

India calls off missile deal with Israel

- India has called off an order to buy Spike anti-tank guided missiles from Israel's state-owned defence contractor Rafael.
- The deal was worth about \$500 million and its termination came ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to India.
- However, India will buy 131 Barak surface-to-air missiles built by Rafael.
- The 4.6-billion-rupee (\$72 million) order follows up an earlier purchase of Barak missiles, meant to protect Navy vessels against sea-skimming missiles and aerial threats.
- The two countries have grown closer since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, widening commercial cooperation beyond their longstanding defence ties.
- Mr. Modi became the first sitting Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel last summer, and Mr. Netanyahu will fly to India on Jan. 14.

Panchayat secretary's certificate is no proof-Supreme Court on Citizenship

Certificates issued by the 'gaon' or village panchayat secretary/Executive Magistrate is no proof of Indian citizenship.

- It is only a supporting document used for the limited purpose of establishing a linkage between the holder of the certificate and the person(s) from whom legacy is being claimed, the Supreme Court has clarified.
- The certificate merely acknowledged the shifting of residence of a married woman from one village to another.
- The certificate by itself by no means establishes any claim of citizenship of the holder of the certificate, the court observed.

Such proof (of citizenship) will come only if the link between the claimant and the legacy person (who has to be a citizen) is established. The certificate has to be verified at two stages. The first is the authenticity of the certificate itself; and the second is the authenticity of the contents thereof, it observed.

Nod for Myanmar border pact

India cleared the agreement on land border crossing with Myanmar. The decision was taken at the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister.

- The agreement will facilitate regulation and harmonisation of already existing free movement rights for people ordinarily residing in the border areas of both countries.
- It facilitates movement of people on the basis of valid passports and visas which will enhance economic and social interaction between the countries.

Key Ministries disagree over CAMPA fund rules

Differences between the Environment Ministry and the Finance Ministry have become a roadblock to the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA).

- This authority was envisaged as an independent body that would manage a corpus — collected from industries that have used forest land for projects — that accumulates around Rs 6,000 crore annually and is already worth around Rs 42,000 crore.
- These funds are meant to be used by states to implement agro-forestry in non-forest land to compensate for felled forest.

In spite of Parliament — after a fractious debate — signing CAMPA into law last year, it is yet to come into existence.

- Minister of State for Environment Mahesh Sharma told Parliament that this was because the “rules” governing the management of the fund weren’t finalised and several meetings had been held among states to fix these rules.
- Environment Ministry says Power to disburse the funds should be with the CAMPA, however the Finance Ministry says it should be routed through the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI), which is not ideal as it could allow States to use it for purposes other than afforestation.
- The CFI is the repository of government revenues and taxes and all funds channelled through it require Parliamentary approval.
- By way of example, the education cess that the government collects never necessarily gets spent on education. The Comptroller and Auditor General recently pulled up the government for not transferring Rs 83,497 crore, collected as a ‘Secondary and Higher Education Cess’ in the Consolidated Fund of India during 2006-2007 to 2016-2017, to designated funds in the Public Account from where government routes money to schemes.

Currently funds collected under CAMPA directly go into the Public Account and from thereon to the states.

- States are able to access CAMPA funds through an “ad hoc” mechanism whereby the Centre disburses it on a needs-basis.
- There are, however, too few personnel entrusted with managing this fund and often there isn’t enough due-diligence.
- This year, for instance, the ad hoc body disbursed only Rs 1,827 crore to states this year as opposed to Rs 2,213 crore and Rs 2,057 crore in the preceding years.

The Supreme Court, in a 2009 order, had directed that an independent authority be charged with disbursing these funds.

Govt. nod for revised PPP port concessions

The government approved a revised model concession pact for projects based on public private partnership (PPP) design at major ports to make the investment climate more investor friendly.

