groups have criticized the moves and some are being forced to go against their will, the government has insisted that refugees moving to the island have done so voluntarily. More than 1 million Rohingya have fled waves of violent persecution in their native Myanmar and are currently living in overcrowded, squalid refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district.

(N.I.E., 16/02)

Singapore reduces foreign workers quota in manufacturing sector to 15 per cent

Aiming at moderating the country's reliance on foreign labour, the Singapore government on Tuesday announced that the S Pass quota for foreign workers in manufacturing sector will be cut from 20 per cent to 15 per cent in phases over the next two years. The S Pass allows mid-level skilled foreigners to work in Singapore. Workers on S Passes must earn a fixed monthly salary of at least SGD 2,500 and are typically degree or diploma holders, such as technicians. From January 1 next year, firms in the manufacturing sector can have only up to 18 per cent of their workforce be foreign workers on S Passes, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said in his Budget speech. This quota will be further cut to 15 per cent from January 1, 2023, said Heng, who is also the Finance Minister. It is currently 20 per cent. The overall quota -- comprising workers on work permits and S Passes -- for manufacturing will remain at 60 per cent, The Straits Times reported, citing the budget presentation in Parliament.

(N.I.E., 17/02)

Germany plans free COVID-19 antigen tests for all from March 2021

Germany is to offer free COVID-19 antigen tests for all from March, Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Tuesday, as the country cautiously began allowing some children to return to schools. "From 1 March, all citizens will be able to be tested free of charge by trained personnel" with the tests, Spahn said in a tweet. They will be available at pharmacies, doctors' and dentists' offices as well as COVID-19 testing centres, according to the Bild daily. Unlike PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests that must be analysed in a lab, antigen testing can be done from saliva with a result given on the spot within 30 minutes. That makes it easier and faster to test large numbers of people, though antigen tests are less reliable in detecting COVID-19 in people who are not showing symptoms. Spahn added that Germany is also planning to roll out self-administered antigen tests after their approval by national drug regulator BfArM, which "is expected soon". Germans will be asked to pay one euro (USD 1.20) each for the home tests, according to media reports. Self-administered tests in particular could play an important role as Germany eyes reopening schools and some other facilities after more than three months of closures. Restaurants and bars, hotels, cultural venues and leisure centres were shuttered in November, followed by schools and non-essential shops in December.

(N.I.E., 17/02)

UN chief 'extremely grateful' for India's 200,000 COVID vaccines for peacekeepers

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is "extremely grateful" for the gift of 200,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses announced by India for peacekeepers, the spokesperson for the UN chief has said. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, while addressing the UN Security Council meeting on COVID-19 on Wednesday, announced a gift of 200,000 COVID-19 doses for the UN peacekeepers. "Keeping in mind the UN Peacekeepers who operate in such difficult circumstances, we would like to announce today a gift of 200,000 doses for them," he said. "We are extremely grateful for this donation announced today by the Indian delegation. The distribution will be operationalised by the UN's Department of Support," Stephane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, told PTI. The 200,000 doses essentially mean that it will be possible to administer the required double doses of COVID-19 vaccines to all UN peacekeepers across missions. According to the UN Peacekeeping, currently a total of 94,484 personnel are serving in 12 peacekeeping operations across the world led by the Department of Peace Operations.

(N.I.E., 18/02)

Millions endure record cold wave in US without power; at least confirmed 20 dead

A winter storm that left millions without power in record-breaking cold weather claimed more lives, including three people found dead after a tornado hit a seaside town in North Carolina and four family members who perished in a Houston-area house fire while using a fireplace to stay warm. The storm that overwhelmed power grids and immobilized the Southern Plains on

Tuesday carried heavy snow and freezing rain into New England and the Deep South and left behind painfully low temperatures. Wind-chill warnings extended from Canada into Mexico. In all, at least 20 deaths were reported. Other causes included car crashes and carbon monoxide poisoning. The weather also threatened to affect the nation's COVID-19 vaccination effort. President Joe Biden's administration said delays in vaccine shipments and deliveries were likely. North Carolina's Brunswick County had little notice of the dangerous weather, and a tornado warning was not issued until the storm was already on the ground. The National Weather Service was "very surprised how rapidly this storm intensified ... and at the time of night when most people are at home and in bed, it creates a very dangerous situation," Emergency Services Director Ed Conrow said.

