



South Korean President Moon Jae-in and first lady Kim Jung-Suk greet a South Korean woman who was forced to work in Japanese wartime brothels as a "comfort woman" at the Presidential Blue House in Seoul, South Korea—REUTERS

ECHO WORLD

Oppn alleges conspiracy to axe Bengali-speaking people from Assam

Baseless charge, says Rajnath

NEW DELHI, JAN 4 /-/- Opposition members in the Lok Sabha today alleged a conspiracy to drive out Bengali-speaking people from Assam, a charge rejected as "baseless" by Union home minister Rajnath Singh. Trinamool Congress (TMC) member Saugata Roy raised the issue as soon as the Zero Hour began, pointing out that names of 1.3 crore people out of 3.29 crore population of Assam had not appeared in the first draft of National Register of Citizens, which aims at identifying illegal immigrants. "We fear this is a conspiracy to drive out Bengali-speaking people from Assam," Roy said, drawing vociferous support from his party MPs and some members of the Congress and the Left parties.

Responding to the claim, the home minister said the NCR work was going on under the supervision of the Supreme Court and there was no need for anyone to feel concerned. "Those whose names have been left out can approach a tribunal. It is a baseless allegation that some people



Trinamool Congress MPs raising slogans during a demonstration in front of the Gandhi statue at Parliament house in protest against alleged effort to drive out Bengali speaking people in Assam, in New Delhi on Thursday.

are being driven out," Singh said. The CPM too alleged that the linguistic minorities, including Bengalis, in Assam were being targeted in the name of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and said the problem should be resolved amicably on the basis of the Constitution and "not on the whims" of RSS-BJP. Charging the BJP government in the state with using religion and language as tools to divide the people of Assam, the party also

lashed out at the prime minister for allegedly "using vote bank politics to win polls" there. The Prime Minister is squarely responsible for this crisis, the party said. The Prime Minister for the sake of votes tried to rake up the same issue during the poll campaign in Assam. He had promised that all those who came from across the border will be sent back, as the RSS and BJP believe that all Bengali-speaking people are Bangladeshis. CPI(M) leader Mohd Salim told reporters here. Salim

claimed that though the "fragile unity" in Assam was somewhat achieved through the Assam Accord, the RSS has been propagating for long "to divide" the Bengali-speaking population using religion. Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal had on Wednesday said all those excluded in the first National Register of Citizens draft should not worry as no one will be discriminated against on the basis of caste or community and given opportunities to

prove their citizenship. Sonowal also said a mechanism has to be devised "humanely" by the Centre on what to do with those found to be illegal immigrants after finalisation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The BJP had made identification of illegal immigrants in Assam from Bangladesh, an overwhelming number of whom are Muslims, its key poll plank during the assembly polls in 2016.

Assam BJP attacks Mamata over her 'conspiracy' remark, urges NRC to file complaint against her

GUWAHATI, JAN 4 /-/- The BJP today urged the authorities involved with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam to file a complaint in the Supreme Court against West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee for alleging that the Centre was "hatching a conspiracy" to drive out Bengalis from the northeastern state. Assam BJP chief Ranjeet Kumar Dass claimed Mamata made the comment to lure Bengali-speaking people towards the Trinamool Congress, as the saffron party was strengthening its foothold in West Bengal. "We appeal to the NRC authorities to register a case of contempt of the Supreme Court," he told a press conference here. The NRC of 1951 is being updated in Assam under the supervision of the Supreme Court to identify original residents of the state in order to check illegal migration. Its first draft was published on December 31 midnight. Dass alleged that the West Bengal chief minister does not have any understanding of NRC's progress and wants to hamper the cordial relations between various religions and languages. "It was a conspiracy for political gain. She made this emotional statement as the Trinamool Congress is becoming weak. She knows that the BJP is going to come to power in West Bengal in future like other states," he claimed. The Assam BJP chief also claimed that even Bengali youth organisations in Assam were opposing the West Bengal chief minister's remark. Asked if the BJP will file a complaint against Mamata, he said: "We have informed the Assam chief minister about it." Mamata's speech and spotting of the Trinamool Congress banners around

Guwahati are signs that they have launched a conspiracy to spread unrest in the state, the BJP leader claimed. He said that irrespective of diverse languages, including Bengali, people in Assam are not moved by "such divisive speeches. Assam public works president Abhijit Sarma, who had filed a PIL in the Supreme Court for



update of the NRC said, her statement is contempt of the court as the NRC is being updated on the orders of the Supreme Court. Addressing a meeting on Wednesday, the West Bengal chief minister had accused the Centre of "excluding" names of Bengalis in Assam from the first draft of the NRC. "I warn the BJP government at the Centre not to play with fire... This is a conspiracy of the Centre to drive out around 1.80 crore people from the state," she had said. On BJP MLA Shiladitya Dev's reported statement that the first draft of the NRC contained names of foreigners, Dass said the legislator is a responsible person and should inform the NRC authorities if he has proper information.

