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THE ECHO OF INDIA

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VOL XIV ISSUE NO 40

PAGES 12

KOLKATA • TUESDAY • JANUARY 30, 2018

Rs 1.50



The ill-fated bus being pulled out of the canal — EOI pix

Deaths of beloved teachers leave colleagues, students speechless

SOUMYA DE SARKAR

MALDA, JAN 29 /--/ Students of Palgachhi managed primary school and Birnagar primary school under Baishnabnagar circle in Malda were benumbed after they learnt about the unforeseen deaths of their teachers - Malay Biswas, 37 and Sujay Majumdar, 24 who were among the victims of the bus tragedy at Daulatabad in Murshidabad district today. Biswas and Majumdar, appointed as primary teachers less than a year ago boarded the ill-fated bus to reach their school after spending a couple of days with their families. Biswas of Karimpur area in Nadia district joined Palgachhi managed



Malay Biswas



Sujay Majumdar

primary school on February 4, 2017. Youngest of three brothers, the young teacher soon became popular among the pupils as they used to receive unexpected gifts like pencils, drawing books from 'Malay Sir'. His affection for the students was commendable. After joining the school he stayed in a mess at Pubarun township area. Recently, his family members were looking for his bride. He used to go home during vacations. It's incredible that Biswas would never meet his students," said Akhtar Ahmed, headmaster of the school. Colleagues used to tease Majumdar as his joining date was Feb 14, last year popularly known as the Valentine's Day. "Sujay was the only son of his father Bhupendranarayan Majumdar of Shitalnagar village at Domkal in Murshidabad district. Since his joining he stayed in a mess with other primary school teachers from other districts at a mess near Chamagram," said Ziaul Haque, headmaster of Birnagar primary school. "We all were anxious after coming to know about the bus-tragedy. We anticipated that Majumdar might have boarded the bus with an eye to reaching the school in time. Punctuality was one of his virtues. Being a young teacher he became very popular among the students in less than a year," Haque added. He along with his other colleagues started for Shitalnagar village in the afternoon to condole the bereaved family of the dead young teacher whose smiling face is still very alive in their memory.

Bus falls into canal in Murshidabad, 36 die

EOI CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA, JAN 29 /--/ In a ghastly accident, 36 people were killed and eight injured when a bus carrying more than 50 passengers crashed through the Balirghat bridge railing and plunged into a canal at Daulatabad in Murshidabad district at about 6 today morning, police said. The bus was going to Malda from Karimpur in Nadia district.

As time passes by the number of the dead is increasing, with police,

and Rs 50,000 for slightly injured. Primary investigations suggest the driver lost control of the vehicle as he was talking over his cellphone, the police said. "The incident is quite unfortunate. Dense fog might have caused poor visibility for the driver. People should be more cautious," Mamata who supervised rescue operations for some time and later went to Murshidabad Medical College to talk to the injured, said. Following the accident, angry locals pelted police with stones and



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee talking to senior officials of the government

fire brigade and members of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) keeping on their efforts to fish out more bodies, if any, from the bed of the river where the bus got entangled. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee who rushed to the site along with minister for transport Shubhendru Adhikary had earlier announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the next of kin of the dead, Rs 1 lakh for the seriously injured

Voting peaceful at Uluberia and Noapara by-polls

KOLKATA, JAN 29 /--/ Voting picked up by noon in Uluberia Lok Sabha constituency and Noapara assembly seat in West Bengal with the seats registering 48 per cent and 55 per cent polling respectively in the by-election. Voting was underway, when the last reports came in. "Till 1 pm 48 per cent and 55 per cent voting has been recorded in both the constituencies. The voting process is completely peaceful," a senior election official said. The elections were necessitated following the deaths of Sultan Ahmed, the TMC MP from Uluberia Lok Sabha constituency, and Madhusudan Ghose, the Congress MLA from Noapara Assembly seat. The TMC, which had been in power

torched two police vehicles, accusing them of arriving late for rescue operations. Stones were hurled at a fire tender that was sent there to put out the fire. Police lobbed teargas shells and baton-charged the protesters. Hundreds of villagers as well as anxious relatives of the passengers gathered on the canal banks as four cranes were pressed into service to fish out the bus submerged in the water.

in the Uluberia seat since 2009, has fielded Sultan Ahmed's wife Sajda this time. The CPM-led Left Front has put up Sabiruddin Molla and Congress S K Madassara Hossain Warsi. The BJP has fielded its district committee leader Anupam Mallik from the seat. Five independents are also in the fray for the Lok Sabha seat. In Noapara, the TMC has fielded Sunil Singh, while the CPM has put up Gargi Chatterjee. Goutam Bose is the Congress contestant and Sandip Banerjee of BJP. The Uluberia Lok Sabha seat has 15,77,396 voters and the Noapara Assembly seat has 2,46,522 voters. The results will be announced on February 1, the EC said.