(N.I.E., 18/02)

Indonesia mulls penalty for those refusing COVID-19 vaccine

While Indonesia began its second phase of mass vaccinations against the coronavirus on Wednesday, it has been learnt that the government is planning to punish those who refuse to take the vaccine. According to a report by Bloomberg, the government may punish those refusing the vaccine via delaying or denying social assistance or administrative services along with imposing fines, said a revised presidential ruling. However, the final form of penalty will be decided by local governments. Necessitating the vaccine compulsory is seen as a rare move as reluctance increases toward the shots that were rushed in its development. According to a survey last September, about 65 per cent of Indonesians sought to be vaccinated, while the rest were sceptical over the health risks, cost and whether the vaccine would be halal. Considering these aspects, the vaccine has been made free of cost. Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin noted at the market on Wednesday that many Indonesians were still afraid of the vaccine, but added that 77-year-old Vice President Ma'ruf Amin had been inoculated that morning. "Hopefully, this can motivate other people, particularly the elderly, to take the vaccination," Amin said.

(N.I.E., 19/02)

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia resigns over move to arrest opposition leader

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia announced his resignation Thursday following a court ruling that ordered the arrest of a man who leads the ex-Soviet nation's top opposition party. Gakharia said in a statement he was stepping down because of disagreements within his own team over the decision to arrest Nika Melia, chairman of the United National Movement opposition party. A Tbilisi court on Wednesday ruled to place Melia, who is accused of organizing "mass violence" during anti-government protests in 2019, in pre-trial detention after he refused to pay an increased bail fee of \$12,000. If convicted, Melia faces nine years in prison. He has rejected the charges as politically motivated. Melia and his supporters from other opposition parties have vowed to resist the arrest, and he denounced the ruling as

“unlawful.” According to the Interfax news agency, Melia remained in the Tbilisi headquarters of the United National Movement on Thursday, and police officers were unable to enter the office to apprehend him.

(N.I.E., 19/02)

World leaders applaud US formal return to Paris climate pact

The United States is back in the Paris climate accord, just 107 days after it left. While Friday’s return is heavily symbolic, world leaders say they expect America to prove its seriousness after four years of being pretty much absent. They are especially anticipating an announcement from the U.S. in coming months on its goal for cutting emissions of heat-trapping gases by 2030. The U.S. return to the Paris agreement became official Friday, almost a month after President Joe Biden told the United Nations that America wants back in. “A cry for survival comes from the planet itself,” Biden said in his inaugural address. “A cry that can’t be any more desperate or any more clear now.” Biden signed an executive order on his first day in office reversing the pullout ordered by his predecessor, President Donald Trump. The Trump administration had announced its withdrawal from the Paris accord in 2019 but it didn't become effective until Nov. 4, 2020, the day after the election, because of provisions in the agreement.

(N.I.E., 20/02)

Water leaks indicate new damage at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant

Cooling water levels have fallen in two reactors at the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant since a powerful earthquake hit the area last weekend, indicating possible additional damage, its operator said Friday. New damage could further complicate the plant’s already difficult decommissioning process, which is expected to take decades. Tokyo Electric Power Co. spokesman Keisuke Matsuo said the drop in water levels in the Unit 1 and 3 reactors indicates that the existing damage to their primary containment chambers was worsened by Saturday's magnitude 7.3 quake, allowing more water to leak. The leaked water is believed to have remained inside the reactor buildings and there is no sign of any outside impact, he said. In 2011, a powerful magnitude 9.1 earthquake and tsunami damaged the Fukushima plant's cooling systems, causing three reactor cores to melt and nuclear fuel to fall to the bottom of their primary containment vessels. TEPCO will monitor the water and temperatures at the bottom of the containment vessels, Matsuo said.

