



THE ECHO OF INDIA



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Only sixth schedule can protect land rights in Darjeeling hills, says GNLFF leader

DEEPA MILAN PRADHAN

MIRIK, JUNE 30 -- Only a constitutionally guaranteed sixth schedule set up can grant the people of the hills of Darjeeling ownership over their land, Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) sub-division committee president Mahendra Khadka said on Saturday.

Speaking to the Echo of India in Mirik, Khadka said people do not understand the reality. "On their own volition they are now getting in touch with to get membership of GNLFF," he said.

"They are already in support of the sixth schedule status for the autonomous hill council in Darjeeling. Taking a dig at the Gorkha Jankumari Morcha, he said people no longer had any faith in the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration which had no constitutional status. Formed under an act of the West Bengal assembly, GTA had no real autonomy and was dependent on the West Bengal government for every aspect. "Following this betrayal by the GJM of accepting a council under a State act, people have now started understanding the importance of the sixth schedule and are spontaneously entering the fold of the GNLFF."

If Darjeeling were brought under the sixth schedule, all the communities belonging to the hills would be granted tribal status; this would ensure the security of ownership of land to them, he argued. Khadka held that a "proper and neutral" assessment would indicate that GNLFF had already emerged as the largest party in the hills.

It may be mentioned that it was under the stewardship of Subash Ghisingh that GNLFF had first raised the demand that the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, the predecessor of GTA, be brought under the sixth schedule of the Constitution. As chairman of DGHC, Ghisingh had realized that the hill council, also formed under a State act, did not have much power. There was delay, however, in bringing all the communities in the hills of Darjeeling under the umbrella of the scheduled tribe category.

Shah holds meeting with NE states leaders in Manipur

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30 -- BJP president Amit Shah on Saturday held meetings with his party leaders who are in-charge of 11 Lok Sabha seats spread across seven northeast states as part of a drive to ensure that it wins the maximum number of these constituencies in the general election next year.

Shah held separate meetings with Lok Sabha 'toll' (group) of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Manipur in Manipur, the party's media head Anil Baluni said.

Baluni said that Shah was in West Bengal for two days before he arrived in Manipur. The BJP chief would reach Odisha on Sunday.

He described his visits to these eastern and north-eastern regions as part of his party's and the Modi government's "Look East" policy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often spoken about his government's emphasis on the development of these regions as India could not be strong if some of its parts remain underdeveloped. Shah has been visiting there frequently to ensure their all-round development, he said.

Except for Mizoram, the BJP is in power in all these states -- as the leader of an alliance or as a junior partner.

West Bengal, Odisha and the Northeast have emerged central to Shah's plans for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls as he believes that the BJP can improve on its tally there and make up for any likely loss it may suffer in other states.

Kalimpong cyclist wins Mountain Biking race in Sikkim

SUJAL PRADHAN

GANGTOK, JUNE 30 -- Isaac Rai of Kalimpong has been adjudged the winner of Epic 17k Mountain Terrain Biking Race held in North Sikkim.

A total of 66 athletes from various parts of the country and neighbouring Bhutan had participated in the race. The final day of the epic 17k MTB race covered a distance of 83 kms from Thangu to Gurudongmar Lake at an elevation level of 17800 ft.

The valedictory ceremony was held at Lachen Dzumsa on Saturday where the winners of the race were awarded prizes. The function was attended by Forest Minister, T. W. Lepcha as chief guest in the presence of Deputy Speaker, Sikkim Assembly Sonam Gyatso Lepcha. Cash prizes were awarded to the riders who were the first, second and the third.

The event based on the themes 'Beti Bachao Beti



The winner in the race -- Shekhar Khawas

Padhao' and 'Secure Himalayas' was organised by the Forest Department in collaboration with the North District administration. The associate partners were Lachen Dzumsa, Lachen Dzumsa, Indian Army and Indo-Tibet Border Police.

