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**Ghulam Nabi Azad meets NC president Farooq Abdullah**  
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**NEARBY**



**CM lays foundation for medical college, hospital**  
 Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Saturday laid the foundation for a government medical college and hospital in Dindigul.  
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**M.P. floor test tomorrow**  
 SIDHARTH YADAV  
 BHOPAL

The office of the Madhya Pradesh Governor announced late on Saturday that the floor test to decide the fate of Kamal Nath-led Congress government would be held on Monday. The division of votes will be held after the Governor's address.  
**RELATED REPORT** ▶ PAGE 8

## Virus cases rise, more airlifts planned

National tally touches 102, including 31 in Maharashtra; States ramp up measures for social distancing

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
 NEW DELHI

The list of positive coronavirus cases as confirmed by the Union Health Ministry stood at 84 on Saturday, with two deaths reported so far from Delhi and Karnataka. Data from States, however, put the number of confirmed cases at 102, with Maharashtra reporting 12 new cases.

Ten persons have been discharged and contact tracing of the positive cases has led to identification of more than 4,000 contacts who have been put under surveillance, Health Ministry officials said.

"We currently have a total number of 84 confirmed cases, including 17 foreigners. More than 4,000 people who had come in contact with those testing positive have been identified," Special Secretary, Union Health Ministry, Sanjeeva Kumar said on Saturday.

He added that a Mahan Air flight bringing back Indian



**Safety concerns:** Health workers spraying disinfectants in a residential area as a precautionary measure in Jammu on Saturday. ▶ AP

passengers from Iran would land in Mumbai on Saturday midnight. A special Air India flight is also being sent to Milan, Italy, to bring back Indian students.

Several States have ramped up measures to ensure social distancing to con-

tain the spread of the disease. Himachal Pradesh and

### COVID-19

West Bengal have announced the closure of all schools and educational in-

stitutions till March 31. Punjab has ordered cinema halls and gyms to close down and Gujarat has issued an epidemic disease notification.

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**VIRUS POSES NEW CHALLENGES TO INDIA'S U.S. POLICY** ▶ PAGE 10

### Home Ministry does a U-turn

The Union Home Ministry on Saturday said it would pay ₹4 lakh in compensation to the families of those who die of COVID-19 and meet the treatment cost at rates fixed by the States. Within hours, it issued another circular and deleted the clause. ▶ PAGE 7

### Spain emerges as new hotspot

Governments around the world ramped up the battle against the SARS-CoV-2 virus on Saturday by shutting borders and promising cash injections, as Spain emerged as a global hotspot registering more than 1,500 new infections in just 24 hours. Further, the number of cases worldwide passed 1,50,000. ▶ PAGE 10

## SAARC virtual meet today

PM to convene videoconference

**SUHASINI HAIDAR**  
 NEW DELHI

Two days after he made the surprise offer, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will convene a meeting of SAARC leaders on the coronavirus pandemic over a videoconference on Sunday evening.

The conference, which will include leaders of seven countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka - and the special adviser (Health) to Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, Dr. Zafar Mirza, will discuss the number of coronavirus cases in the subcontinent, different measures taken to stop the spread of the virus, and treatment methods.

**'For common good'**  
 "Coming together for common good," tweeted Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar, making the announcement



Pakistan PM Imran Khan has deputed his special adviser to the meeting.

of the videoconference, which will begin at 5 p.m. IST on Sunday.

The conference will come a day ahead of a similar "virtual conference" convened by France for members of the G-7 countries - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States - which will be held on Monday.

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## Centre hikes excise duty on petrol, diesel by ₹3 per litre

No change in retail price; govt. to earn ₹39,000 crore

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
 NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday increased the excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹3 a litre each to garner ₹39,000 crore in additional revenue, as it repeated its 2014-15 act of not passing on to customers the gains from the slump in international oil prices.

The retail prices of petrol and diesel will not be impacted by the increase as the state-owned oil firms adjusted them against the recent fall in oil prices and the likely trend in the near future, officials said.

According to a notification from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs,

### Taxing the fuel

The excise duty on petrol increased by ₹3 per litre. The table shows components of petrol price in Delhi in May 2014 and March 14, 2020

Price build up of petrol	May 2014	Mar.14, 2020
Price charged to dealers	47.12	28.50
Excise duty	10.39	22.98
Dealer commission	2.00	3.54
Total	59.51	55.02
VAT	11.90	14.85
Retail price in Delhi	71.41	69.87

*All figures in ₹/litre*

the special excise duty on petrol was increased by ₹2 to ₹8 a litre and on diesel from ₹2 to ₹4 a litre. Road cess was raised by ₹1 a litre each to ₹10. The total incidence of excise duty on petrol has ri-

sen to ₹22.98 a litre and on diesel to ₹18.83. The tax on petrol was ₹9.48 and on diesel ₹3.56 when the BJP entered office in 2014.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 8

## I-T Dept. shocked by Tasmac's acceptance of banned notes

Dismisses State undertaking's explanation of law and order as reason for accepting invalid notes

**MOHAMED IMRANULLAH S.**  
 CHENNAI

The Income Tax Department has expressed shock at the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (Tasmac) having accepted demonetised currency notes worth ₹57.29 crore from customers between November 9 and December 30, 2016, in contravention of the demonetisation announcement made by the Prime Minister on November 8, 2016.

