



THE ECHO OF INDIA



Principal goes on leave, G D Birla School to re-open today

KOLKATA, DEC 6 /.../ After a 6-day stand-off with parents that led to the shut-down of the school following sexual abuse of a nursery student, the G. D. Birla Centre for Education is going to re-open on Thursday as principal Sharmila Nath had been asked to go on a temporary leave by the authorities. This was revealed by the forum of parents who had a two-hour long meeting with the school management with the demand, among others, dis-

missal of the principal. "The principal is not going to be there in the school from tomorrow and the vice-principal will be in charge," said a member of the forum who was in the delegation that met the management. Meanwhile today chief minister Mamata Banerjee said certain political parties were trying to score brownie points over the alleged sexual assault incident at G D Birla Centre for Education here. She alleged that such parties

wanted the school to be shut so that other students of the institute suffer. "The incident which happened at the school is very unfortunate... But certain political parties are trying to score brownie points over it. They want the school to be closed so that the other children suffer. They believe in politics of closing down everything," Mamata said at a rally here. A four-year-old nursery student was allegedly sexually assaulted by

two male teachers inside the prominent private school on December 1, where a similar incident had taken place three years ago, triggering angry protests by guardians. The chief minister had on Tuesday said that some people were trying to politicise the situation in the school. She has also noted that teachers, particularly those in co-education schools, have to share an extra responsibility and ensure such incidents do not take place.

Prez, PM and Rahul pay tributes to Ambedkar

NEW DELHI, DEC 6 /.../ President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi today paid tributes to the architect of the Constitution, B R Ambedkar, on his death anniversary. The leaders paid floral tributes to Ambedkar, hailed for his contribution towards uplift of Dalits, at Parliament House Lawns here. Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Thawar Chand Gehlot and senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge also paid respects to Ambedkar there. "I bow to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on his Mahaparinirvan Diwas," the Prime Minister said on Twitter. Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi too paid tribute to the architect of the Constitution on his death anniversary and said men might be mortal but their ideas need to be propagated. Rahul, poised to take over as Congress president, took to Twitter to remember Ambedkar, hailed for his contribution towards the uplift of Dalits. "Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise, both will wither and die. My tributes to #BabasahebAmbedkar on #MahaParinirvanaDiwas," Rahul said. Ambedkar passed away on this day in 1956. He was 65 then.

Sixteen VHP supporters arrested in Siliguri

PRASHANT ACHARYA

SILIGURI, DEC 6 /.../ Siliguri Police today arrested sixteen members of Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) for organizing a public rally while celebrating 25th years of Babri Masjid demolition without permission from the local authorities.

VHP and its youth wing Bajrang Dal have organised a protest rally nationwide to celebrate 25th years of Babri Masjid demolition today in the name of Shaurya Diwas (Day of Valour). Six leaders have been arrested from Siliguri while other members

were arrested from various areas under Siliguri Mahakuma. Bajrang Dal has planned to organise the protest rally in front of head post office of Siliguri today morning. While putting the party flag police first arrested four members later two more were arrested. The meeting was cancelled after police arrested the members. VHP district president Suva Sheel said: "We have planned to celebrate Saurya Diwas to mark protest on the 25th years of Babri Masjid demolition but the public rally was cancelled due to intervention of police. We were not allowed to organize protest meeting."



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressing the rally near Gandhi statue in the Maidan —Arijit Ganguly