(N.I.E., 20/02)

UK speeds up COVID vaccinations; all adults by July 31

The British government says it aims to give every adult in the country a first dose of coronavirus vaccine by July 31, a month earlier than its previous target. The goal is for everyone over 50 or

with an underlying health condition to get a shot by April 15, rather than the previous target of May 1. The makers of the two vaccines Britain is using, Pfizer and AstraZeneca, have both experienced supply problems in Europe. But U.K. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Sunday that “we now think that we have the supplies” to speed up the vaccination campaign. More than 17.2 million people have been given the first of two doses of vaccine since the U.K. inoculation campaign began on Dec. 8. The news comes as Prime Minister Boris Johnson meets with senior ministers Sunday to finalize a “road map” out of that national lockdown that is due to be announced on Monday. Britain has had more than 120,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe.

(N.I.E., 21/02)

Tensions rise between Somalia and UAE over delayed elections

Two days after violence related to Somalia's delayed elections, the country's foreign ministry has accused “external forces” for contributing to the problems. At least five soldiers were killed and more than a dozen people, mostly civilians, were wounded on Friday in violent protests over the country’s delayed election. Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed is under pressure as elections were to be held on Feb. 8, but no vote occurred on that date because there was no agreement on how the polls should be conducted in the Horn of Africa nation. Some Somalis are demanding that the president should step down. The foreign ministry blamed a foreign country for making “misinformed and misleading statements that disregard the facts and at times appear to be supporting insurrection,” in a statement issued Sunday. Although no specific country was named, it was clear the statement was referring to the United Arab Emirates which had earlier criticized the violence. “The United Arab Emirates has expressed its grave concern over the deteriorating situation in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, as a result of ongoing violence and the excessive use of force against civilians,” said the UAE statement issued Saturday.

(N.I.E., 21/02)

President Joe Biden to mark US crossing 500,000 COVID-19 deaths

President Joe Biden will mark the US crossing 500,000 lives lost from COVID-19 with a moment of silence and candle lighting ceremony at the White House. The nation is expected to pass the grim milestone on Monday, just over a year after the first confirmed US fatality due to the novel coronavirus. The White House said Biden will deliver remarks at sunset to honour those who lost their lives. He will be joined by first lady Jill Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff. They will participate in the moment of silence and lighting ceremony. Biden has made a point of recognising the lives lost from the virus. His first event upon arriving in Washington for his inauguration a month ago was to deliver remarks at a COVID-19 memorial ceremony.

(N.I.E., 22/02)

China urges US to lift trade restrictions, stop 'unwarranted' interference

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on the US on Monday to lift restrictions on trade and people-to-people contacts while ceasing what Beijing considers unwarranted interference in the areas of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet. Wang's comments at a Foreign Ministry forum on US-China relations come as Beijing is pressing the administration of President Joe Biden to drop many of the confrontational measures adopted by his predecessor Donald Trump. Among those are pressure over trade and technology grievances that prompted Trump to hike tariffs on Chinese imports in 2017 and impose bans or other restrictions on Chinese tech companies and academic exchanges. Trump also upgraded military and diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy claimed by China as its own territory, while sanctioning Chinese officials blamed for abuses against Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and a crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong.

(N.I.E., 22/02)

Malaysian court halts deportation of 1,200 Myanmar migrants after outcry

A Malaysian court ordered a temporary halt to a controversial plan to deport 1,200 Myanmar detainees to their homeland Tuesday weeks after a coup, following a last-ditch legal challenge. The migrants, including members of vulnerable minorities, had already been taken in buses and trucks to a military base on Malaysia's west coast to be loaded onto waiting Myanmar navy ships. The United States and the United Nations had criticised the plan, while rights groups said there were asylum seekers among those due to be repatriated. Rights groups Amnesty International and Asylum Access had lodged a court challenge, arguing Malaysia would be in breach of its international duties by sending vulnerable people back to a country where they could be in danger. The Kuala Lumpur High Court ordered a halt to the repatriation to allow a hearing to take place on Wednesday into the groups' bid to stop the deportations, their lawyer New Sin Yew said. Amnesty International Malaysia's executive director, Katrina Jorene Maliamauv, said that "the government must respect the court order and ensure that not one of the 1,200 individuals is deported today". She called on authorities to grant the UN refugee agency access to the migrants set to be deported, so they can assess whether any should be granted refugee status.

