The last sunset of the year 2017 at Babughat, Kolkata-Pix by Arijit Ganguly

Assam govt to release first draft of National Register of Citizens

GUWAHATI, DEC 31 /--/ At the stroke of midnight today, the Assam government will release the first draft of the much-awaited National Register of Citizens (NRC) with names of 2.24 crore bona fide Indian citizens. Of the 3.28 crore people who had applied for inclusion in the registry, 2.24 crore have found a place in the first draft following verification of their documents. The rest will be considered in the next two drafts, chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal told media persons on Saturday.

"As per hon'ble Supreme Court's order, there will be two more drafts of the NRC and the names of all genuine citizen claimants whose names do not feature in the first publication will be included in it after verification of the pending documents," Sonowal said. Dispelling apprehensions over security, Sonowal said no untoward situation is expected to arise as the district administrations have been conducting public meetings and campaigns to explain to the people the updating procedures. The chief minister also said the media have an important role to play in disseminating correct information to the public. "Social media will be monitored closely for misinformation on the NRC draft and strict action will be taken against those attempting to create trouble," he said. Asked about a tentative date for release of the final draft, Sonowal said, "The Assam government is conducting the NRC updation process with the state government machinery, the district deputy commissioners' offices mobilised for it on the orders of the Supreme Court... The complete draft will be published after verification of all documents of those who had applied for inclusion."

The state coordinator for NRC, Prateek Hajela, asserted that genuine Indian citizens need not panic if their names have not appeared in the first draft as verification process is yet to be completed. "If the name of any genuine Indian citizen does not appear in the first draft, it means the verification process of that person is yet to be completed," Hajela said, adding there will be scope for making claims after the final draft is published. Union home secretary Rajiv Gauba, during his visit to the state, had also said there will be an opportunity for claims and objections after the release of the third draft. "Those who do not find their names in the first draft need not worry as there will be opportunities for subsequent investigation and document verification," Gauba had said after reviewing the NRC updating process in Assam. The office of the state coordinator for NRC has made elaborate arrangements for people to check their names in the first draft at NRC sewa kendras across the state from 8 am on January 1. They can also check for information online and through SMS services. Assam, which faced influx from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only state having an NRC, first prepared in 1951. According to the Assam government's official website, "The NRC is a register containing names of Indian citizens. The only time that a National Register of Citizens (NRC) was prepared was in 1951 when after conduct of the Census of 1951."

It was prepared by recording particulars of all the persons enumerated during that Census, the website said. The issue of updating the NRC of 1951 was first raised by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) more than three decades ago. The students' body had submitted a memorandum to the Centre on January 18, 1980, two months after launching the anti-illegal foreigners Assam Movement. On November 17, 1999, at an official-level tripartite meeting to review the implementation of the Assam Accord, a decision was taken that the NRC would be updated and the Centre sanctioned Rs 20 lakh for the purpose and released Rs 5 lakh of it to start the exercise. The final decision to update the NRC was taken on May 5, 2005 when then then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chaired a meeting to review the implementation of the accord. Thereafter, the government created a directorate for updating the NRC and the process of computerisation of the voters' list up to 1971 and the NRC of 1951 began.

A pilot project that was launched in two revenue circles of Barpeta and Chaygaon was suspended after a violent protest by a few organisations. The state government then formed a Group Of Ministers (GoM) to hold talks with different organisations to draft modalities for updating the NRC. "The updating process finally gained momentum after the Supreme Court started monitoring its progress and set December 31 midnight as the date for publication of the first draft of the NRC. (PTI)

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel stand guard at a temporary camp ahead of the publication of the first draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the Juria village of Nagaon district in the northeastern state of Assam

Maoists torch machines of agency engaged in gas pipeline work

GAYA, DEC 31 /--/ Maoists have torched two poke lane machines and a vehicle of the agency engaged in the construction of Jagdishpur-Haldia gas pipeline project in Bihar's Gaya district, police said today. The incident occurred at Kaaj village under Guraru police station area of the district late Saturday night when Maoists torched two poke lane machines and a vehicle of an agency for not paying levy, city superintendent of police J Jalla Reddy said. The Maoists also beat the staff of the agency and threatened that they will not allow the work to be completed unless and until they pay levy, the city SP said. An FIR has been lodged against unknown Maoists the SP said and added that police are conducting raids to nab them. (PTI)

