

NATIONAL

Snakebite cases to become a ‘notifiable disease’, says Centre

The Centre has written to States and Union Territories urging that snakebite cases and deaths be made a "notifiable disease" under relevant provisions of the State Public Health Act or other applicable legislation. This move will make it mandatory for all government and private health facilities to report all suspected, probable snakebite cases and deaths.

Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava, in her letter, noted that snakebites are a significant public health concern. In certain cases, they cause mortality, morbidity, and disability, with farmers, tribal populations and others being at higher risk. She said that the notification will help the stakeholders gauge accurate burden, and, identify high-risk areas, and factors responsible for the deaths of snakebite victims, resulting in improved clinical management of snakebite victims.

"A robust surveillance system is essential for accurately tracking snakebite incidents and deaths, which will provide valuable data to inform and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions," she said.

(H.,01/12)

NATIONAL

Space X's Falcon-9 deploys Indian satellite into orbit

India's GSAT-N2 (GSAT-20) communication satellite was successfully launched by Space X's Falcon-9 rocket in the early hours of Tuesday.

After lifting off at 12.01 a.m. (Indian Standard Time) from the Space Launch Complex 40 (SLC-40) at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida, Falcon-9 put the GSAT-N2 into a geo synchronous transfer orbit.

GSAT-N2 is a Ka-band high throughput communication satellite of New Space India Ltd., which is the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organization. According to the ISRO, the satellite is set to enhance broadband services and in flight connectivity across the Indian region.

"This satellite, featuring multiple spot beams and wideband Ka x Ka transponders, aims to support a large subscriber base with small user terminals, significantly boosting system throughput through its multi-beam architecture which allows frequency reuse," the ISRO said.

The GSAT-N2 satellite, with a lift-off mass of 4,700 kg, has a mission life of 14 years. This is India's first collaboration with Elon Musk's Space X.

(H.,19/11)

NATIONAL

GE marine engines chosen to power Navy's missile vessels

Engine manufacturer General Electric announced that its LM2500 marine engines have been chosen to power Indian Navy's Next Generation Missile Vessels (NGMV) being built by Cochin Shipyard Limited.

Six LM2500 marine gas turbine engine kits will be delivered by GE Aerospace for assembly and test by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Industrial and Marine Gas Turbine Division in Bengaluru, India.

Additionally, GE Aerospace will be supplying its composite base and enclosure, and full complement of gas turbine auxiliary systems, GE said in a statement.

"The LM2500 gas turbine's proven power and reliability make it the ideal choice for the NGMV mission. We are proud to continue our collaboration with HAL to deliver this critical technology for India's maritime defense," said Amy Gowder, GE Aerospace Defense & Systems President and CEO, in the statement.

New design

The statement noted that the NGMV is a new design for the Indian Navy that will reach a maximum speed of 35 knots and carry an impressive array of anti-surface weapons and the core of the NGMV propulsion system is the "LM2500, a marine gas turbine engineered to unleash superior power while meeting stealth requirements".

Cochin Shipyard was awarded a ₹ 9,805 crore contract by the Defence Ministry for the construction of six NGMVs for the Indian Navy and deliveries are scheduled to commence from March 2027. After constructing the country's first indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, Cochin Shipyard is now building eight anti-submarine warfare shallow water crafts for the Navy, which are under various stages of construction.

(H.,19/10)

NATIONAL

India elected to GlobE Steering Committee

India was elected to the 15-member GlobE Steering Committee during the plenary session held in Beijing on Thursday after a multistage voting process. "As a member of the Steering Committee, India will play a crucial role in shaping the global agenda against corruption and asset recovery. India's expertise in combating corruption will be valuable assets to the Globe Network," said a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) release.

The Globe Network is a vital platform for international cooperation, and India's participation will strengthen its efforts to combat cross-border financial crimes and corruption. The Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (Globe Network) was an initiative of G-20.

(H.,27/09)

NATIONAL

Phase 3 clinical trial opens for indigenous dengue vaccine

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Panacea Biotech Ltd. on Wednesday announced the initiation of the first Phase 3 clinical trial for a dengue vaccine in India.

The trial will evaluate the efficacy of India's indigenous tetravalent dengue vaccine, DengiAll, developed by Panacea Biotech. The first participant in this trial was vaccinated on Wednesday at the Pandit Bhagwat Dayal Sharma Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Rohtak.

The tetravalent dengue vaccine strain (TVO03/ TV005), originally developed by the National Institutes of Health, U.S., has shown promising results in preclinical and clinical trials worldwide.

Panacea Biotech, one of three Indian companies to receive the strain, is at the most advanced stage of developing the vaccine. The company has worked extensively on these strains to develop a full-fledged vaccine formulation and holds a process patent for this work. Phases 1 and 2 in the clinical trials of the Indian vaccine formulation were completed in 2018-19 and yielded promising results, a release issued by the Health Ministry said.

