

January 4th news:

International:

Turkeys 'Bird Language' in Cultural Heritage List

The unusual and very efficient whistle language commonly called "bird language" used as a means of communication by villagers in remote northern Turkey entered the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. UNESCO accepted the "bird language" of Black Sea villagers as an endangered part of world heritage in need of urgent protection.

National:

Cabinet approves establishment of new AIIMS at Bilaspur

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for establishment of new AIIMS in Bilaspur (Himachal Pradesh) under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY). The cost of the project is Rs.1351 crore.

Salient features:

- ❖ The new AIIMS will be completed in a period of 48 months with a pre-construction phase of 12 months, construction phase of 30 months and stabilization / commissioning phase of 6 months.
- ❖ The Institution will consist of a hospital with a capacity of 750 beds and trauma center facilities.
- ❖ It will have a Medical college with an intake of 100 MBBS students per year.
- ❖ Nursing college with an intake of 60 B.Sc. (Nursing) students per year.
- ❖ Residential complexes and allied facilities / services, broadly on the pattern of AIIMS, New Delhi.
- ❖ The hospital will have 20 Speciality/Super-Speciality Departments including 15 Operation Theatres.
- ❖ It will also have an AYUSH department with 30 beds for providing treatment facilities in traditional system of medicine. Impact:
- ❖ The establishment of new AIIMS will serve the dual purpose of providing super speciality health care to the population while also help create a large pool of doctors and other health workers in this region that can be available for primary and secondary level institutions / facilities being created under National Health Mission (NHM).

Background:

Under this scheme, AIIMS have been established in Bhubaneswar, Bhopal, Raipur, Jodhpur, Rishikesh and Patna while work of AIIMS Rae Bareli is in progress. Also, three AIIMS in Nagpur (Maharashtra), Kalyani (West Bengal) and Mangalagiri in Guntur (Andhra Pradesh) have been sanctioned in 2015, two AIIMS have been sanctioned at Bathinda and Gorakhpur in 2016 and an AIIMS in Kamrup (Assam).

Cabinet approves Zojila Pass tunnel project

The Union Cabinet on 3rd January approved the construction of Asia's longest bi-directional Zojila Pass tunnel at an estimated cost of Rs 6,089 crore, which will reduce the travel time through Zojila Pass to 15 minutes from the current 3.5 hours.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave its go-ahead to the 14.2-km long tunnel project in Jammu and Kashmir to provide all-weather connectivity between Srinagar, Kargil and Leh, which remains cut-off from the rest of India during winters due to heavy snowfall.

Zojila tunnel will be the longest bi-directional tunnel in Asia. (Its) construction period (will be) seven years because of a very difficult terrain where in some areas temperature dips to minus 45 degree celsius. The tunnel shall be an engineering marvel as first of its kind in such a geographical area

The project would enhance the safety of travellers crossing Zojila Pass and reduce the travel time from 3.5 hours to 15 minutes

Zojila pass is situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet on Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National Highway which remains closed during winters (December to April) due to heavy snowfall and avalanches cutting off Leh-Ladakh region from Kashmir.

The government has given its approval to the construction, operation and maintenance of 2-lane bi-directional Zojila Tunnel with Parallel Escape (Egress) Tunnel excluding approaches on Srinagar-Leh section connecting NH-1A at Km 95 and at Km 118 in Jammu and Kashmir on engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) mode.

Bilateral:

India ends \$500-m missile deal talks with Israel

India has decided to pull out of talks to procure the 'Spike' anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) from Israel's state-owned Rafael Advanced Systems after protracted negotiations to buy 1,600 units for the Indian Army.

The \$500 million deal, which was almost finalised by a high-powered panel of the Defence Ministry last year to meet the long-pending demand of the Army's infantry battalions, had gathered momentum when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Israel.

The deal was never signed. So there is no question of cancelling a contract here. It was always at discussion stage. This was supposed to be a single-window clearance. But it has been decided not to go ahead with the talks

The official said the decision to cancel the talks was formally communicated to Rafael Advanced Systems by the Ministry of Defence earlier this week, although the decision to cancel the deal was finalised in November last year.

The decision comes ahead of the much-touted visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which is scheduled to take place from January 14-16.

Yoav Har-Even, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Rafael Advanced Systems, is also visiting India as part of the Prime Minister Netanyahu's delegation. During the visit, he is expected to make a last-ditched attempt to push the deal through, sources said.

The Israeli ATGMs were supposed to be co-produced at manufacturing unit in Hyderabad, in collaboration with Bharat Forge's Kalyani Strategic Systems.

The manufacturing facility was inaugurated in August. There were plans to also produce an air-to-surface version of the Spike missile for the Indian Air Force at a later stage.

According to sources, the reason why the Ministry of Defence decided to cancel the deal during the discussion stage was because it found the Israeli ATGMs "too expensive" to be produced in India.

The government has now decided to go for the local version of the man-portable ATGMs – Nag – being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), under the government's Make in India programme. The Nag missile was successfully flight-tested last September in Rajasthan, marking successful completion of development trials. It has been developed at a cost of around \$50 million.

The Indian Army is in dire need of third-generation ATGMs having infra-red seeker with integrated avionics. The requirement is for 40,000 missiles for Army's 382 infantry battalions and 44 mechanised regiments.

Govt exempts cruise tourists with e-visa from biometric enrolment till 2020

Home Affairs has exempted cruise tourists arriving with e-visa from the requirement of biometric enrollment for a period of three years to promote cruise tourism in the country.

Shipping Ministry in a release said, this will make immigration clearance of such passengers faster, leaving them with more time to spend on shore.

E-Visa has been in place in the five major ports of Mumbai, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin and Chennai. The Ministry said, till now biometrics of passengers were required at port of first arrival for immigration clearance.

This simplified immigration clearance procedure is part of a series of steps to attract and to enhance cruise passenger experience at the major ports.

The Ministry said, the standard operating procedures to handle cruise was revised earlier and is being implemented uniformly at all ports.

In November, last year major ports reduced their tariffs for 3 years by 42 to 67 per cent to make it attractive for cruise lines to visit India.

Economy:

CCEA nod for implementation of Jal Marg Vikas Project

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, CCEA has given its nod for implementation of the Jal Marg Vikas Project, JMVP for capacity augmentation of navigation on National Waterway-1 at a cost of over 5 thousand 370 crore rupees with the technical assistance and investment support of the World Bank. The Project is expected to be completed by March, 2023.

The alternative mode of transport will be environment-friendly and cost-effective and the project will contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country.

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

Sports:

Colin Munro creates record

New Zealand crushed the West Indies by 119 runs in the final Twenty20 in Mount Maunganui on 3rd January to sweep the 3 match series. Colin Munro with a rollicking 104 off 53 deliveries, became the first player to hit three centuries in international Twenty20 cricket as New Zealand posted an imposing 243 for five which was their highest Twenty20 total.

Awards:

Award for JNPT: India's Premier Container Port, the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust has won the "Samudra Manthan - Caring Organisation of the Year" award. The award instituted by Bhandarkar Shipping aims to fuel healthy competition in the maritime sector.

Besides achieving operational excellence, JNPT provides excellent facilities to their staff like medical insurance, residential township with school, transport service, canteens, rest rooms, recreation, sports activities and regular training programs on various key topics.