Intolerance has become the agenda of Centre: Mamata

Abhishek challenges BJP, makes veiled attack on Mukul

DEBANJAN MUKHERJEE

KOLKATA, DEC 6 /.../ "Till my death, I will keep raising my voice against wrongdoings and injustice and no one can stifle my voice", chief minister Mamata Banerjee said today attacking the BJP. At a rally organised by Trinamool Youth Congress to observe 25th year of Babri Masjid Demolition at Esplanade, Mamata said: "Intolerance has become the main agenda of the government sitting at the Centre. They are not ready to accept any kind of criticism. Journalists across the country are being killed just because of writing against their wrongdoings". "The national media have been purchased. Not a single channel now has the guts to show or speak anything that offend the BJP government. I don't blame the journalists because the owners of their media houses have been purchased. They simply keep criticizing the small regional parties", she added. Referring to the arrest of party MPs Sudip Bandopadhyay, Tapas Paul and former state minister Madan Mitra, the TMC supremo said: "They have arrested Sudip Bandopadhyay and Tapas Paul on charges that they have failed to prove. What was their fault? They made use of donations during election campaign. Very few leaders have the monetary strength to fight election on their own and so they accept donations. The have submitted their records to the Election Commission. Now let the Commission decide whether what they did was legal or illegal". The chief minister today also advocated electoral reforms in the country so that the practice of election funding by political parties comes to an end. Attacking the Union government over intolerance, Mamata today alleged that over 75,000 businessmen have left the country in the last four years. "I have records. Over 75,000 industrialists have become NRIs in the last four years. The Modi government had promised to bring back black money from abroad and put Rs 15 lakh in every citizen's bank account. But instead of doing that these industrialists have left the country with their bank balance. If each of them has left with at least Rs 50 crore, you can calculate how much money has gone out of the country," she said. "I challenge all parties that keep criticising the Trinamool Congress round the clock to arrange a rally of this size on a notice of just 48 hours. Let them do it first and then they can criticise this government". Launching a veiled attack on Mukul Roy, who joined BJP recently, Banerjee said: "Somebody who has left the party and is now dreaming to bring change in Bengal has never won an election. I challenge him to pick any seat from the 294 Assembly constituencies and contest the next Assembly elections. If he manages to win I will quit politics".

Politicisation of military taking place, it has to stop: Army Chief

NEW DELHI, DEC 6 /.../ Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat today said there was a politicisation of the armed forces and the military "should be somehow" kept away from politics. The Army Chief also said the norm in the "good old days" was never to discuss women and politics in the forces. However, these subjects were gradually "inching" their way into the discourse and this should be avoided, General Rawat added. "The military should be somehow kept out of politics. Of late, we have been seeing that politicisation of the military has been taking place. I think we operate in a very secular environment. We have a very vibrant democracy where the military should stay far

away from the polity," he said. The Army Chief was speaking at an event organised by the United Service Institution. In the "good old days", the norm was that women and politics were never discussed in the forces, he said. However, these subjects were gradually "inching" their way into the discourse and this should be avoided, he added. "Whenever (any) issue (of) linking any military establishment or military personnel where political entity comes in then...that is best avoided," Gen-

eral Rawat said. The Army Chief declined to elaborate on the statement. The defence forces, he asserted, do best when they don't meddle in the political affairs of the nation. Responding to criticism over the Army being asked to build foot overbridges following the stampede at Mumbai's Elphinstone railway station in October, Rawat said there is a charter of aid to civilians under which the armed forces help out in times of crises like floods and earthquakes. Navy chief Admiral Sunil Lanba,

who is also chairman of the powerful chiefs of staff committee (CoSC), has taken up the issue of capping educational assistance with the defence ministry, he said. There has been some resentment in the three services of the armed forces over the defence ministry's decision to cap the educational assistance it gives to children of martyrs or those disabled in action at Rs 10,000 per month. The Army Chief added that there was a "misunderstanding" on the issue and Defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman had assured that addressing the problem was a priority. The Army Chief also noted that there was radicalisation among the youth by terror outfits and the issue was being addressed.



Gen. Bipin Rawat

ATA GLANCE

US House passes Bill on Rohingya

WASHINGTON, DEC 6 /.../ The US House of Representatives has condemned the "ethnic cleansing" of Rohingya Muslims and called on Myanmar's leadership to end attacks on minorities in the Rakhine state, in the stiffest congressional criticism of the government in the Buddhist-majority country. The House passed a resolution on Tuesday, urging immediate restoration of humanitarian access to the Rakhine state where unrest has forced over 600,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh. (Details on Page 4)

Plot to kill British PM May foiled

LONDON: An Islamist terror plot to assassinate British Prime Minister Theresa May by detonating an explosive device to storm into her Downing Street office has been foiled by the country's security services, media reports said today. Two men, 20-year-old Naa'imur Zakariyah Rahman and 21-year-old Mohammed Aqib Imran, appeared at Westminster Magistrates' Court in London today charged with terror offences following their arrest by counter-terrorism officers on November 28. They have been remanded in custody to appear before the Old Bailey court in the city on December 20.