Prez calls for 'sustained debate' over holding simultaneous polls

■ Says Govt committed to empowerment, not appeasement

NEW DELHI, JAN 29 /--/ President Ram Nath Kovind today called for a "sustained debate" on holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies, saying all parties need to arrive at a consensus over the issue.

In his maiden address to the joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament at the beginning of the Budget session here, Kovind said citizens alive to the state of governance in the country were concerned about frequent elections in one part of the country or another, which adversely impacted the economy and development. "Frequent elections not only impose a huge burden on human resources but also impede the development process due to the promulgation of the model code of conduct," he said. The President said a "sustained debate" was required on the subject of simultaneous elections and "all political parties need to arrive at a consensus on this issue". Kovind's remarks came days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a fresh pitch for holding the polls together. Modi had said that like festivals, elections should be held on fixed dates so that governments can function for five years. He had also said that barbs exchanged during campaigning in one state have a bearing in other parts of the country which are not going to polls. The Prime Minister was of the

view that once the elections are held together, the central and the state governments can devote the next five years to governance which otherwise suffers due to frequent polls. Newly-appointed chief election commissioner O P Rawat had recently thrown a word of caution over the issue, saying the legal framework required to hold the two elections together will take a "lot of time" to get ready. Rawat had also said he would be the wrong person to respond to whether simultaneous polls could be held in 2019.

In his address, the President today also said that the government was ready for a dialogue with anyone who shunned violence and reposed faith in the Constitution. He said terrorist violence in the interiors of Jammu and Kashmir is directly related to cross-border infiltration. "With better coordination, our Army, Paramilitary forces and Jammu and Kashmir Police are giving a befitting response to the perpetrators," he said. The President also mentioned that security situation in Naxal-affected areas and insurgency-hit Northeastern

states has improved significantly. "My government has kept open the path of dialogue with those who wish to shun violence and join the mainstream, while reposing faith in the Constitution of India," he said. The President said the government is committed to "empowerment and not appeasement", and is making

"intensive" efforts for the education and socio-economic development of the minorities, President Ram Nath Kovind said today. He also said the government is "continuously" working with "utmost sensitivity" towards empowerment and economic inclusion of the over 2.50 crore 'divyang' (persons with disabilities) in the country. "Committed to 'empowerment and not appeasement', my Government is making intensive efforts for the economic, social and educational empowerment of the minorities," the president said. Kovind also talked about the government's reform to allow women above 45 years of age to perform Haj without 'Mehram' (male guardian). This year, more than 1,300 women will undertake the pilgrimage without Mehram. (PTI)



PM asks political parties to help pass triple talaq bill

NEW DELHI, JAN 29 /--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a fresh pitch for early passage of the bill to criminalise the practice of instant triple talaq by "humbly requesting" political parties to pass it in the Budget session which began today. In his customary address to the media outside Parliament House building on the first day of the session, Modi said it was the Union government's effort as well as the expectation of the people that there would be no politics on an important issue like triple talaq and Muslim women would get their right. "But in the last session, despite a Supreme Court ruling, we could not get the bill passed in Parliament. I hope and I humbly request all political parties of the country to get the bill passed in this session as a New Year gift of 2018 to Muslim women," he said. The Prime Minister said at a time when credit agencies, the IMF and the World Bank are giving positive opinion about India, the Budget will give a new energy to the economy which is already surging ahead. Modi hoped that the Budget would live up to the expectations of the common man. He also said Parliamentary committees should do more to evaluate various provisions in the budget and come up with a roadmap. Modi today also asked NDA leaders to work towards creating an environment in favour of holding simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, a BJP ally said after a meeting of the ruling alliance. The BJP-led NDA also passed a resolution hailing the Prime Minister for his speech in the World Economic Forum in Davos and the presence of heads of ten ASEAN countries as chief guests at the Republic Day parade, sources said. On the issue of simultaneous polls, Modi said the leaders can start debating the matter and help create a positive atmosphere in its favour, a leader, who attended the meeting, said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the media ahead of the Budget Session of Parliament, in Parliament House, New Delhi — PIB

AT A GLANCE

Bail granted to Matang Sinha

KOLKATA: The Calcutta High Court today granted bail to former union minister Matang Sinha, who was arrested by the CBI for his alleged connection with the Saradha chit fund scam, on bail bonds



of Rs 1.01 crore. A division bench comprising Justice Joymaloy Bagchi and Justice R Bharadwaj granted bail to Sinha on five bonds of Rs 20 lakh each and a relative to provide another Rs 1 lakh as bond. The bench directed him not to leave West Bengal without permission from the trial court.