NRC and Citizenship Amendment Bill keep Assam on tenterhooks

ROJ CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA, JUNE 30 -- Assam is on the tenterhooks over the twin issue of the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Bill. While one section of people whose names may not appear in the final NRC are scared of being declared as foreigners and incarcerated in detention camps under inhuman condition, others are afraid that if the Citizenship Bill is passed the indigenous people of the state would be swamped by illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

In the wake of the discontent over the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the influential All Assam Students Union has raised the demand for an inner line permit system for states in the north-east. "It is high time the debate over the controversial Citizenship Bill is put to rest. The Centre should

introduce constitutional safeguards to protect the identity of the people and this includes an inner line permit in north-east states, taking into consideration the local conditions," AASU Advisor Samujjal Bhattacharya said, according to a PTI report from Guwahati.

It may be mentioned that, among the north-eastern states, at present the inner line permit system is in place in Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. In Manipur and Meghalaya, there are sporadic agitations in support of the introduction of the inner line permit system.

On Friday, various organizations, including a students' union, took out a rally in Guwahati, urging the government to accord constitutional safeguard to the indigenous people. People from different walks of life joined the protest rally that was taken out from

Latasil Field and culminated at Assam Engineering Institute playground.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill was "unconstitutional and unacceptable," it would put the identity of local people at stake, Bhattacharya said. "The only solution acceptable to us is the revocation of the Bill. We urge the opposition parties to push the government in that direction," the AASU leader said at the protest meet, held by 29 indigenous organizations.

The north-east region is not a "dumping ground" for illegal Bangladeshis, Bhattacharya said. Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has been saying that people of the state should have faith in the government, but we are worried as the existence of tribal people here has come under threat," he stated.

The Bill, introduced in

the Lok Sabha to amend the Citizenship Act 1955, proposes to make illegal migrants of six communities -- Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians -- eligible for Indian citizenship after six years of residence in the country.

Opinions on the Bill, however, appeared divided in Assam, with people in Barak valley voicing support to it, while those in Brahmaputra valley opposing the amendment tooth and nail.

A Silchar-based civil society on the other hand expressed concern over the detention camps in Assam where people who have been branded as foreigners under the Foreigners Act have been lodged. The condition of detention camps in Assam were "inhumane" and "lacked basic amenities," members of North East Linguistic and Ethnic Co-ordination Committee (NELECC)

claimed. "We urge the Centre to ensure that camps are separated from jail premises. Detainees should not be treated like criminals," NELECC member Subhranshu Bhattacharya said.

NELECC members had met Home Minister Rajnath Singh and Minister of State for External Affairs General V K Singh (Retd) recently and spoke about the issues of the National Register of Citizens. "In the meeting, we also told the home minister about the difficulties faced by people in the detention camps," Subhranshu Bhattacharya said.

The final draft of the NRC was not released on Saturday, though, as scheduled, due to the heavy floods in the Barak Valley. A petition was filed in the Supreme Court last week, seeking more time to prepare the draft and the apex court had fixed the date of hearing on July 2. The NRC is being updated

under the Supreme Court's supervision.

"We have made considerable progress in the last few days and will most likely be in a position to publish the draft on the next date fixed by the Supreme Court," NRC state coordinator Prateek Hajela said, according to a PTI report.

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said the names of all "genuine Indians" would be incorporated in the list of the state's citizens. He also ruled out any possibility of violence after the publication of the NRC, saying adequate forces were deployed across the state to deal with any situation.

The first draft of the NRC was released on the intervening night of December 31 and January 1, in which the names of 19 million of the 33 million applicants were incorporated. (Written with PTI reports)



Football fever in Mirik -- DEEPA MILAN PRADHAN

Not received any request for Rahul's visit to Kailash Mansarovar: MEA

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30 -- The Ministry of External Affairs has said it has not received any "formal request" for Congress President Rahul Gandhi's visit to Kailash Mansarovar in China's Tibet region. "We have not received any formal request for his visit to the Tibetan Autonomous region in China," MEA Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said. Kumar said Gandhi could visit Kailash Mansarovar either through the MEA-organised route or through a private route.