Left Front takes out rally against communalism

KOLKATA, DEC 6 /.../ The CPM-led Left Front took out rally here today, the 25th anniversary of Babri Masjid demolition, urging people to maintain communal harmony and peace in the country. The Left parties called for maintaining peace and tranquility in the state and country and resisting communal forces. Senior Left leaders like CPM state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra, Left Front chairman Biman Bose and several other top Left leader participated in the rally. "Not only a mosque was demolished 25 years back, it was demolition of India's culture of unity in diversity. Observe BLACK DAY on 6/12 to resist any onslaught on the fundamental principles of our Constitution laid down in its Preamble,"

Mishra had tweeted few days back. "Let's hit the street and pledge to oust BJP from power everywhere with the people's mandate so that another black day do not recur ever," he had said. Meanwhile, in New Delhi Six left parties today urged the Union government to punish those responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and said they would continue to put pressure on it till the guilty were booked. "We will put pressure on the government through mass movements till the people responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid are booked," CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said at a protest march in Delhi.

Land mafias attack TMC leader in Siliguri

SILIGURI, DEC 6 /.../ TMC leader Shikha Chatterjee was attacked by land mafias in Siliguri's Ashighar area on Tuesday night. Chatterjee has been admitted at a private nursing home after injury. Four more TMC members were also injured in the incident. Police have arrested two persons so far in the case. According to the information, Dipesh Debnath was residing in a house built over two khattas of land but the land mafias

have thrown him out of his house and threatened with dire consequences. Dipesh and his family members sought the TMC leader's help to get their house back. Dipesh said that when Chatterjee took them to their house, suddenly land mafias attacked them. Local TMC members 'ghareed' Ashighar police station after the incident and lodged written complaint against seven persons allegedly involved for attacking TMC leader and four others.

Dhananjaya, Roshen deny India 2-0

—See page-8

UP becomes 1st state to endorse Centre's Triple Talaq draft bill

LUCKNOW, DEC 6 /.../ Uttar Pradesh has become the first state to endorse the Centre's draft bill that makes instant triple talaq a cognisable and non-bailable offence. The draft law, which provides for three years' imprisonment and a fine to a Muslim man trying to divorce his wife by uttering "talaq" three times, got the UP government's approval at a meeting of the state cabinet chaired by chief minister Yogi Adityanath here last on Tuesday night. "The Centre's draft Bill on

triple talaq has been endorsed by the Cabinet. The Centre had asked the states to send their respective views on it by December 10," UP government spokesman and cabinet minister Siddharth Nath Singh said. Uttar Pradesh has become the first state to give its nod to the proposal, which is to be introduced as a bill in the Winter session of Parliament beginning next week, an official said. There have been 177 reported cases of instant talaq before the judgement and 66 after the Supreme

Court order this year. "...Uttar Pradesh tops the list," he said. As per the draft, triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat will be a "cognisable and non-bailable" offence punishable with three years imprisonment and the wife will be entitled to maintenance and the custody of children if they are minor. The Supreme Court had on August 22 struck down triple talaq, calling the Islamic practice unconstitutional and in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution, which provides for equality before the law.

The draft 'Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Marriage Bill' was sent by the Centre to the state governments for their views as the practice continued despite the Supreme Court striking it down. The draft was prepared by an inter-minister group headed by Union home minister Rajnath Singh. The proposed law would only be applicable on instant triple talaq or 'talaq-e-biddat' and it would give power to the victim to approach a magistrate seeking "subsistence allowance" for herself



and minor children. The woman can also seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take a final call on the issue. Under the draft law, triple talaq in any form -- spoken, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp -- would be bad or illegal and void. The provision of subsistence allowance and custody has been made to ensure that in case the husband asks the wife to leave the house she should have legal protection.

Track Record
29 years

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