

NRC revision: In Tripura, the boot is on the other foot

AGARTALA, AUG 28/- Barring the ruling BJP, no political party in Tripura opposed to National Register of Citizens (NRC) revision, a senior CPI(M) leader said on Monday. If the Centre wishes to revise the citizenship register across the country, the CPI (M) has "no reason to oppose the move", Lok Sabha MP Jitendra Chowdhury said. "NRC is a regular matter. It was supposed to be regularly updated but no state took measures after 1951. Following the recent Assam exercise, talks about updating NRC in other states have been doing the rounds. I don't think any Indian citizen will oppose the exercise," he told reporters. The Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT), a regional party with a tribal base, has also been demanding NRC revision in the state. The party organized a five-hour sit-in in front of Swami Vivekananda Maidan in Agartala on Monday to press for their demands, including revision of register and empowerment of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, which administers areas inhabited by indigenous people of the state. INPT president Bijoy Hrangkhawl said a delegation of the party would visit Delhi soon to submit a memorandum to the Centre in this regard. "The demand for NRC revision is a constitutional one. We demand that citizens clarify their stance on the issue," Hrangkhawl said during his speech. Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb had said last month that everyone in the state has valid papers and there was no demand for updating the register. "Everything is in order in Tripura and everyone has valid papers. Hence, it is not an issue for us," Deb had said. The IPTT, the ruling party's ally in the state, however, has been vocal in its demand for draft revision.

Darjeeling Municipality takes initiatives to woo students away from online games

EOI CORRESPONDENT

DARJEELING, AUG 28/- Shortly after online "discriminating games" are suspected to have claimed a victim in the hills of Darjeeling, the Darjeeling Municipality is trying to spread the message to stay away from online "discriminating games" that are suspected to have rearing their heads in the region. A part of the effort was the organization of a two-day football tournament for school students by the Darjeeling Municipality on Tuesday. An 18-year-old student of Kurseong is suspected to have committed suicide recently enticed by an unknown called to play the "Momo" game online. Investigations are in progress to verify the incident.

The municipality, for starters has decided to engage school students. The primary objective of organizing this tournament is to involve students in field activities and



A football match in Darjeeling at the initiative of the municipality -- Pranab Chhetri

sports. This way, their minds will be away from playing online games. Also sporting activity is good for health. "We have organized the tournament for the Municipal Boy's High school which is under our jurisdiction," said Sagar Tamang, the municipality vice-chairman.

The four-a-side tournament is being organized in the Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan ground just below the main market area. The tournament has been divided into junior and senior categories with 12 teams and each team comprising of four players. "The match is being played for 30 minutes and will have two extra times. Since the ground is small, the goal post is only two feet in height which will make the matches interesting not only for the players but also the spectators," Tamang said.

The municipality has invited officials of various non-government organizations to attend and watch the finals that will be held on Wednesday. "We have requested representatives of NGOs to come watch the match tomorrow and also give talks on things like drug abuse so that the students also stay away from it," the municipality vice-chairman said.

High power team visits landslide areas in Pakyong

SUJAL PRADHAN

PAKYONG, AUG 28/- A team led by MLA Gnathang Machong constituency and Minister D.T. Lepcha along with secretary Land Revenue Tshyegal Tashi on Tuesday visited the under construction Ekiyava Model Residential School at Thekabung under Gnathang Machong Constituency in East Sikkim and inspected landslides in the EMRS area. Land and standing crops like cardamom and trees were damaged in the slide.

After the inspection, Tshyegal Tashi said compensation for crops damaged by the landslides will be compensated soon as the survey had been completed by the Pakyong Sub-Divisional land revenue office. He said the



D. T. Lepcha on a visit to Pakyong -- Shekhar Khawas

restoration works like protective walls, acquiring land will be done as per the norms after the concerned

departmental engineers prepares the estimates. Minister D.T. Lepcha said the area will be more

developed once the EMRS campus will be completed and started functioning in the coming March 2019. He assured the affected families that their land and crops would be compensated. He urged

villagers to do large scale organic farming as well as dairy, homestays and other business because once the EMRS was functional at the permanent campus, all the local vegetables and dairy products would have a market.

