Will continue to support the rights of the Pak refugees: BJP

JAMMU, DEC 31 /--/ BJP today condemned Hurriyat and other political parties for opposing the grant of domicile certificate to the West Pakistani Refugees residing in Jammu and Kashmir and said it will continue to support the rights of the WPRs. "Hartal called by Hurriyat and other separatist groups yesterday to oppose the grant of domicile certificate to WPRs is very unfortunate, unwarranted and uncalled for. BJP strongly opposes the efforts of these pro-Pakistan elements to politicise a humanitarian issue," BJP state spokesperson Brig Anil Gupta (retd) said. He condemned the attitude of Hurriyat and political parties who are opposing the grant of domicile certificate to the WPRs residing in the state and said what was more discomforting is that these people belong to economically backward segment of the society and have been denied the growth opportunities due to no fault of theirs. "It is very unfortunate that a section of society living among us is termed as refugees and denied basic rights on the plea that they are not the state subjects and have migrated from West Pakistan at the time of partition," he said. Even after 70 years of independence they are being given this treatment in their own country due to the "parochial outlook" of the majority community in the state is tragic, Gupta said. "It is the influx of illegal Bangladeshi and Burmese migrants that has resulted in the demographic change and ironically they do not raise any voice against them but welcome them. "This highlights their communal outlook. Our Party will continue to support the WPR and ensure that justice is delivered to them," he said. Taking a dig at the National Conference's stand, Gupta said political parties like NC are misquoting history and trying to mislead the people of Jammu using the name of late Maharaja Hari Singh. "Their contention that State Subject laws were enacted by the Maharaja to safeguard the interest of Dogras is being quoted out of context.

"The State Subject Act was enacted by the Maharaja in 1927 to protect the rights of its citizens when J&K was an independent state. "It was the Maharaja only who had acceded the state with India in 1947 and it was his desire that his state should be a part of Union of India," he said. He said, "All citizens of J&K are now citizens of India." Had the Maharaja been alive he would have himself ensured that any law that keeps his state away from rest of the country should be "abrogated", the spokesperson said. "He would have ensured that these helpless people are given all rights immediately and they would not have to suffer this humiliation for 70 years," he said. It was surprising and unfortunate that parties which had included this issue in their election manifestos in the past were now opposing the issue of the domicile certificate. "The statements of Ambika Soni in Jammu and Congress spokesperson Meem Afzal in Srinagar clearly show that the Congress was only exploiting them for narrow political gains and now that their plight is being improved by the present BJP government they have joined hands with the Hurriyat and others to oppose the same," he said.

"Issue of domicile certificate will enable the WP refugees to seek central government jobs including in the armed forces. There will be quota for them in the 5 IRP Battalions being raised under Prime Minister Special Package for J&K," he said. The contention that it is an attempt to change the state's demography, Gupta said it is not understood as to how it will affect the demography of the state since they have been staying here since 1947. "The State Subject Act was enacted by the Maharaja in 1927 to protect the rights of its citizens when J&K was an independent state.

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Kejriwal hopes stalled works will be expedited under new L-G

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /--/ Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal today said he is hopeful the works that have come to a standstill in the national capital will be expedited under new Lt Governor Anil Baijal. Baijal (70), a former Union home secretary, took over as the Lt Governor of Delhi today.

"I am very hopeful that in the future, we all - MLAs, Delhi government, people of Delhi - will work with the Lt Governor for development of Delhi. "In the last few months, some works of Delhi government have come to standstill. I hope that these works will be expedited," Kejriwal said. Baijal's predecessor Najeeb Jung and the Delhi government have been at loggerheads on a range of issues including transfer and posting of officers since AAP came to power. On being asked about his relationship with the AAP government after taking oath, Baijal said, "This is a speculative thing and I don't know how the relationship will improve. We will sit together and talk." Baijal was administered the oath of office and secrecy of Lt Governor by Chief Justice of Delhi High Court G Rohini.

Apart from the Chief Minister, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, judges, Delhi Chief Secretary M M Kutty, Deputy CM Manish Sisodia, Water Minister Kapil Mishra, New Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi, Opposition leader Vijender Gupta and other two BJP MLAs O P Sharma and Jadgish Pradhan, senior bureaucrats attended the oath-taking ceremony. Baijal, a 1969 batch IAS officer, had served as Union Home Secretary under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, besides holding key positions in other ministries. He had retired in 2006 as secretary of the Urban Development Ministry. He was also the vice chairman of Delhi Development Authority. Baijal was actively associated with the designing and roll-out of Rs 60,000 crore Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) launched by the Manmohan Singh government. The former bureaucrat was also on the executive council of the think-tank Vivekananda International Foundation, several of whose former members have been appointed to senior positions by the Modi government including National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.(PTI)

Brace up! Wet, cold January in offing

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /--/ After an unusually warm November and December this season, January is expected to be cold and wet due to formation of three western disturbances expected in the month, bringing sudden rain and snowfall to north India. A strong western disturbance is expected between January 3-7, which should bring moderate-to-heavy snowfall over hills in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. At the same time, an induce cyclonic circulation over Haryana is likely to shower light-to-moderate rain in Punjab and Haryana between January 6-10. Delhi may receive light rain on January 6 or 7.