The first participant was vaccinated on Wednesday at the Pandit Bhagwat Dayal Sharma PG Institute in Rohtak. In collaboration with the ICMR, Panacea Biotech will conduct the Phase 3 clinical trial across 19 sites in 18 States and Union Territories, involving more than 10,335 healthy adult participants.

The trial, primarily funded by the ICMR with partial support from Panacea Biotech, is set to follow up with the participants for two years.

"The initiation of this phase 3 clinical trial for India's first indigenous dengue vaccine marks a critical advancement in our fight against dengue. It reflects our commitment to protecting citizens from this pervasive disease and underscores India's capabilities in vaccine research and development.

Through this collaboration between ICMR and Panacea Biotech, we are not only taking a step towards ensuring the health and well-being of our people but also reinforcing our vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat in the healthcare sector," Union Health Minister J. P. Nadda said.

(H.,15/08)

NATIONAL

Urban, rural land reforms by Centre; land records to be digitised with GIS mapping

The 2024-25 Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman promised a few reforms related to land and land use in the country ranging from their identification to planning and potentially drawing from multiple domains. Ms. Sitharaman said "land-related reforms and actions, both in rural and urban areas, will cover land administration, planning and management, and urban planning, usage and building bylaws". According to her, these activities are to be completed in three years with "appropriate fiscal support".

She added that "rural land-related actions will include assignment of unique land parcel identification numbers or Bhu-Aadhaar for all lands, digitization of cadastral maps, survey of map sub-divisions as per current ownership, establishment of land registry, and linking to the farmers registry".

On the urban front, the Minister continued saying: "Land records...will be digitized with geographic information system (GIS) mapping. An IT-based system for property record administration, updating, and tax administration will be established. These will also facilitate improving the financial position of urban local bodies."

Ms. Sitharaman also said that on the back of a successful pilot project, the Centre "in partnership with States will facilitate the implementation of the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in agriculture for coverage of farmers and their lands in three years." This programme will include a "digital survey" of the kharif crop in 400 districts and the land details being brought into a "land registry".

"Incentivizing States for action on reforms around land, in both rural and urban areas, is a welcome move," Deepa Jha, who works on land governance issues at the Indian Institute of Human Settlements, Bengaluru, told The Hindu.

NATIONAL

New criminal laws to become effective on July 1 Meghwal

Emphasizing that the new criminal laws have been brought in after widespread consultation, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Sunday said that the new laws will come into force on July 1. The Minister made these remarks on the sidelines of a conference on 'India's Progressive Path in the Administration of Criminal Justice System' in Kolkata. The three new laws-the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, Bharatiya Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam - will replace the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, and Indian Evidence Act. Mr. Meghwal also expressed hope about the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the country.

(H.,17/06)

NATIONAL

Bengaluru-Mysuru highway to get 60 AI-powered speed cameras

Owing to increasing instances of speeding and driving on the wrong side of the Bengaluru-Mysuru access controlled highway, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has started installing 60 Artificial Intelligence-powered traffic enforcement cameras at strategic locations along both the Bengaluru-Nidaghatta and Nidaghatta-Mysuru stretches of the highway.

"At regular intervals along the highway, dedicated arches featuring solar-powered panels have been installed to accommodate cameras. Each side of these arches is equipped with five cameras and lanewise speed limit indicators, enhancing surveillance to detect all kinds of violations on the stretch," a NHAI official said.

Earlier in February, the NHAI approved the deployment of AI-based automatic number plate recognition cameras at six locations on the highway. Officials said once the cameras are operational, the vehicles and number plates will be automatically captured, allowing authorities to penalise the violators.

Motorists using the highway welcomed the initiative. A commuter from Bengaluru said: "It's about time they cracked down on reckless driving. These cameras will hopefully make people think twice before breaking the rules."

(H.,16/05)

NATIONAL

Govt may shift base year to FY23 or FY24

THE base year for most Indian economic data could be revised to 2022-23 or 2023-24 depending on the results of the Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys done during these two years.

The National Statistical Survey Office (NSSO) has done two back-to-back surveys for determining the monthly consumption expenditure of households one in 2022-23 and another in 2023-24. The result of the first one has already come out, and the second one is expected in 3-6 months, government sources told this newspaper.

"Depending on the results of the two household consumption data, the government would fix the new base year. The data for the year which captures the ground realities better would be chosen as the new base year," a government official said. Currently, the base year is 2011-12, and there has been a demand for revising the base year, which is used for comparison of economic data like GDP, retail and wholesale inflation, etc. The NSSO had planned to do two successive surveys for Household Consumption Expenditure surveys-one in 2020-21 and another in 2021-22. However, due to the out-break of Covid pandemic, the surveys had to be postponed by two years.

Former chief statistician Pronab Sen told this newspaper that the base year should be a year which is a normal year and there are no economic shocks during the year, and therefore, either of the two years-2022-23 and 2023-24-can be the base year.