- The revised Model Concession Agreement (MCA) includes providing an exit route to developers by way of divesting their equity up to 100% after completion of two years from the Commercial Operation Date (COD), similar to the MCA provisions of the highways sector.
- The amendments in the MCA envisage constitution of the Society for Affordable Redressal of Disputes - Ports (SAROD- PORTS) as a disputes resolution mechanism similar to the provision available in the highways sector. The government said under provision of additional land to the concessionaire, land rent had been reduced from 200% to 120% of the applicable scale of rates for the proposed additional land.

Concessionaire would pay royalty on per MT of cargo/Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit (TEU) handled basis, which would be indexed to the variations in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) annually.

- This would replace the present procedure of charging royalty which is equal to the percentage of gross revenue, quoted during bidding, calculated on the basis of upfront normative tariff ceiling prescribed by Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP).
- The government said this would help to resolve the long-pending grievances of public private participation (PPP) operators that revenue share was payable on ceiling tariff and price discounts are ignored.
- The problems associated with fixing storage charges by TAMP and collection of revenue share on storage charges, which had plagued many projects, would also get eliminated.

First 'Blue Moon' total eclipse in 150 years to occur soon

A rare total lunar eclipse that involves the second full moon of the month — popularly referred to as a Blue Moon — is set to take place on January 31 for the first time in over 150 years.

Centre approves ₹5,369 cr. for waterway project

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the more than ₹5,369 crore Jal Marg Vikas Project.

The project is envisaged for the development of fairway on National Waterway-1 with the technical and investment support of the World Bank.

The project will extend over Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

It will cover major districts, including Varanasi, Ghazipur, Vaishali, Patna, Begusarai, Musrhidabad, Pakur, Hoogly and Kolkata.

The project is expected to be completed by March 2023.

It will provide alternative mode of transport that will be environment friendly and cost effective.

The project would contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country while providing a boost to infrastructure development.

Job creation

NW-1 development and operations will lead to direct employment generation to the tune of 46,000 and indirect employment of 84,000 will be generated by vessel construction industry.

The project will include construction of multi-modal terminals at Varanasi, Sahibganj, Haldia, Kalughat, Ghazipur and Farakka, five pairs of roll-on roll-off terminals,

integrated ship repair and maintenance complexes, bank protection works, and provision of navigation aids.

Centre to infuse ₹7,577 cr. in six PSBs

The Finance Ministry has approved proposal for infusion of ₹7,577 crore in six weak public sector banks (PSBs) as part of the recapitalisation plan to bolster capital adequacy ratio.

All these banks, which got capital support, are under prompt corrective action of the RBI.

The lenders that will receive capital through preferential issue of shares include Bank of India, IDBI Bank and UCO Bank.

HC notice to Centre on new Haj policy

The Delhi High Court issued notice to the Centre on a petition challenging a provision in the new Haj Policy, which debars persons with disabilities to apply for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Bench asked the Haj Committee, the Ministry of Minority Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to submit their response on the plea.

The policy debars “persons suffering from polio, tuberculosis, congestive and respiratory ailment, acute coronary insufficiency, coronary thrombosis, mental disorder, infectious leprosy, AIDS, or any other communicable disability or handicapped” from applying for Haj pilgrimage.

North Korea reopens border hotline with the South

North Korea reopened a long-closed border hotline with South Korea.

The North's decision to open the border phone line came a day after South Korea proposed high-level discussions amid a tense stand-off over North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's said in his New Year address that he was open to speaking with the South and would consider sending a delegation to the Winter Olympics to be held just across the border in Pyeongchang in February.

U.S. officials said Washington would not take any talks between North and South Korea seriously if they did not contribute to denuclearising North Korea.

Officials on both sides were checking the line and conducting a conversation for about 20 minutes.

The hotline with the South was shut down by North Korea in February 2016 in retaliation against the closing of a border factory town that was jointly operated by the two Koreas.

Pack grains, sugar in jute bags: Cabinet

In a boost to the jute sector, the Cabinet approved the mandatory packaging of foodgrains and sugar in jute bags for the Jute Year 2017-18.