After scrutinising the Corporation's I-T returns for the year 2016-17, the department found that it had an opening balance of ₹84.23 crore as on



The I-T Department has sought tax for ₹57.29 crore in unexplained investment.

November 9, 2016. Of that balance, ₹81.57 crore was in Specified Bank Notes (SBN) or demonetised currency notes of ₹500 and ₹1,000) and

₹2.66 crore in other denominations.

Subsequently, Tasmac had collected ₹3,490.21 crore between November 10 and December 30, 2016, and the collections were deposited in bank accounts on a daily basis. Records showed that the Corporation had deposited about ₹140 crore in demonetised notes during the entire demonetisation period. After deducting the initial ₹81.57 crore, the balance worked out to ₹57.29 crore.

"The assessee is a government-owned State undertaking and it is beyond imagina-

tion how the State undertaking, managed by an IAS officer, would collect demonetised currency in contravention of the order of the Government of India," the I-T department said in an Assessment Order passed on December 30, 2019, and accessed by *The Hindu*.

"Though assessee claimed that it accepted SBN from customers due to law and order problems, the assessee has failed to produce any evidence from Government of Tamil Nadu or the police evidencing any law and order issue that constrained [it] to sell non-essential commodi-

ty like liquor against invalid bank notes," the I-T department order said.

Refusing to believe that illegal transactions could have been carried out by a State entity and since Tasmac did not provide branch-wise details of deposited demonetised notes, the I-T department said the transactions using demonetised notes should be treated as "unexplained investment," for 2017-18.

Besides demanding tax for the unexplained investment of ₹57.29 crore, the department ordered proceedings against Tasmac.

## GST on mobile phones hiked to 18%

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
 NEW DELHI

Mobile phones are likely to get costlier, with the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council on Saturday decid-

ing to increase the rate on mobile phones and specific parts to 18% from the current 12%, from April 1.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the decision

was taken to correct the inverted structure of duty on some products, wherein the rate of tax paid on inputs is more than the rate of tax on finished products.

On the glitches in the GST Network (GSTN), built and managed by Infosys, she said the company was given a deadline of July 31, 2020, to implement the initiatives discussed for the smooth running of the system, instead of the January, 2021

deadline sought by Infosys chairman Nandan Nilekani. He also made a presentation and the Council asked him to attend the next three meetings and update it of the status of upgrade.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 8

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- Application for PG Courses will be available only online mode

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- Pass in Higher Secondary Examination (Std 12) of Tamil Nadu or its equivalent Examination of other states in India or that of the Central Board of Secondary Education
- For admission to PG programmes, a pass in UG degree from any recognised university is required
- Eligibility for respective UG / PG course can be referred in the college website.

**Courses**

- Information about the courses offered is available in the college website and in the brochure issued along with the printed application form.

**How to apply**

- Applications are issued from 16-03-2020 at the college campus and also available in the college website <http://www.psgcas.ac.in>. After publication of +2 results / UG results, the applicants can register their filled application in the college premises and the online applicants can complete the registration through college website
- For PG programmes, applications are available in online mode only.

**Starting of Admission**

- Admissions for Aided courses start on the 11<sup>th</sup> day and for SF courses on the 4<sup>th</sup> day from the date of publication of the results of Tamil Nadu Higher Secondary Board Examinations / Bharathiar University 2020.

**Selection of Candidates**

- Selection will be done by publishing the course wise rank list as per merit order.
- Selection will be intimated to the respective candidates via SMS to their primary mobile number
- The Selection list will be published in the college website and also displayed at the college campus
- Candidate must provide contact number and E-mail id for the selection process

**Joining Time**

- From the date of intimation via SMS and in college website, the selected candidates shall join the course within 2 days
- The college works on all 7 days of the week till the end of May 2020.

**Advisory**

- Please avoid agents / brokers / students / staff posing to be influential, in obtaining admission in the college
- Admission will be done at the designated counters in the college campus.

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## SCs, OBCs fear losing benefits under new scholarship plan

Centre likely to put new scheme in place in a few months

**T. RAMAKRISHNAN**  
 CHENNAI

The Central government's proposal to scrap scholarship schemes catering exclusively to students belonging to communities such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) and club them into one has drawn criticism from activists in Tamil Nadu.

To be called Pradhan Mantri Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (PM-YASAVI), the new arrangement is expected to be in place in a few months. Last month, the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment held discussions with senior officials from various States.

The main objection of critics to the Centre's initiative is the reduced coverage that the new scheme is likely to achieve.

The existing post-matriculation scholarship scheme for SC students, whose origins can be traced to the efforts of B.R. Ambedkar, in the mid-1940s, has become a "big hit" in the last seven or eight years, mainly due to

"liberal financial assistance" of the State government, said M. Bharathan, State convener of the Amedbkar Kalvi Nutrandu Iyakkam. "If it is going to get merged with the proposed scheme, it is our apprehension that this may restrict the number of beneficiaries drastically," he added.

The number of beneficiaries under the post-matric scheme in T.N. has gone up to such an extent that the State government is bearing most of the scheme's burden, though it is a Central scheme. For example, in 2018-19, the share of the State government was around ₹1,526 crore while that of the Union government was ₹384 crore. One of the reasons being advanced by the Centre for the launch of the new scheme is that the share of the Centre has been reduced to less than 10% which, according to a document of the Union government, has led to the old scheme losing its "character of a national scheme".

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