The EMRS will accommodate 480 students along with teaching and non teaching staff. Homestay tourism had grown in the constituency over the last four years and many had been benefited. He urged local public to initiate the homestay in the area and take benefit of it.

The team also visited landslides at Pachey where the restoration work of the road was disturbed due to regular flow of slush and mud from the landslides and mooted the idea of an alternate road to Pakyong Bazaar.

GJM lambasts R. P. Rudy on Gorkhaland statement

EOI CORRESPONDENT

DARJEELING, AUG 28/- Reacting to senior BJP leader Rajiv Pratap Rudy's statement that a "consensus" and "role of the state government" was necessary for creation of a separate state, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha on Tuesday lambasted the former Union minister for playing with the sentiments of the people to gain political mileage. GJM Darjeeling sub-division spokesperson Sandip Chhetri said the BJP was never sincere about the demand of the Gorkha community even though being its political ally. "It's a political gimmick of the BJP party to make their way back to the hills keeping the 2019 election in mind. They seem to have forgotten the sentiments and fooling the hills people," he said.

On Monday in Kalimpong district after a meeting of the standing committee on water resources of which Rudy is the chairman, the BJP leader had said that even though issues such as creation of separate states were discussed, it was important to take into account the role of the state government in reaching a consensus. Rudy's statement was in contrast to his speech the BJP leader gave in 2009 in Kalimpong during the Independence Day celebration when he had said that he hoped to celebrate the day in a separate Gorkha state, in the following year.

Then and even during the last four years of his tenure as Union minister, Rudy had not pointed to the "role of the state government and reaching consensus" on the demand.

The GJM leader said, "Rudy along with BJP leaders like Sushma Swami and Jaswant Singh had talked about Gorkhaland in 2009 when the UPA was in power in Delhi. The BJP had even taken up the issue in the parliament. But when the BJP came to power and continues to be so, they seem to have forgotten our demand. They should act on their words and promise and not make it an election issue."

Chhetri said the hills people would not be fooled again and advised the BJP to keep its promise or forget winning from the hills. "Now is the time to work and not just give speeches. We can be fooled once but not always," he said.

GJM said BJP should not try and create disturbances in the hills as people were going about their life normally. "If the Central government wants that they can create a separate state. If Telangana and Jharkhand can be formed even after state government opposition than why not Gorkhaland. He (Rudy) and BJP says the state government must give its consent but there are precedence," Chhetri said and asked the BJP to refrain from creating trouble in the hills.

Nathu La traders place their demands with D.C. East

EOI CORRESPONDENT

GANGTOK, AUG 28/- Traders operating on the Sino-Indian border trade in Nathu La in a memorandum to the District Collector East Sikkim have demanded that the number of vehicles permitted to cross the border must be increased to 60 and the number of traders to 100. The warehouses must be handed over to the Traders Association in Sherathang, the road leading to the trade mart in Sherathang must be renovated and snow must be cleared from the road in winter. The district administration asked the Traders Association to give a written request for overnight halt at Rinchengang Trade Mart in the Tibet Autonomous Region so that it could be forwarded for further action. The District Collector assured that he would try to conduct a meeting to address the issues within September 2018. It may be mentioned that traders in Nathu La border have refused to trade till their demand on allowing more vehicles and traders to the border is met.

Countdown for Indrajatra 2018 begins

SANJAY AGARWAL

September 22

SORENG, AUG 28/- The first audition of the "Talent Hunt Competition" took place in Soresng, West Sikkim on Monday. There were a total of 32 participants, both for solo and group items, in different categories like dancing, singing, boat boxing from Soresng and nearby areas like Tharpu, Chumbong, Kaluk, Sombarey and Daramdin. From 32 participants, 13 were qualified for the quarter final, which will be held in Gangtok on September 8. The

The event was organized by Sikkim Newar Guthi Youth Affairs (SNGYA) team in coordination with Inspire Academy, Arithang, on the occasion of coming Indrajatra festival which is scheduled to take place for the first time as a three-day event in Gangtok from September 21 to 23. SNG is organizing many events this year like Newar folk dance competition, ethno achar competition, Bhaji Sikkim & Majju Sikkim competition and exhibition stalls including food stalls in the Indrajatra



Participants at the talent hunt competition -- EOI Photo

judges for the day were Komal Gurung of Tapashya Dance Academy, Ganes Dhungel of Department of Culture and Heritage of Sikkim Government, GOS HRDD Deoraj Bagdas) and director Praja Pradhan "Saphal". The next auditions are scheduled in Gangtok and Singtam on September 2 and respectively. The finale will be held in M.G. Marg in Gangtok on

festival in M.G. Marg, Gangtok. The motive behind the events is to showcase the rich culture and tradition of the Newars of Sikkim. The talent hunt competition which is open for all communities will give a platform to individuals to showcase their talent and its one of the effort of SNG to build up the mood for the coming Indrajatra festival.