The Jute Year 2017-18 period is from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.

According to the government, the decision would sustain the core demand for the jute sector and support the livelihood of the workers and farmers dependent on the sector.

The approval mandates that 90% of the food grains and 20% of the sugar products shall be mandatorily packed in jute bags.

Scientists identify four new balsam species

Researchers from the University of Calicut in Kerala have reported the discovery of four new species of balsam from various locations in Arunachal Pradesh.

Commonly known as jewel weeds because of the diverse colour of the flowers, balsams are distributed throughout the Eastern Himalayas and the Western Ghats, Sri Lanka, South East Asia, Africa and Madagascar.

The genus is called *Impatiens*, signifying the impatient nature of the fruits which explode when touched.

The researchers have published their findings in the international journals *Phytotaxa* and *Webbia*.

Impatiens haridasanii was named after Haridasan, former scientist, State Forest Research Institute, Arunachal Pradesh, for his contribution to the taxonomy of the north-eastern States. The species is characterised by small yellow flowers and hairy leaves.

Impatiens pseudocitrina, discovered in Anjaw district, sports bright yellow flowers with small red spots on the throat and a long spur at the back.

A magnificent species discovered from the Lower Dibang valley, *Impatiens nilalohitae* grows to a height of more than one metre and has dark purple flowers with pale yellow throat and green stalk. The name *nilalohitae* denotes the dark purple colour in Sanskrit.

Another spectacular balsam, *I. roingensis*, was found growing in Roing and Upper Siang. The plant has clustered white flowers with yellow patch on the mouth and hooked spur.

According to the authors, road widening works, deforestation and other development activities are posing a threat to the natural habitat of the new species.

The researchers have also reported the rediscovery of another species *I. agastyamalayensis* from the Western Ghats after a gap of more than a century.

India is home to more than 230 balsam species.

Earlier, scientists had reported the discovery of *Impatiens arunachalensis*, a critically endangered species, from the Upper Siang district.

Another balsam species *Impatiens walongensis* has been reported from Anjaw district.

WHO okays Bharat Bio typhoid shot

Bharat Biotech has received a pre-qualification from the World Health Organisation (WHO) for Typbar Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine.

This paves the way for supplies of the vaccine to UNICEF, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and Gavi supported countries.

₹150-crore investment

The Hyderabad firm is working to expand the manufacturing capacity to 200 million doses. In India, the product is being marketed for two years now.

Typbar TCV is the first typhoid vaccine clinically proven to be administered to children from 6 months of age to adults, and confers long-term protection against typhoid fever.

With WHO-SAGE recommendation, for use of TCV in infants between 6 and 23 months of age and catch up vaccinations for children between 2 and 15 years of age, countries could introduce the vaccine into their immunisation programmes.

STATE-TELANGANA

10 lakh eyes-in-the-sky to watch over city

Over the next three years, at least 10 lakh surveillance cameras are proposed to be installed in the Greater Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits under 'Nenu Saitham' project.

- Making the announcement at the inauguration of Technology Fusion Centre (TFC) at the Police Commissionerate, Director General of Police M. Mahender Reddy said over 1.66 lakh community CCTV cameras have, so far, been installed across the city under the project.

The TFC is a miniature command control centre which helps the department in prevention and detection of crime in the city.

- It will help officers to access a wide variety of structured and unstructured data from various sources, including road accidents, surveillance cameras, traffic enforcement data and patrol vehicle tracking data among other things.
- The system will improve response time through aggregation, analysis and dissemination of information to field officers.
- The centre consists of several functional blocks that provide essential technology solutions towards protecting communities and enhancing public safety including traffic command centre, facial recognition analytics and video enhancement unit, social media monitoring unit and traffic signal management unit.

The main objective behind having the centre is to develop, deploy, test and operate the newly adopted technology before they are shifted to the main command control centre, which will come up at Banjara Hills.

All services will be fully operational before the inauguration of the new building in Banjara Hills, the main centre will be inaugurated by the year-end.

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