BSF launches 'Operation Alert' to curb militant movement

Intruder killed, 2 Pak posts destroyed

JAMMU, JAN 4 /-/- The Border Security Force (BSF) has launched 'Operation Alert' along the over 200 kilometer long International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir to curb the increasing movement of infiltrating militants from across the border.

"There are inputs that there is movement of militants and accordingly, we have declared 'Ops Alert' on the border," Inspector General of BSF Jammu Frontier, Ram Awatar told newsmen here today. The BSF gave a military send-off by organising wreath-laying ceremony at Frontier headquarters here in the honour of the late head constable Radha Pada Hazara, who was killed in sniper firing by Pakistan Rangers along the IB in Samba sector on Wednesday. J&K DCP P S P. IGP Jammu Zone and Dr S D Singh attended the ceremony along with the IG BSF Jammu Ram Awatar and other senior officers and jawans of BSF. "It is because of that alertness that they have acted like that (resorting to sniper firing). The moral of the BSF is high and will continue to remain high," the IG said.

He said the effort of the BSF was to maintain peace along the border, but Pakistan was always trying to disturb this peace. "It is because of this machination of Pakistan that they yesterday martyred one jawan by sniping," he said. Giving details of Wednesday's incident, the IG said "this jawan was performing duty at a forward post and there were four to five rounds of fire from Pakistan and one of them hit him". It was followed by automatic weapon fire. After getting information the neighbouring mounts reloaded back and solid response was given by the BSF in which Pakistan has suffered large human and property loss," he added. Pak posts were destroyed and the entire infrastructure in those posts has been damaged, the officer said. He added that one intruder was killed in RS Pura sector today. "The increasing movement under thick cover of fog and one intruder was spotted well inside Indian territory and he was fired upon and shot dead. He was resident of Sialkot district (of Pakistan). It was an infiltration attempt," the officer said.

India rebuffs Pak over its 'propagandistic exercises after release of Kulbhushan's 2nd confession video

NEW DELHI, JAN 4 /-/- India today rebuffed Pakistan for carrying out "propagandistic exercises" by putting out "coerced" statements by Kulbhushan Jadhav on video, and said such actions by Islamabad carry no credibility. The hard-hitting response by India came after the Pakistan foreign ministry put out a video of Jadhav in which the 47-year-old Indian is purportedly asking India why it was "lying" that he was not working for an intelligence agency. In the video, Jadhav says he is a commissioned officer of the Indian Navy and that his commission has not gone. He also asked India why it was "lying" that he was not working for an intelligence agency.

However, the veracity of the video which was released by the Pakistan Foreign Office could not be ascertained. "This does not come as a surprise. Pakistan is simply continuing its practice of putting out coerced statements on video. It is time for them to realise that such propagandistic exercises simply carry no credibility," external affairs ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said. Jadhav also claimed in the video that the Pakistan government was taking good care of him. Reacting sharply, Kumar said: "The absurdity of a captive under duress certifying his own welfare while mouthing allegations of his captors clearly merits no comment." He also said that Pakistan is best advised to fulfill its international obligations, whether it pertains to consular relations or UNSC resolutions 1267 and 1373 on terrorism, and to desist from continuing violations of human rights of an Indian national. The video was released days after India had hit out at Pakistan for violating understandings over the Jadhav-family meet and raised questions about the Indian national's well being.

NRC: State determining fate of lakhs of applicants as Assam govt is sending documents for verification

SABYASACHI BANDOPADHYAY

KOLKATA, JAN 4 /-/- While, after the publication of the first draft of updated version of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, chief minister Mamata Banerjee has launched a vitriolic attack on the ruling BJP at the Centre of hatching a conspiracy to drive out Bengalis from that state, the home department of her government is working overtime to determine the fate of lakhs of applicants from Assam who placed documents to claim that they had been in West Bengal before March 24, 1971, the cut-off date for determination of nationality of the citizens in Assam.

