

Headlines at a Glance - 20th October 2020

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India successfully test fires SANT Missile

India today successfully test fired the Stand-off Anti-tank (SANT) Missile off the coast of Odisha, sources said on Monday. The Missile is being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and will have both Lock-on After Launch and Lock-on Before Launch capability, the sources informed. On the other hand, the IAF on Sunday congratulated the DRDO on the successful test-firing of BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. BrahMos supersonic cruise missile was successfully test-fired from the Indian Navy's indigenously-built stealth destroyer INS Chennai, hitting a target in the Arabian Sea, the DRDO said.

SOURCE: *Hindustan Times*

Singapore becomes the first country to attach Facial recognition to the National Database

Singapore will become the world's first country to use facial verification in its national ID scheme, but privacy advocates are alarmed by what they say is an intrusive system vulnerable to abuse. From next year, millions of people living in the city-state will be able to access government agencies, banking services and other amenities with a quick face scan. This biometric check will do away with the need to remember a password or security dongle when performing many everyday tasks, its creators say.

It is part of the financial hub's drive to harness technology, from ramping up the use of electronic payments to research on driverless transport. Facial verification has already been adopted in various forms around the world, with Apple and Google implementing the technology for tasks like unlocking phones and making payments. Governments have also deployed it at airports for security checks on travellers. But Singapore's rollout is one of the most ambitious yet, and the first to attach facial verification to a national identification database. The technology captures a series of photos of a person's face in various lights. These images are matched with other data already available to the government such as national identity cards, passports, and employment passes.

SOURCE: *Business Standard*

Hing Cultivation introduced in Indian Himalayas

Due to efforts of CSIR constituent laboratory, Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT), Palampur, a historical shift in farming practices is in the offing with farmers of the remote Lahaul valley in Himachal Pradesh taking up cultivation of *asafoetida* (*Heeng*) to utilize vast expanses of waste land in the cold desert conditions of the region. CSIR-IHBT brought in seeds of *asafoetida* and developed its agro-technology. *Asafoetida* is one of the top condiments and is a high value spice crop in India. India imports about 1200 tonnes of raw *asafoetida* annually from Afghanistan, Iran and Uzbekistan and spends approximately 100 million USD per year. Lack of planting material of *Ferula assa-foetida* plants in India was a major bottleneck in cultivation of this crop. The first seedling of *asafoetida* was planted by Dr. Sanjay Kumar, Director, CSIR-IHBT on 15th October, 2020 at farmer's field in village Kwaring of Lahaul valley to mark initiation of cultivation of *asafoetida* in India. Since *asafoetida* is a major condiment in Indian cuisines, team CSIR-IHBT made relentless efforts for introduction of this important crop in the country.

SOURCE: *The New Indian Express*

NCDC to launch Ayushman Sahakar Scheme

NCDC's scheme will be a step towards strengthening farmers welfare activities by the Central Government. Rupala said the AYUSHMAN SAHAKAR scheme would revolutionize the

way healthcare delivery takes place in rural areas. He also gave a call to the existing cooperatives to take up healthcare services as an activity for farmers. As per the scheme formulated by NCDC, the amount of Rs 10, 000 crore will be given to cooperative bodies, the minister announced. NCDC's scheme aligns itself with the focus of the National Health Policy, 2017, covering the health systems in all their dimensions- investments in health, organization of healthcare services, access to technologies, development of human resources, encouragement of medical pluralism, affordable health care to farmers etc. In line with the National Digital Health Mission launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 15th August, 2020, NCDC's Ayushman Sahakar would bring transformation in rural areas. By virtue of their strong presence in rural areas, cooperatives utilizing the scheme would bring revolution in comprehensive health care services.

SOURCE: *The Hindu*

Indo-Pacific: Japan and Vietnam sign Agreements

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, in his first overseas summit since taking office last month, agreed with his Vietnamese counterpart to step up defence and security cooperation in the face of China's expanding influence in the region.

In talks in Hanoi on Monday, Suga and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc set a basic agreement allowing Japan to export defence equipment and technology to Vietnam. Japan has been pursuing such agreements in recent years to bolster ties with Southeast Asia and sustain its own defence industry. Suga says his four-day trip to Vietnam and later Indonesia is key to pursuing the "free and open Indo-Pacific" vision for multilateral economic and security cooperation to counter China's growing power and protect sea lanes in disputed areas of the South China Sea. Japan already has defence equipment transfer deals with the US, Britain and Malaysia, among other countries. Vietnam is a 12th partner. In its first actual delivery, Japan in August exported a radar surveillance system to the Philippines. Details of possible equipment sales were not mentioned, but Suga called the agreement "a major step" for a bilateral defense cooperation, saying he expects further developments.

SOURCE: *Outlook India*