New foreign secy assumes charge

NEW DELHI: Seasoned diplomat Vijay Keshav Gokhale, considered an expert on China and East Asia, today took charge as India's foreign secretary, a post that he is set



to hold for the the next two years. A 1981-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, Gokhale succeeds S Jaishankar. Gokhale served as secretary (economic relations) in the ministry of external affairs (MEA) before taking up the new role.

Economic Survey asks Indians to confront son preference

NEW DELHI, JAN 29 /--/ The pink coloured Economic Survey document tabled by Union finance minister Arun Jaitley in Parliament today recommended that India must confront the societal metapreference for a son, observing that the adverse sex ratio of females to males has led to 63 million "missing" women. The colour of this year's survey cover was chosen as a symbol of support for the growing movement to end violence against women, which spans continents. Laying special emphasis on gender development, the Survey cautioned that on several indicators, notably employment, use of reversible contraception, and son preference, India has some distance to traverse despite the country's economic progress. The Survey states that just as India has committed to moving up the ranks in Ease of Doing Business indicators, a similar commitment should be endeavoured on the gender front. The percentage of working women has declined over time from 36 per cent being employed in 2005-06 to 24 per cent of women employed in 2015-16, pointed out the Survey. It acknowledges that Union government's 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' and 'Sukanya Samridhi Yojana' schemes, and mandatory maternity leave rules are all steps in the right direction, pointing out that measures such as increasing maternity leave will offer support to women in the workforce. Given these observations, the states and all stakeholders have an important role to play in increasing opportunities available for women in education and employment, it said. As per the Survey, nearly 47 per cent of women do not use any contraception, and of those who do, less than a third use female-controlled reversible contraception. The Survey highlighted another phenomenon of son metapreference which involves parents adopting fertility "stopping rules" having children until the desired number of sons is born. "This metapreference leads naturally to the national category of 'unwanted' girls which is estimated at over 21 million," says the Survey. Consigning these odious categories to history soon should be society's objective, opines the Survey.

Centre seeks to withdraw last 4 companies of CPMF from hills

NEW DELHI, JAN 29 /--/ The Union government today told the Supreme Court that it wants to withdraw the last four companies of Central Para-military Forces from two districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal for deployment in three poll-bound North-Eastern (N-E) states. The government said it has received a recommendation from Election Commission of India (ECI) for deployment of central paramilitary forces (CPMF) in three N-E states of Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya, in which assembly elections

will be held in February. A bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud sought the response from West Bengal government in three days and posted the matter for further hearing on February 5. Attorney General K K Venugopal, appearing for Centre, told the bench that the ECI has sought deployment of 300 companies of paramilitary forces in Tripura where polling will be held on February 18. "The ECI has also sought deployment of 270 companies in Nagaland and 100 companies in Meghalaya. Assembly polls

in both the states will be held on February 27," he said. Venugopal said the Centre cannot forever keep paramilitary forces in the two districts of West Bengal which had recently seen violent incidents and they needed to be shifted to the neighbouring poll-bound states. On November 27 last year, the apex court had permitted the Centre to withdraw four of the eight companies of CPMF from strife-torn Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts, the scene of unrest over statehood demand, for deployment in Gujarat. It had allowed the transfer of

these forces after being informed by Centre that the situation in country's eastern part was fast returning to normal. The Centre had said the Union of India was alive to the situation prevailing in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts and now "the situation there is returning to normalcy". On October 27 last year, the court had permitted the Centre to withdraw seven of the total 15 companies of CPMF from Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal. Observing that law and order was a "state subject", the court had stayed a Calcutta High Court

order restraining the Centre from relocating the paramilitary forces from the state. The High Court had asked the Centre to allow all 15 companies of paramilitary forces to remain deployed in West Bengal. It had stayed the withdrawal of paramilitary forces from Darjeeling hill till October 27 after the state government approached it opposing the Centre's decision. The Centre had said it needed to deploy the forces in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, besides the borders of Jammu and Kashmir and in the N-E. (PTI)