(N.I.E., 23/02)

United Nations says Afghanistan civilian casualties down by 15 per cent in 2020

The number of civilians killed and wounded in violence across war-weary Afghanistan fell by 15 per cent last year compared to 2019, according to a United Nations report released Tuesday. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the UN Human Rights Office attributed the drop in civilian casualties in part to an apparent tactical change by insurgents to targeted killings, fewer suicide bombings and a stark drop in casualties attributed to

international military forces. Still, Afghanistan remains among the deadliest places in the world to be a civilian. A distressing feature of the conflict remains the disproportionate impact on Afghan women and children, who make up 43 per cent of all casualties. The attacks targeting civilians include assaults on members of the judiciary, media and activists. Also targeted have been religious minorities, especially the Shiite Muslim population, most of whom also belong to the Hazara ethnic group, and the Sikh population. The overall number of civilian casualties in 2020 of 8,820 -- including 3,035 killed and 5,785 others wounded -- fell below 10,000 for the first time since 2013. Last year's total was 15 per cent down compared to 2019, the UN said. Afghanistan has seen a nationwide spike in bombings, targeted killings and violence on the battlefield as peace negotiations in Qatar between the Taliban and the Afghan government have stalled.

(N.I.E., 23/02)

Nepal's Supreme Court reinstates parliament dissolved by PM Oli

Nepal's Supreme Court in a historic verdict on Tuesday reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives, in a setback to embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli who was preparing for snap polls. A five-member Constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher annulled the government's decision to dissolve the 275-member lower house of parliament, according to a notice issued by the apex court. The court termed the dissolution of the House as "unconstitutional" and ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days. Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after President Bidya Dev Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling party. Oli's move to dissolve the House sparked protests from a large section of the Nepal Communist Party led by his rival Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', also a co-chair of the ruling party.

(N.I.E., 24/02)

Japan PM Yoshihide Suga appoints 'Loneliness' minister to cabinet to curb rising suicide cases

Japan has appointed its first Minister for Loneliness this month after the country's suicide rate increased for the first time in 11 years during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to The Japan Times, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga added a minister of loneliness to his Cabinet earlier this month, following the example of the UK, which in 2018 became the first country to create a similar role. Suga tapped minister Tetsushi Sakamoto, who is simultaneously in charge of combating the nation's falling birth rate and revitalizing regional economies, for the new portfolio. In his inaugural press conference, Sakamoto said Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga appointed him to address national matters "including the issue of the increasing women's suicide rate under the pandemic," according to CNN. "Suga instructed me to examine the issue and put forward a comprehensive strategy, by coordinating with the related

ministry... I hope to carry out activities to prevent social loneliness and isolation and to protect ties between people," Sakamoto added.

(N.I.E., 24/02)

Joe Biden aims to distribute masks to millions in 'equity' push

President Joe Biden plans to distribute millions of face masks to Americans in communities hard-hit by the coronavirus beginning next month as part of his efforts to ensure “equity” in the government’s response to the pandemic. Biden, who like Donald Trump’s administration considered sending masks to all Americans, is instead adopting a more conservative approach, aiming to reach underserved communities and those bearing the brunt of the outbreak. Trump’s administration shelved the plans entirely. Biden’s plan will distribute masks not through the mail, but instead through Federally Qualified Community Health Centers and the nation’s food bank and food pantry systems, the White House announced Wednesday. The Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Agriculture will be involved in the distribution of more than 25 million American-made cloth masks in both adult and kid sizes. The White House estimates they will reach 12 million to 15 million people. The White House is not distributing safer N95 masks, of which the U.S. now has abundant supply after shortages early in the pandemic.