A Gorkha Janmukti Morcha meeting was held at Rangpo on Monday under the guidance of Morcha president Chandan Gurung. Inactive members were dropped in the meeting and new members given responsibilities. A proposal to distribute the book named "The Story of Gorkhaland" by taking permission from the writer and the publisher was taken. -- SANJAY AGARWAL

HC order banning night stay at meadows worries trek operators

DEHRADUN, AUG 28/- The Uttarakhand High Court order banning night stay at high-altitude meadows and limiting the number of tourists visiting there would deal a major blow to the adventure tourism in the state and render nearly 10,000 people engaged in trek and mountaineering expeditions here jobless, say trade insiders. "Nearly one lakh people across the state will be directly affected if the order is implemented. Tourism, especially the adventure tourism, is the sole means of livelihood in the hills and an order like this amounts to indirectly asking tourists not to come to the state," Garhwal Himalayan Trekking and Mountaineering Association president Jayendra Singh Rana

says. It would deprive many of their livelihoods and force migration from the hills. "There are trekking destinations which cannot be reached without a night stay on the route. What will happen to them? What will happen to the porters, mule operators, helpers and cooks who go along with the trekking and expedition teams to the high-altitude meadows and grasslands?"

The entire population of villages through which trekking and mountaineering expeditions are conducted are involved in one way or the other in the exercise and the restrictions like this will hit them badly. "My view is that before any such step is taken, all stakeholders and people

tourism which prohibits ecological balance of the Himalayas like littering the bughyals (grasslands) with non-biodegradable materials like plastic is perfectly okay. But, limiting the number of tourists entering the bughyals at a given time to 200 and banning night stay would force the people associated with the trade to shut shop and go elsewhere in search of livelihood. "On one hand, there is an emphasis on creating jobs to stop people's migration from the hills, but on the other, the restrictions like these will deprive them of their jobs and force them to migrate."



associated with the trade should be taken into confidence," Uniyal says.

The Uttarakhand High Court on August 21 ordered the state government to remove all permanent structures from the alpine and sub-alpine meadows and grasslands, including Aail-Bedini-Bagzi Bughyals (grasslands) in the state within three months.

A bench of justices Rajiv Sharma and Lokpal Singh also limited the numbers of tourists visiting the meadows at a given time to 200, while putting a complete ban on night stays. The order also banned commercial grazing of cattle on all types of alpine meadows, permitting only local shepherds to graze their cattle in reasonably limited number.

The order also directed all district magistrates in the state to ensure removal of plastic

water bottles, cans and other garbage materials from the meadows within six weeks.

A trek operator in Uttarakashi district, which has many trekking zones, says the numbers of tourists visiting the area has already gone down substantially in the last two years after the Gomukh to Uttarakashi stretch was notified as eco-sensitive zone, restricting many activities in the area. "A ban on the night stay at meadows and limiting the number of tourists visiting one to just 200 will be the last nail in the coffin of the people associated with the trade of trekking and mountaineering," Uttarakashi's Snow Spider Trek proprietor Bhagwat Semwal has told PTI.

"There has been a 70 per cent

fall in the number of tourists visiting the national park and reserve forest areas of Uttarakashi due to the high costs and various other formalities involved, so much so that the low budget tourism is almost over. The new restrictions will be the last nail in the coffin of the people in tourism business."

Semwal says the state government should find a middle-of-the-path solution, taking care of both the fragile ecology of the Himalayas and the livelihood of the people in the state.

The Garhwal Himalayan Trekking and Mountaineering Association president Rana says the association is studying the implications of the high court order and weighing the legal options. PTI