According to Mahesh Palawat, chief meteorologist at Skymet, a private weather forecasting agency, fog is expected over the 255 million hectare Indo-Gangetic plains till January 2 and 3. Bihar and Jharkhand may receive light rain on January 1 and 2. Dense fog and cold conditions will continue in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Haryana, north Rajasthan and Delhi. Another western disturbance is expected between January 17-20. "During that period we expect moderate snowfall over the hills and scattered rains over Punjab, Haryana and north Rajasthan," Palawat said. A western disturbance is an extra-tropical storm originating in the Mediterranean region that brings sudden winter rainfall to the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent.

January's last western disturbance could happen between January 27-29, which will be instrumental for a good snowfall in the hills and light rain in parts of Punjab and Haryana. This year, winter temperatures have been unusually warm due to occurance of the La Nina pattern and global warming. The IMD, in its forecast, has predicted a warmer winter this year.(PTI)

Supporters of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav sitting on dharna near CM's residence in Lucknow on Saturday.

Will wipe out drug menace from Punjab within 4 weeks: Capt Amarinder

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /--/ Hitting out at Arvind Kejriwal, Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh today said the AAP national convener was trivialising the state's drugs problem to divert the attention from substance abuse charges against his party's leaders. "AAP workers are themselves making allegations of drugs abuse against their party leaders, many of whom are caught in corruption and sex scandals. Kejriwal was now resorting to diversion tactics by indulging in blatant lies against the Congress," Singh said. Rebutting Kejriwal's allegation of drug peddling against Congress, the former Punjab chief minister said the AAP leader was resorting to falsehood in a desperate bid to divert the attention from drug abuse charges against his party's leaders. Congress is committed to fight the drug menace in Punjab and the state party chief is committed to wipe out drugs from Punjab within four weeks of assuming power, a statement from the party said. Singh also blamed Kejriwal for ditching the people of Punjab on key issues such as Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal. Again challenging Kejriwal for an open debate on issues vital to Punjab's interest, Singh said he was ready to debate him on all issue - including drugs and SYL.

"Kejriwal should debate instead of making unfounded allegations and resorting to cheap gimmickry," Singh added. The people of Punjab want Kejriwal to convince them of their seriousness in the matter, especially given his track record of changing his mind 10 times a day, he claimed adding that the AAP leader should make his stand clear on the drug problem in the state.(PTI)

Puducherry govt will work for balanced development in 2017: Narayanasami

PUDUCHERRY, DEC 31 /--/ Chief minister V Narayanasamy today vowed to ensure that all the four regions of the Union Territory witnessed balanced development in all sectors in 2017.

In his New Year eve message, he said various development oriented programmes had been set in motion during 2016 and they would be sustained and carried on further so that a balanced development was achieved in the four regions of Puducherry Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam.

Narayanasamy, heading the Congress ministry, said his government would spare no efforts to register industrial development in the new year and said the cooperation of the people was absolutely necessary from all sections. Puducherry Assembly Speaker V Vaithilingam, Ministers, Leader of the Oppositon N.Rangasamy of AINRC, MLAs, MPs, and leaders of various political parties extended their greetings on the eve of New Year to the people.(PTI)

Company shortlisted for supplying notes blacklisted: Chandy

KOCHI, DEC 31 /--/ Former Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy today said one of the four companies said to have been shortlisted for supplying plastic notes appeared to be "blacklisted" which he felt smacks of corruption. Producing portions of a copy of a report of the Public Untertakings Committee of Parliament in 2013, he alleged that the company was named in it for not meeting certain security parameters for printing 1365 million pieces of Rs 100 notes during 1997-98. The parliamentary panel, then chaired by Jagadambika Pal, had cited grave implications of such move and "fervently emphasised that outsourcing of printing of currency notes/minting coins should never be resorted to in the future", Chandy said. "Now, a company, against which a Parliamentary committee had given a report in 2013, has been roped in by the Government for supplying plastic notes. It is a big scam. A joint parliamentary committee should probe it," Chandy said in a Malayalam note distributed at his press conference here.