(N.I.E., 25/02)

Thousands celebrate reinstatement of Nepal's Parliament

Thousands of anti-government protesters threw confetti and chanted slogans in Nepal’s capital on Wednesday to celebrate Parliament's reinstatement by the Supreme Court. The court order was major blow to troubled Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli, who dissolved the legislature in December because of a feud within the governing Nepal Communist Party. The jubilant demonstrators applauded the court's decision and demanded Oli's immediate dismissal. The court ruled on Tuesday that the dissolution was unconstitutional and that a meeting of the reinstated body must be called within 13 days. Oli has not made any public comments since the ruling, which has put him in a difficult position because he will not have the support of a majority of lawmakers. The Nepal Communist Party won a majority of the seats in 2017 elections, but has split following a feud between Oli and co-leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Without the support of Dahal's splinter group in Parliament, Oli would have difficulty remaining in office. However, no party holds a majority to form a new government, which is likely to lead to a political crisis.

(N.I.E., 25/02)

Ghana is first nation in world to receive UN-backed COVAX vaccine

Ghana has become the first country in the world to receive vaccines acquired through the United Nations-backed COVAX initiative with a delivery Wednesday of 600,000 doses of the

AstraZeneca vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India. The vaccines, delivered by UNICEF, arrived at Accra's Kotoka International Airport early Wednesday and are part of the first wave of COVID-19 vaccines that COVAX is sending to several low- and middle-income countries. Ghana is among 92 countries that have signed onto the COVAX programme, according to a statement by Ghana's acting Minister of Information Kojo Oppong Nkrumah.

(N.I.E., 25/02)

Countering Chinese Propaganda Act introduced in US Congress

A legislation has been introduced in the US Congress for countering the Chinese propaganda by creating a new sanctions authority against state-backed disinformation networks. Republican Study Committee Chairman Congressman Jim Banks and Senator Tom Cotton on Wednesday introduced the Countering Chinese Propaganda Act. The bill requires the Secretary of State to examine whether or not the United Front Work Department meets the criteria to be sanctioned under this new authority. The legislation is based on recommendations from the Republican Study Committee's National Security Strategy and authorises sanctions against the United Front Work Department (UFWD), which is an overseas influence arm of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC). The United Front participated directly in the Uyghur genocide and the oppression of Christians in China, but its ultimate goal is to spread those persecutory tactics around the globe, Banks said. "The leadership in Washington may have changed, but China's political warfare hasn't. It's fallen to Congress to expose and counter Communist Party disinformation. We can't back down now," he said.

(P., 26/02)

Armenian PM faces military's demand to resign, talks of coup

Armenia's prime minister accused top military officers on Thursday of attempting a coup after they demanded he step down, adding fuel to months long protests calling for his resignation following the nation's defeat in a conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The demonstrations began immediately after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed a November 10 peace deal that saw Azerbaijan reclaim control over large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas that had been held by Armenian forces for more than a quarter-century. Those protests have gathered pace this week, and the feud with his top military commanders has weakened Pashinyan's position. The immediate trigger for the standoff was Pashinyan's decision to oust the first deputy chief of the military's General Staff, a group of the armed forces' top commanders. In response, the General Staff called for Pashinyan's resignation — but the prime minister doubled down and dismissed the chief of the General Staff. He described the military's statement as a "military coup attempt" and urged troops to only listen to his orders. He also called on his backers to come to the streets and then later walked among them, using a loudspeaker to rally support. "We need a conversation, not a confrontation," he said. Pashinyan denied rumors that he was preparing to flee the country.