Since mid-2016 the Assam government has sent documents of 1,48,900 lakh applicants to the West Bengal government and out of that documents of only about 8,000 applicants have been sorted out and sent back to Assam. About 50,000 documents are lying with various DMs. And there had been quite a few whose claims had proved false. Incidentally more documents are pouring in, according to officials. "We have been working religiously to verify the claims of the people that before going to Assam they had been residing in West Bengal before 1971. They have submitted various documents in support of their demand and we have sent them to concerned authorities for

verification. It's a long and tedious job. We are awfully short-staffed with just three people and we have requested for four more people for the job," an official of the state home department told the Echo of India. It was in 1985 that the Rajiv Gandhi-led Union government signed an agreement with the All Assam Students Union, spearheading a movement for driving out Bangladeshis illegally

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residing in Assam that those who came to Assam after March 24, 1971 would be deported from the state. Following a case filed by Assam Public Works, an NGO, in 2009, the Supreme Court fixed December 31, 2017 as the date for publishing the first draft of NRC. Out of 3.29 crore applicants, only the names 1.9 crore people have found place in the first draft.



Queue before an NRC Seva Kendra in Assam—File Pix

The Assam government said there would be two more lists and after that those who would not find their names would be deprived of their constitutional rights.

While today the Assam police has registered a case against Mamata for her criticism of the BJP for allegedly trying to drive Bengalis out of Assam, the Trinamool Congress seemed to be unfazed. "Nobody can stifle the voice of our chief minister who will always uphold the cause of hapless people," Partha Chatterjee, state minister for education and TMC secretary general said.

AT A GLANCE

Indian envoy meets top CPC official
BEIJING: Indian Ambassador to China Gautam Bambawale today held talks with Guo Jizhong, vice minister, International Department of the ruling Communist Party, amid efforts by the two nations to improve their ties post-Doklam. Guo is the senior most vice minister of the international department of the CPC which plays key role in policy formations. China's external relations, Bambawale, a seasoned diplomat who till recently served as high commissioner to Pakistan, assumed charge as India's ambassador to China last month.

Modi to get special gift from Netanyahu
JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will present a special gift - the Gal-Moblie water desalination and purification jeep - to his friend Narendra Modi during his visit to India starting January 14, according to sources here. Netanyahu and Modi waded into the Mediterranean Sea and rode the "buggy" jeep on the coast during the latter's visit to Israel in July last year. Now Netanyahu is going to gift the same jeep to Modi, informed sources said.

PUNE, JAN 4 /-/- An FIR was filed against Dalit leader Jignesh Mevani and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student leader Umar Khalid for their alleged "provocative" speeches during an event here on December 31, an official said today.

Both were charged for allegedly creating a rift and spreading disharmony between the Maratha and Dalit communities. Mevani, the newly elected MLA from Gujarat, and Khalid had attended the 'Elgar Parishad', an event organised to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the battle of Bhima Koregaon, at Shaniwar Wada in the city on

December 31. According to a complaint filed by city resident Akshay Bikkad Mevani and Khalid allegedly made "provocative" speeches at the event and their remarks were aimed at creating disharmony and rift between the communities, which led to the violence in Bhima Koregaon on January 1. Bikkad approached the Deccan-Gymkhana police with the complaint, which was forwarded to the Vishrambaug police station, since Shaniwarwada falls under its jurisdiction.

The Vishrambaug police registered the FIR against the two leaders on Wednesday, the official said. According to the complaint,



needed to be in assemblies and Parliament, but if one had to eradicate casteism, it would happen only by taking to the streets. According to the complaint, Khalid, the student leader

from JNU in New Delhi, said the battle of Bhima Koregaon had to be taken ahead. "They had attacked. It is time to retaliate and we will fight this battle and we will win and this victory over new Peshwa will be the true homage to the martyrs of Bhima Koregaon battle," the complaint quoted Khalid as saying. Based on the complaint, offences were registered against Mevani and Khalid under IPC sections 153 (a) (delivering speech to create disharmony or feelings of enmity, section 505 (giving statement conducive to public mischief) and 117 (abetting commission of offence by the public or more than ten persons), the

police official said. Normal life was crippled in Maharashtra on Wednesday due to a bandh called by Dalit groups to protest the violence on the anniversary of a battle fought 200 years ago. Meanwhile, members in the Rajya Sabha today condemned the state of caste violence in Maharashtra and demanded an impartial and speedy judicial inquiry to punish the culprits. The House, which had witnessed disruption of proceedings over the issue on Wednesday, today held a brief discussion when several members appealed for peace and unity among the various sections of the society.