



Health minister Sudip Roy Barman checking the artificial limb of a child during a programme organised by ONGCL, Tripura Asset, at DDRCL in Agartala on Thursday.

# Centre slashes petrol, diesel prices by Rs 2.50

### Several states follow suit

NEW DELHI, OCT 4 /- The Union government today announced a Rs 2.50 per litre cut in petrol and diesel prices by reducing excise duty and asking PSU oil firms to take a hit of Rs 9,000 crore, a step that was matched by BJP-ruled states by slashing VAT so as to double the reduction in retail rates. While the Centre cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 1.50 per litre and asked oil firms to absorb Re 1 a litre of prices, BJP-ruled states including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam and Tripura announced a cut in VAT of up to Rs 2.5 per litre to effect a Rs 5 per litre reduction in pump rates. The price cuts would be effective from midnight tonight. The reduction in excise duty, only the second in four years of BJP-led NDA rule, will dent Centre's revenues by Rs 10,500 crore and was aimed at cooling retail prices that had shot up to an all-time high. Announcing the decision, Union finance minister Arun Jaitley asked the state governments to match the move with a similar reduction in sales tax or VAT, saying leaders who only tweet and indulge in lip sympathy over high prices will be put to test now. The BJP government at the Centre had raised excise duty on petrol by Rs 11.77 a litre and that on diesel by Rs 13.47 a litre in nine installments between November 2014 and January 2016 to shore up finances as global oil prices fell, but then cut the tax just once in October last year by Rs 2 a litre. It had resisted the call for a reduction in excise duty since May when retail rates first shot up and then again from mid-August when fuel prices started moving up again. In Delhi, where the fuel prices are the lowest among all metros, and most of the state capitals, petrol is currently sold at Rs 84 per litre and diesel at Rs 75.45. Jaitley said he on Wednesday met Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and inter-ministerial consultations continued on Thursday. After approval of



will factor in Re 1 in their pricing, and states have been asked to cut VAT as they have reaped windfall gains due to ad valorem nature of the levy that results in higher realisation whenever rates move up, he said. "The states' revenue increases because of increased crude oil prices and hence it is easier for the states to absorb Rs 2.50 (cut)," he said. Following the Centre's announcement, several BJP-ruled states in a move that looked well coordinated announced Rs 2.50 per litre reduction in VAT. Last month, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh had reduced VAT to cushion consumers for a spate of price increases. Since mid-August, the petrol price has risen by Rs 6.86 a litre and diesel by Rs 6.73—the most in any six-week duration after the daily price revision was introduced in mid-June last year. The move to ask state-owned oil firms, who were given pricing freedom, to absorb Re 1 per litre was seen as a return of government control over pricing, leading to stocks of Indian Oil Corp (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd (HPCL) tanking. Jaitley however, said asking oil companies to bear a part some burden is not going back on defaulting the promise to lower prices. State-owned fuel retailers absorbing Re 1 per litre price would mean a Rs 9,000 crore hit on profits on an annualised basis. For the remainder of current fiscal, it would be Rs 4,500 crore with IOC's share being roughly half and the rest is split equally between HPCL and BPCL.

## Fuel prices should be slashed by Rs 10 at least: Mamata

SILIGURI, OCT 4 /- West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee today demanded that the Centre should slash fuel prices by Rs 10 per litre at least and also withdraw the cess on petroleum products. Mamata was reacting to the Centre's announcement of a Rs 2.50-per-litre cut in petrol and diesel prices by reducing the excise duty by Rs 1.50 a litre and asking oil companies to absorb another Re 1. "The Central government should slash fuel prices by Rs 10 at least. This government at the Centre is not bothered about the well-being of the masses... They are only interested about their party (BJP)," Mamata, whose government had last month slashed petrol and diesel prices by Re 1 per litre, said while addressing a programme in Siliguri. The Centre should also withdraw the cess on petroleum products. The increase in fuel prices have a spiralling effect on the prices of essential commodities, the chief minister added. PTI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi embraces Russian President Vladimir Putin during a welcoming ceremony in New Delhi — Reuters