He said the parliamentary panel has noted that the very thought of India's currency being printed in three different countries is alarming to say the least. With Congress leader and Parliament's Public Accounts Chairman K V Thomas by his side, Chandy, citing newspaper reports, claimed that the banknote manufacturer was earlier "blacklisted" by the Union Home Ministry.(PTI)

CPI urges PM to offer relief to bank deaths

PUDUCHERRY, DEC 31 /--/ The CPI today urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to sanction ex gratia relief to the families of those who had collapsed and died while waiting in queues before the banks and ATMs in different parts of the country, post demonetisation.

"The demonetisation move of the Centre is the most dictatorial and senseless and had cost lives of around 120 persons who died during their wait in long queues before banks to withdraw money," CPI National Secretary K Narayana told reporters here. He further said, "The scheme is a worst initiative as black money continued to rule the roost and in fact it was converted into white money in different forms of immovable properties."

Heart surgery performed on 3 children from Liberia

KOCHI, DEC 31 /--/ Three children from Liberia, who arrived here with congenital heart defect, have undergone free heart surgeries successfully at a private hospital here, recently. Lisie Hospital, pioneer in the field of cardiac care in the state, said as a gesture of goodwill it has joined hands with Moolan Foundation and Rotary Club of Cochin Global to perform free heart surgeries for the three children. The hospital in a release said today it has added another feather to its cap by providing "Care with Love" to children with heart disease from Africa. The children, aged from seven months to eight years, were under the treatment of Dr Sia Wata Camanor, a paediatrician at the John F Kennedy Hospital in Monrovia.

"The Ebola outbreak more than a year ago had drastically reduced the medical services in the country and children with heart disease had been dependent on other developed nations for treatment. We chose India as a destination for cardiac care because it is affordable and provides quality care," the release quoted Sia Wata as saying. Their treatment was carried out by a team of doctors, the release said. Congenital heart defects are the most common birth defects affecting 1 in 100 children, according to the release.

K'taka has released Rs.862 cr for drought relief : Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, DEC 31 /--/ Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah today said the state government has released Rs 862 crore for drought relief measures. "We are not sitting quiet waiting for funds from the central government. We have already released Rs 862 crore for drought relief measures," Siddaramaiah said. He said Rs 400 crore has been released for drinking water and fodder for cattle, and Rs 325 crore is already available with the District Deputy Commissioners. Maintaining that the state was reeling under severe drought, the chief minister said there is scarcity of drinking water with no adequate water in reservoirs and lakes being dried up. "District Deputy Commissioners have been directed to take adequate measures in ensuring the availability of drinking water and fodder for cattle," he told reporters. Karnataka is reeling under successive years of drought, and the state government has already declared 139 taluks in 29 districts as drought-hit. The Chief Minister had earlier said the state has incurred an estimated loss of Rs 25,000 crore this year due to severe drought. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had yesterday assured the all-party delegation led by Siddaramaiah that a decision on release of Rs 4,702 crore drought relief to Karnataka for kharif crop loss in 2016 will be taken on January 4. Speaking about the meeting with the Prime Minister, Siddaramaiah said in a few districts there was damage to crops due to floods, for which Rs 386 crore had been sought as relief. Pointing out to the deficit rainfall, he said state has efficiently implemented job guarantee scheme and "we have requested Union government's support in making this more effective to support drought affected families." On the Mahadayi river water dispute with Goa, Siddaramaiah said during the meeting with Prime Minister "we have requested his intervention, as the court has provided an opportunity for finding a solution through discussion, and it was also informed to him about Karnataka legislature's resolution seeking his intervention."

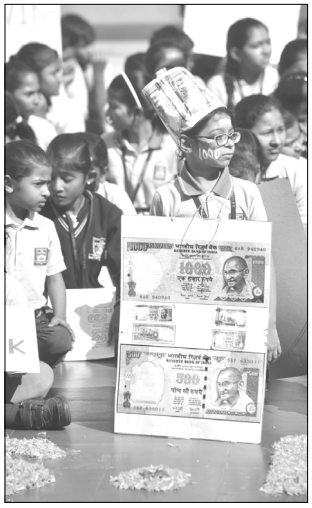
He said "Prime Minister heard us, but did not give any assurance. BJP members in the delegation remained silent, only Ananth Kumar (Union Minister) said they have had discussions with Goa and Maharashtra Chief Ministers." (PTI)

Lokayukta Police deposits Rs 1.61 cr in old notes as FDs

INDORE, DEC 31 /--/ Lokayukta Police has converted Rs 1.61 crores, seized in now banned Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denomination notes in the last 10 years, into fixed deposits as per Madhya Pradesh High Court order.

"We have deposited Rs 1,61,56,000 cash seized during raids at various premises of government officials and deposited it as fixed deposits at a nationalised bank," Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Lokayukta Indore, B S Patihar said.

The amount was seized in connection with 30 cases of alleged corruption in the last one decade.



School children celebrating the New Year at their school in Ahmedabad on Saturday.