

Editorial

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Bridging the divide

With the change of guard in the state, there is a palpable sense of renewed vigour and enthusiasm amongst the general public as well as those in administration and governance. The turnaround can be gauged from the fact that announcements for plans and projects by the new government is being received with a positive hope and anticipation rather than with snide remarks and sarcasms as were the case earlier. Perhaps such a change in perception may have a lot to do with the no-nonsense and go-getter attitude portrayed by the Chief Minister N Biren, or it may very well be also a spontaneous expression of the undying hope and aspirations that had for long been suppressed or brushed aside and crushed beneath the ever increasing piles of politically motivated and opportunistic schemes devised and implemented by the few with influence and power without the scantest consideration for the frustrated and deluded public. Now that concrete steps are being taken up in right earnest to untangle the political and social complications, it is time to take into account the irrefutable fact that there had been a gradual build-up of mistrust and suspicions amongst the different ethnic groups and communities in the state. Accepting this very simple fact should be the first step towards any and every effort to address the issue and to lay down a strong social foundation which can withstand any future divisive forces. The earnest appeal of the chief minister for putting in constructive suggestions before passing judgments should be kept in mind as such moves will encourage participation of the public in state building and will eventually lead to better and stronger state. Arguably, the best measure for securing such a positive outcome will be to increase interaction and communication amongst the various groups and communities which calls for putting in place a network of roadways that is operational throughout the year. Every other factor of development and progress inevitably hinges on the improvement and construction of existing or new roads which are vital in making the people living in far-flung and remote places to access facilities and opportunities that make life better and safer. Transfer of technologies and infrastructures can be achieved with relative ease which will accelerate development and instill a sense of belonging in the hearts of these people which is evidently in short supply till date. But above all, improving roads will increase interaction and communication amongst the people of different communities and groups which is perhaps the only effective means of dispelling the suspicions and distrust. With increased understanding of the diverse customs, cultures and traditions will come respect and appreciation. A tourism related exploratory festival of sorts in every district of the state can be held in turn which will act as a medium through which people from different places can experience and enjoy the company and cultures as well as the way of life of the diverse groups and communities instead of confining state level tourism festivals in the state capital.

2 Indians abducted in South Sudan released: Swaraj

PTI New Delhi, Mar 31: Two Indian petroleum engineers who were abducted in South Sudan have been released, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said today. "I am happy to inform about the release of two Indian nationals Midhun and Edward who were abducted in South Sudan. They have reached the Indian embassy in Khartoum. "I appreciate the efforts of Indian Ambassador in South Sudan Srikumar Menon for the release of Indian nationals," she said in a series of tweets.

Indians Midhun Ganesh and Edward Ambrose along with a Pakistani, Ayaz Hussein Jamali, were abducted by rebels from near their workplaces earlier this month in oil-rich Upper Nile state. Jamali has also been reportedly released. "Following requests from Indian and Pakistani governments, the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments coordinated together to secure the release of the three oil workers," Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service said in a statement. However, it did not specify when the hostages were released.

ICAR institutions gear up to help raise farmers' incomes

By : Gargi Parsai

Technology and its dissemination to farmers' fields plays a crucial role in Indian agriculture. Recognising that scientific research will be critical to doubling farmers' income in the next five years, institutions under the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) are gearing themselves to deliver. In the horticulture sector that involves vegetables, fruits, flowers, spices, aromatic plants and plantation crops, scientists are not only working towards developing new varietal seeds that give higher production, are resistant to pests, diseases and climatic changes but are also addressing issues of post-harvest losses and marketing under public-private partnerships. Official statistics for 2015-16 reveal that India harvested 286.1 million tonnes of horticulture produce from 24.4 million hectares of land. As per the first advance estimates the production for 2016-17 is estimated at 28.7 million tonnes from 24.3 million hectares of land. The total output is expected to be higher by 2% over the previous year. Of this, the production of fruits is estimated at 92 million tonnes, which is higher than in 2015-16. The output of vegetables is likely to be around 168.6 million tonnes with tomato, and potato having registered a marginal increase over previous year. Lately horticulture sector has grown by over 7 per cent and has the potential for providing nutritional security as well as profitability to farmers particularly the small and marginal ones. The percentage share of horticulture in Indian agriculture is around 33 per cent. Being second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables, India exported in 2014-15 fruits and vegetables worth Rs. 7474.14 crores. Vegetables can contribute largely towards food and nutritional security of the people, particularly the poor. They are a rich source of vitamins, minerals and plant fibres