## US threat of sanction on India's purchase of Russian S-400

WASHINGTON, OCT 4 /- The US has urged its allies to forgo transactions with Russia, warning that the S-400 missile defence system that India intends to buy would be a "focus area" for it to implement punitive sanctions against a nation undertaking "significant" business deals with the Russians. The US administration is required under a domestic law, Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act or CAATS, to impose sanctions on any country that has significant transactions with Iran, North Korea or Russia. The Act primarily deals with sanctions on Russian interests such as its oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions, in the backdrop of its military intervention in Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US Presidential elections. "We urge all of our allies and partners to forgo transactions with Russia that would trigger sanctions under CAATS," a state department spokesperson said on Wednesday when asked about India's plan to purchase multi-billion S-400 missile defence system from Russia. "The Administration has indicated that a focus area for the implementation of CAATS Section 231 is new or qualitative upgrades in capability - including the S-400 air and missile defence system," the spokesperson said. According to a media report, India and Russia will sign a deal for the multi-billion-dollar S-400 surface-to-air missile system this week. Moscow has been negotiating to sell the S-400 long-range surface-to-air missiles to India for months. The signing of the deal for Moscow's most advanced air defence system will be overseen by Russian president Vladimir Putin, who arrived in New Delhi on October 4-5 for the annual India-Russia summit, the report said quoting a top Kremlin official said. (PTI)

## Putin arrives in India for summit with Modi

NEW DELHI, OCT 4 /- Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived here today on a two-day visit to hold the annual bilateral summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Putin, who is accompanied by a high-level delegation, was received by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj. The 19th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit will take place here on Friday during which Modi and Putin are expected to review bilateral defence cooperation in the wake of the US sanctions against Russian defence majors. The two leaders are also likely to deliberate on key regional and global issues, including US sanctions on import of Iranian crude oil. The focus during the visit will be on the S-400 Triumf air defence missile system agreement, with a top Kremlin aide saying Tuesday that Russian President Putin will oversee the signing of the USD 5 billion deal.

## Govt's Naga talks interlocutor RN Ravi appointed deputy NSA

NEW DELHI, OCT 4 /- RN Ravi, the government interlocutor for talks with Naga insurgents, was Thursday appointed Deputy National Security Advisor, according to an order issued by the Personnel Ministry. Ravi is the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved redesignating Ravi as the Deputy National Security Advisor (Internal Affairs) and as interlocutor of the government in Nagaland instead of chairman, JIC, the order said. Ravi, a 1976-batch Indian Police Service officer (retired) of the Kerala cadre, was in August this year given an extension as the government's representative for the ongoing talks with Naga insurgent group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM). Ravi retired as the Special Director in the Intelligence Bureau in 2012. He was in charge of the Northeast desk at the IB. He was appointed as the chairman of the JIC, which works under the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), in September 2014, months after the NDA came to power. (PTI)

## Shelter home case Skeleton of minor girl's recovered, CBI informs SC

NEW DELHI, OCT 4 /- The CBI informed the Supreme Court today that it has recovered skeleton of a minor girl during the ongoing probe into the Muzaffarpur shelter home case in which several girls were allegedly raped and sexually abused. The agency told a bench of Justices Madan B Lokur, S Abdul Nazeer and Deepak Gupta that it has interviewed the girls who were residing in the shelter home with assistance from experts of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), and needed some more time to talk to them again in view of the facts emerging in the probe. CBI's counsel told the bench that experts from NIMHANS were dealing with the aspects pertaining to the trauma faced by these girls and the exercise has yielded "good results" so far.