According to him, the NSSO changed the methodology of the surveys, and therefore, to check the 'stability' of the data they did two back-to-back surveys. "Under the new methodology, the NSSO surveyors pay visits to the households three times unlike once in the past. It is possible the questions are answered by three different members of the same household giving significantly different answers. This could make the data unreliable," said Sen.

(N.I.E.,24/04)

NATIONAL

Multi-purpose app SAKHI to assist Gaganyaan crew

The Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) facility at Thumba in Thiruvananthapuram, has developed a multi-purpose app that will help astronauts on the Gaganyaan space flight mission carry out a range of tasks such as looking up vital technical information or communicating with one another.

The Space-borne Assistant and Knowledge Hub for Crew Interaction (SAKHI) will, among other things, monitor the health of the astronauts, help them stay connected with Earth and even alert them about their dietary schedules. The space facility has successfully tested an engineering model of the custom-built, hand-held smart device featuring SAKHI. The development of a flight model is in progress.

The VSSC describes the application as an indispensable assistant to the crew. "During the mission, for instance, the astronauts may need to look up technical documents and training manuals at short notice. Given the limited space in the crew module, taking along thick tomes will be out of the question. SAKHI will ensure that they have all the required data at their fingertips," VSSC director S. Unnikrishnan Nair told *The Hindu*.

Strapped to space suits, the platform can be quickly accessed at all times. The ISRO is hoping to launch the Gaganyaan mission in 2025. The identities of the four astronaut-designates, all IAF test pilots, were revealed at an event attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 27.

(H.,19/03)

NATIONAL

Centre allocates ₹ 20 crore to bail out poor prisoners

The Union government has allocated an annual fund of ₹ 20 crore to bail out poor prisoners languishing in prisons across the country due to financial constraints.

The Home Ministry has urged heads of prisons of all States and Union Territories to utilize the funds to provide relief to poor prisoners, who are either unable to pay the fine imposed on them or are unable to secure bail due to financial constraints.

In a communication, the Ministry said the initiative was part of the Centre's priority in "reaching the last mile: no one to be left behind" under which the "Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme" was launched in May last. "Many such prisoners are socially disadvantaged or belong to low-income groups. It is expected that providing financial aid to such poor prisoners may help them in paying their outstanding amount of fine or in securing bail, within the ambit of provisions of law, and they will be able to come out of jail and join the mainstream as a responsible citizen of the country," the Ministry said.

The Home Minister had written to the Chief Ministers of all States and Union Territories soon after the scheme was launched and requested them to take full advantage of the initiative. Guidelines for the fund utilization and a standard operating procedure was also rolled out for the purpose of implementing the scheme. "It was emphasized that this scheme will go a long way in not only mitigating the problems faced by poor prisoners but also help in solving the problem of overcrowding in prisons."

The States and the Union Territories were told to constitute an "Empowered Committee" at the district level and an "Oversight Committee" at the headquarter level for identifying prisoners. However, many States were yet to provide a confirmation on the constitution of the committees. Urging the authorities concerned to take urgent steps to complete the activity in a time bound manner, the Ministry said the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) was appointed as the Central Nodal Agency for implementing the scheme.

(H.,22/02)

NATIONAL

With rising use of drones, DRDO develops own counter technology

AMIDST the rising deployment of drones for surveillance, logistics support and even attack, India has developed an effective counter-technology. This is along with the multiple types of drones being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).

As per the report recently tabled by a parliamentary standing Committee, the DRDO “is developing an indigenous counter-drone technology, which is capable of counter-attacks including detection, soft kill and hard kill of all types of drones”

“The counter-drone system is ready for production and is already demonstrated to armed services and other internal security agencies,” said sources, adding, “The technology is transferred to Bharat Electronics Limited, Bengaluru, who is the production agency for the system. In addition, Transfer of Technology is given to four more Indian firms for production of anti-drone systems.”

“Anti drone technology is where the focus should be, and in that, DRDO is working every closely with the Industry. We are also doing a lot of R&D for anti-drone protection against these types of drones.” said a DRDO representative.

The work on meeting the rising demand for different types of drones is also being carried out, including micro-drones.

The Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) unmanned aerial vehicle TAPAS developed for ISTAR (Intelligent in Surveillance, Reconnaissance And Target Acquisition) application is in the advanced stage of development trials.

Short Range Armed UAV Archer is being developed for reconnaissance, surveillance and low-intensity conflict. “Developmental flight trials are under progress,” said a DRDO statement.

Meanwhile, the parliamentary Committee report also talks about delays in projects by the DRDO. Of the 55 projects 23 were not completed within the stipulated time.

The DRDO secretary apprised before the committee that” as a measure, we are now hiring a consultant, who will tell us the major reasons due to which projects are getting delayed. Based on that, we will try to correct.”

(NIE.,08/01)