which provide food and nutritional security. These also generate high income and employment, particularly for small farmers. There has been a revolution in the production of vegetables in the country in the last three and a half decades. The demand for vegetables and fruits is said to be growing due to urbanization and rise in income levels and therefore, there is focussed attention on research in this sector. Much of the research in horticulture is being done under the ICAR's All-India Coordinated Research Products (AICRP) headquartered at IHRI (Indian Institute for Horticulture Research) which has the mandate for identification and release of varieties and hybrids through multi-location testing with National Active Germplasm Sites under different agro-climatic zones. While IHRI is the nodal centre for research and transfer on fruits, vegetables and pesticide residues, it coordinates research with regional stations at Hirehalli in Karnataka, Bhubaneswar in Odisha and various Krishi Vigyan Kendras. The centres are involved in farmers' on-farm and off-farm training and capacity building. Besides, it has collaborative linkages with the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Biotechnology, NABARD and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and international universities and organisations. Gaps identified in ongoing research are addressed through externally aided collaborative projects in a time-bound manner. Among the latest premier technologies developed by agriculture scientists and taken to farmers' fields are of triple disease resistant tomato (Arka Rakshak), onion (Arka Kalyan and Arka Niketan), chilli (Arka Saphal and Arka Lohit), okra (Arka Anamika) and brinjal (Arka Anand and Arka Keshav) and stringless French

Bean variety (Arka Suvridha) which are grown in over 31 lakh hectares in various parts of the country. The salt-resistant Dogridge rootstock (on which grape creeper is grafted) identified for development of various varieties of grape including the sweet, dark, thin-skinned, seedless variety is much in demand. In addition organic farming packages have been developed for vegetables. To prevent the mango orchard from being hit by fruit flies, researchers have developed eco-friendly pheromone trap which has become very popular with farmers as the trap catches the pest and prevents attack on the fruit. In ornamental crops tuberose hybrid variety (Arka Prajwal) has a share of 38 per cent of the total sown area in the country. It has been adopted by farmers not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Other notable varieties in ornamental crops are cut-rose varieties of Arka Parimala, Crossandra variety of Arka Ambara and Carnations (Arka Flame). The rose varieties are comparable to imported varieties and new strategies are being developed to beat competition within the country. Notable is Arka Swadesh under polyhouse conditions. In the area of mushroom cultivation that fetches good price for farmers, Pink Oyster Mushroom variety has become popular. Other varieties too have been picked up for commercialisation with sellers are coming up with technological advancements in packaging. With 60 per cent of farming under rain-fed conditions, the agriculture sector is gradually but firmly moving towards the idea of producing more from less water in keeping with the Prime Minister Modi's slogan "More crop per drop". Agriculture scientists at Central Horticulture Experiment Station in Bhubaneswar have oriented their research towards upgrading technologies for

standardisation of drip and micro irrigation in vegetables, water management and in situ conservation using plastic mulch and drip-cum-mulch in vegetables crops in farmers fields. Some of the technologies had been adopted by the state government under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna that gave flexibility to states for use of funds. Farmers who visit various vegetable and crop development centres of the ICAR can not only get knowledge, technology, seeds and saplings for fruit, vegetable, mushroom cultivation, organic farming, bio-intensive management of pests and diseases but also information on commercially viable post-harvest technologies, protocols for export of fruits, machinery for farm, mushroom spawn production, seed-cum-fertilizer drills at all the centres in Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Haryana, Assam and Sikkim. Several of these technologies have been transferred to farmers' fields or which ICAR institutions have won awards. Technologies and research varieties are also put on display-cum-sale at Krishi Melas organised frequently in various parts of the countries to facilitate farmers. At these melas scientists are available for dissemination of first-hand knowledge to farmers and addressing their concerns. Such inter-faces are held in the all-important animal husbandry, dairy sector and fisheries as well which have been identified as crucial areas of growth which will bring income to farmers. With growing awareness, various ICAR centres have now opened up cells to extend services for formulation of business plans for farmers and entrepreneurs who also want to market farm produce gainfully in national and international markets. *Author is an award-winning, senior journalist. She is based in New Delhi.*