Last week, the Congress had said that Gandhi was yet to receive a response from the government to his request to undertake the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. Addressing a rally here on April 28, Gandhi had announced that he would go on a pilgrim image to Kailash Mansarovar after the May 12 assembly polls in Karnataka. He had made the announcement three days after an aircraft in which he was travelling from Delhi to Karnataka developed technical snag. PTI

ESMA might be imposed to prevent strike by Delhi Metro staff: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30 -- As non-executive staff of the Delhi Metro Railway Corporation threatened to go on strike, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said his government might impose the Essential Services Maintenance Act to ensure smooth functioning of the Delhi Metro, even as he appealed to the employees to not resort to it. The Delhi High Court, though, restrained DMRC employees from going on strike.

"Whereas all genuine demands of Metro employees should be met, strike would cause inconvenience to lakhs of people. Strike should not take place. Whereas govt imposing ESMA as last resort, I would urge employees to not resort to strike (sic)," Kejriwal tweeted. Two rounds of talks between the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) authorities and representatives of the DMRC Staff Council on Friday "failed." PTI

5 ITBP personnel killed in landslide in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, JUNE 30 -- Four Indo Tibet Border Police personnel were crushed to death when a heavy boulder, loosened by monsoon rains, rolled down a mountain and hit their vehicle on the Basar-Akajan road in Lower Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh on Friday, police said. Another ITBP jawan succumbed to injuries in hospital.

The incident occurred at around 2.30 pm about 5 km from Likabali, the district headquarters of Lower Siang, when they were on way to it from Basar in West Siang district, police said. The boulder rolled down the mountain slope and smashed the mini bus carrying 20 ITBP personnel. Four ITBP personnel died on the spot. The vehicle had to slow down due to the condition of the road is very bad and was hit by the boulder. PTI

Sikkim Municipalities excel in Swachh Survekshan 2018 First in NE, sixth overall

SANJAY AGARWAL

RONGPO, JUNE 30 -- The municipalities of Sikkim performed extremely well in Swachh Survekshan 2018 conducted under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan-Urban by Union Ministry of Urban Affairs and Housing. The overall ranking of ULBs and States in third Swachh Survekshan 2018 was declared on last week in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A total of 4,041 cities and towns involving 400 million urban people participated in the Swachh Survekshan 2018 in which overall sanitation, waste management and other criteria were assessed by third party agencies. The Survekshan 2018 was an exhaustive exercise that involved online entry of city profile for each ULBs in multi-level services, field inspections, geo-tagging, citizens feedback, documentation of activities, making it the world's most comprehensive exercise.

The State of Sikkim was declared Open Defecation Free for rural areas two years ago while the urban Sikkim with the massive construction of household toilets, community and public toilets achieved ODF status by third party certification early this year making Sikkim fully ODF State of India among few such States like Madhya Pradesh.

In this Survekshan all the ULBs of Sikkim fared very well which jointly put Sikkim in No. 1 in sanitation in North East and 6th overall Cleanest State of India.

Rangpo has recently received the award of the Best City in Solid Waste Management - NE and the Nagar Panchayat will soon seek appointment with the Chief Minister to convey the receipt of the award for Sikkim.

State government doing good job in Darjeeling, says Hill Trinamool

DEEPA MILAN PRADHAN

MIRIK, JUNE 30 -- The West Bengal government was doing good work for the people of Darjeeling hills, according to the Hill Trinamool Congress in Mirik. The

Committee during the day organized a meeting at Manjushri Park near Phuguri, the ancestral village of Gorkha National Liberation Front leader Subash Ghisingh. The meeting was presided over by Anil Chhetri sub-division committee president,



Hill Trinamool meeting at Manjushri Park in Mirik -- EOJ Photo

people of Darjeeling hills wanted peace and development, Trinamool Congress Soureni Samanty Committee president Anil Subba said on Saturday. The Hill Trinamool Congress Mirik Sub-Division and Sobhan Ghisingh, the youth president. The recently formed Soureni Samanty Committee president Anil Subba assured that the party would function smoothly in Soureni area in future.