## AT A GLANCE

**Quake, tsunami toll in Indonesia now 1424**  
PALU: Indonesia's disaster agency says the death toll from the earthquake and tsunami that struck a central island last week has increased slightly to 1,424. National disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho provided the updated figure Thursday at a news conference in Jakarta. The disasters struck Palu and surrounding districts in Central Sulawesi province last Friday. Nugroho said other victims still are buried in the mud and debris and have not yet been recovered. (AP)

## Pakistan foreign minister seeks US role for talks with India

WASHINGTON, OCT 4 /- Islamabad is seeking an American role in facilitating talks between India and Pakistan because the two South Asian neighbours are not engaging bilaterally, Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has said, warning that absence of such a facilitation could lead to escalation of tension. But the latest Pakistani request in this regard has again been rejected by the US, the top Pakistani diplomat told a Washington audience on Wednesday, a day after he had meetings with secretary of state Mike Pompeo and national security advisor John Bolton, during which he raised the issue only to be pushed back by the Trump administration. "When we asked the US, to play facilitating role... Why do we ask? Simply because we are not engaging bilaterally. And that bilateral disengagement is a distraction. We want to focus, we want to move on the western side of the border, which we are not being able to because we have to watch our back from eastern side of the border with India. That is not a healthy situation to be in," Qureshi said in response to a question at the US Institute of Peace, a US Congress-funded top American think-tank. "Now can you (United States) facilitate? The answer from them is no. They wanted bilaterally. But there is no bilateral movement," Qureshi said warning that this could lead to escalation of tension between the two South Asian countries.

## India deports 7 Rohingya immigrants to Myanmar

NEW DELHI, OCT 4 /- India today deported seven Rohingya immigrants, who have been staying in Assam illegally, to their country of origin Myanmar, in a first such move. The illegal immigrants were detained in 2012 and since then they have been lodged in Cachar Central Jail in Assam's Silchar. "Seven Myanmar nationals have been deported today. They were handed over to the authorities of Myanmar at Mowh border post in Manipur," Assam Additional Director General of Police (Border) Bhaskar J Mahanta told news agency PTI over phone. Consular access had been given to Myanmar diplomats, who confirmed the identity of the immigrants, Mahanta said. The confirmation of the Myanmar citizenship of the illegal immigrants came after the government of the neighbouring country verified their addresses in Rakhine State and all of them were given travel documents by Myanmar. This is for the first time Rohingya immigrants were sent back to Myanmar from India. Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court rejected the plea made by one of the Rohingya refugees seeking to restrain the Centre from deporting them to Myanmar. Allowing the deportation of the seven Rohingya Muslims, the Supreme Court said they were found by the competent

## Prashant Bhushan, Arun Shourie meet CBI director seeking probe into Rafale deal

NEW DELHI, OCT 4 /- Lawyer Prashant Bhushan and former Union minister Arun Shourie met CBI director Alok Verma today, demanding a probe into alleged corruption in the Rafale aircraft deal and offset contract. Along with a "detailed" complaint under the Prevention of Corruption Act, Bhushan and Shourie also submitted documents buttressing their arguments for the need of probe. They asked the agency director to take permission of the government to initiate the probe in accordance with the law. "CBI Director said he will look into it very carefully. We will take appropriate action," Bhushan told newsmen after coming out of the CBI headquarters. Meanwhile, the Congress today urged the CAG to carry out a forensic audit of the "Rs 60,150 crore" Rafale fighter jet deal and bring all "facts" on record to enable Parliament to fix accountability for the alleged scam in the contract. A delegation of Congress leaders met the Comptroller and Auditor General of India Rajiv Mehrisahi - this was a second time within a month they met the central auditor over the Rafale deal - and presented a memorandum to him along with fresh documents. The party had met the CAG on September 19 and thereafter the CVC on September 24 for a probe into the deal. Subsequent to the submissions made before the CAG earlier in the Rafale scam, the Congress alleged that documents and revelations made at the highest level in India and France have "exposed a deep rooted sinister conspiracy and a clear cut case of loss to public exchequer".

## Cong presses for CAG audit, meets auditor