National & International News

No stamping of flyers' handbags at 7 airports from April 1

TNN New Delhi, March 31: Come April 1 and passengers flying out of seven biggest airports - Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Cochin - will no longer have to get their cabin bag tags stamped "security checked". The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) took this decision for both domestic and international flyers after carrying out some changes at these airports. The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) had on February 23 sought the ending of stamping at the seven big airports, which includes all metros except Chennai. "We have got high definition cameras installed at Terminal 1 and 3 of Delhi Airport. The pre-embarkation security check area (where flyers queue up to get

frisked) has got 36 and the security hold areas (where flyers are sent after frisking) have got 44 HD cameras," CISF chief OP Singh told TOI. HD cameras now cover all the domestic and international passenger areas of Delhi Airport by getting the existing ones also "repositioned and refocused". Similarly, Singh said the Mumbai Airport has got 85 HD cameras. "We have asked for interrupted power back-up support at all these seven airports. At some airports we have got revolving cameras fixed in addition to fixed cameras to minimize grey areas. We will enhance passenger experience at airports by taking steps like ending stamping and continue to provide the best possible security," the DG said. These seven airports account for 80% of all air traffic in India.

Changes have been made in the rollers - belts with circular steel structures on which hand bags roll to first go into the X-ray machines (input roller) and then come out of them on output roller. They have been made longer at some of the airports where hand bag tag stamping will end on April 1. "Acrylic barriers have been installed (at the point where hand bags exit X-ray machines) to segregate doubtful bags considered as a threat," Singh said. Once all these measures were taken at these seven airports, CISF gave the go-ahead to end stamping of hand bag tags from April 1. Now for the remaining 52 airports, CISF will examine how they too can get rid of stamping. "It may be possible we need to do trial runs at some of those airports," said Singh.

Hand bag stamped tags have a number in fine print which identifies the counter where the bag was screened. The idea is to fix responsibility in case something that could be a threat to flight safety is allowed to go in those bags beyond this point by finding out the screener whose lapse led to that. Full camera coverage allows the same to happen without stamping, something that happens in airports in developed countries. No advanced country, including the US and EU nations, have this requirement of stamping hand bag tags or boarding cards and India is among the few still following this practice. The CISF and BCAS had carried out week-long pilot projects at 12 airports last December where hand bag tags of domestic flyers were not stamped.

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Maoists attack Odisha railway station to oppose Modi visit

PTI Bhubaneswar, March 31: Maoists attacked a railway station in Odisha's Rayagada district early today, triggered a blast and put up posters protesting against the proposed visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the state next month. Around 15-20 Maoists stormed Doikal railway station under Sambalpur Division shortly after mid-night and ransacked the station master's office, Chief Public Relations Officer of East Coast Railway (ECoR), J P Mishra said. The ultras pulled out station master S K Parida and triggered an explosion in the station premises. Parida and a token porter Gobind Hikaka were also detained by them for a brief period, he said. The attackers snatched the walkie-

talkie of the station master, and forced staff of a goods train standing outside the station to shut down the engine, Mishra said. Rayagada Superintendent of Police K Siva Subramani, who rushed to the spot, said minor damage was caused to the engine of the goods train. No railway staff or local people was, however, hurt in the incident, the CPRO said adding control room has been able to speak to the staff. Train services through Daikullu, located between Rayagada and Titlagarh stations, were disrupted for quite sometime. A number of trains were stranded at Muniguda station, railway officials said. The Maoists left behind handwritten posters opposing the policies of Narendra Modi government at the Centre and



Naveen Patnaik regime in Odisha, officials said. In one of the posters, the attackers opposed the proposed two-day visit of the Prime Minister to Odisha on April 15 and 16 to attend BJP's national executive meeting. Some posters also criticised non-Odia officers being appointed to senior posts in the state police as well as administration, they said.

Director General of Police KB Singh said combing operation has been launched in the area by CRPF and Special Operation Group (SOG) personnel after the incident. Railway officials said that movement of goods trains with restricted speed had resumed after security clearance, while steps are being taken for resumption of express and passenger trains soon.