(P., 26/02)

Hundreds of Nigerian schoolgirls taken in mass abduction

Hundreds of girls are missing after a large group of gunmen raided a school in northern Nigeria early Friday morning, residents say. The Government Secondary Jangebe School in Zamfara state was the scene of the latest mass abduction of school children in northern Nigeria. Nasiru Abdullahi told The Associated Press that school records show 300 girls are missing. His daughters, aged 10 and 13, are among them. Resident Musa Mustapha said the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from interfering while the gunmen spent several hours at the school. It was not immediately clear if there were any casualties. Several large groups of armed men operate in Zamfara state, described by the government as bandits, and are known to kidnap for money and for the release of their members from jail. The West African nation has seen several such attacks and kidnappings over the years, notably the mass abduction in April 2014 by jihadist group Boko Haram of 276 girls from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than a hundred of the girls are still missing.

(P., 27/02)

China plays down reports of India beating it in vaccine diplomacy

China on Friday welcomed India supplying more Covid-19 vaccines to a number of countries, playing down reports that New Delhi has beaten Beijing in its vaccine diplomacy around the world. Responding to a question on a report that India has beaten China in its own game of vaccine diplomacy, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin during a media briefing said, “We welcome that and hope to see more countries taking actions to provide vaccines to the world, especially developing countries, to help with the global response.” “China has been overcoming domestic difficulties to provide vaccines to other countries in concrete measure,” he said, flagging China's own vaccine requirement to inoculate its 1.4 billion population. He reiterated that China has been providing vaccines to 53 countries and exporting vaccines to 27 countries, amid reports that many of those countries are yet to receive Chinese vaccines or the promised quantities. For its part, China has promised 10 million vaccines to the United Nations-backed COVAX initiative COVAX, but the first supplies of COVAX vaccines went from the Serum Institute of India to Ghana. India on Wednesday dispatched the first batch of six lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses to Ghana under the COVAX facility, an international cooperative programme formed to make sure low- and middle-income countries have fair access to COVID-19 vaccines.

(P., 27/02)

US Dems reintroduce legislation to prevent future Muslim bans

As many as 140 Democratic lawmakers have reintroduced a legislation in the US Congress to prevent future Muslim bans and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion. The Muslim travel ban, introduced by former US President Donald Trump, targeted several Muslim-majority nations and restricted the entry of people from Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya,

Yemen, Somalia and Venezuela. President Joe Biden ended the Muslim ban on his day one in the office last month. In the House of Representatives, the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants (NO BAN) Act was reintroduced on Friday by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler and Judy Chu, while in the Senate it was done by Senator Chris Coons. Indian-American lawmakers Ami Bera, Ro Khanna, Pramila Jayapal and Raja Krishnamoorthi are among those who are supporting the bill. The legislation strengthens the Immigration and Nationality Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, and restores the separation of powers by limiting overly broad executive authority to issue future travel bans. “When the Trump Administration issued its xenophobic Muslim ban, it was immediately apparent that it was unconstitutional, discriminatory, and morally reprehensible,” said Nadler.

(P., 28/02)

400 escape, 25 dead after Haiti prison breakout

Haitian authorities announced Friday that more than 400 inmates escaped and 25 people died in a prison breakout, making it the country’s largest and deadliest one in a decade, with the prison director and a powerful gang leader among those killed. Some believe on Thursday’s jailbreak at the Croix-des-Bouquets Civil Prison in northeast Port-au-Prince was to free gang leader Arnel Joseph, who had been Haiti’s most wanted fugitive until his 2019 arrest on charges including rape, kidnapping and murder. Joseph was riding on a motorcycle through the Artibonite area in the town of L’Estère on Friday a day after his escape when he was spotted at a checkpoint, police spokesman Gary Desrosiers told The Associated Press. He said Joseph pulled out a gun and died in an exchange of gunfire with police. Joseph ruled Village de Dieu, or Village of God, a shantytown in downtown Port-au-Prince, and other communities, including some in Artibonite, which is Haiti’s largest department. Authorities have not yet provided much details on the breakout except to say that 60 inmates have been recaptured and the investigation is ongoing. State Secretary Frantz Exantus said authorities have created several commissions to investigate who organized the breakout and why. Among those killed was the prison director, identified as Paul Joseph Hector.

(P., 28/02)