Old woman, two grandchildren charred to death

HAJIPUR, DEC 31 /--/ An old woman and her two little grandchildren were burnt alive when their hut caught fire in Vaishali district, police said on Saturday. The incident took place in Sarai police station area late last night where 65-year-old Sudama Devi, her grandson Manish (8) and granddaughter Chandni (10) were charred to death while they were asleep inside their hut at Anwarpur village, SHO of the police station Raman Kumar said. He said the fire appeared to have caused by sparks from an electricity cable that passed close to their hut. The flames were doused by the fire brigade and the bodies were handed over to family members for last rites after a postmortem, the SHO said. (PTI)

New Meghalaya Cong chief appointed

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /--/ A day after five Congress MLAs resigned from the Meghalaya Assembly to join NDA constituent NPP, party president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday appointed Celestine Lyngdoh the new state unit chief replacing DD Lapang.

Lyngdoh is a minister in chief minister Mukul Sangma's Cabinet. Lapang will be an adviser to the state unit. Gandhi appointed Vincent H Pala the working president of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee.

He formed a 13-member pradesh election committee under Lyngdoh, with Mukul Sangma as a member. The state goes to polls early next year. In a setback to the Congress in Meghalaya, eight MLAs including five from the party on Saturday resigned from the assembly to join NDA-affiliated National People's Party (NCC).

With the resignations, the number of Congress MLAs in the 60-member Meghalaya Assembly has come down to 24. Gandhi also formed an election committee, campaign committee and media committee of the Nagaland Pradesh Congress in view of elections in the state, AICC general secretary Janardan Dwivedi said in a statement. There will be the chairman of the election committee for Nagaland. Ayangba Aonok will head the campaign committee, while captain G K Zhimomi will lead the media committee. (PTI)

Former Mao stronghold is now set for green drive

JAMSHEDPUR, DEC 31 /--/ Jiyan village, a sleeping hamlet about 80km from here, is all set to cultivate land scientifically for better yields. The East Singhbhum district police and Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS) have come together to start a green revolution in this remote village, previously a stronghold of the CPI (Maoists), senior superintendent of police Anoop T Mathew said.

"With little help from farmers of adjoining areas, the district police officers have recently started training the residents of Jiyan on how to cultivate land scientifically," he said. The initiative is a part of a promise made by the police department to the people of this village following the surrender of two Maoists from this area, Kanhu Munda and Fogra Munda, in February. "A majority of the villagers depends on agriculture, thus we have decided to focus on developing farming facilities here with an aim to improve their earnings," Mathew said, admitting that the village lacked irrigation facilities. Last week, Mathew, along with a police team and the officials of Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS), had visited the place to offer farming tips to the villagers. As of now, the Tata Steel Rural Development Society has made arrangements for sourcing water from a nearby hilltop and utilising it in the farms, he said while assuring people that a check dam would be set up in the vicinity soon. About 60 villagers along with some reformed Maoists have been participating in the development process. The department has also made arrangements for some residents to visit the adjoining Patamda village for a first-hand experience of scientific farming from the cultivators there. As a part of the initiative, 25 acres were ploughed so far and fertilizers and seeds for farming vegetables such as brinjal, tomatoes, cabbage, and cauliflowers were distributed among the Jiyan villagers, Mathew said. "Our motive was not just to force the Maoists to surrender but to solve the problems that prompted them to join the Maoist outfits," he told PTI. Efforts are on to improve irrigation facilities in and around the hamlet so that the villagers get to earn their livelihood through farming, Mathew, who is confident that a green revolution would bring an end to the red revolution, said. (PTI)

State Notes

Bengal BJP intellectual cell convenor joins TMC

KOLKATA, DEC 31 /--/ In a jolt to West Bengal unit of the BJP, convenor of the party's state intellectual cell Diptangshu Chowdhury joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Saturday. Chowdhury, a former army officer, had joined the BJP ahead of the Assembly elections last year and had unsuccessfully contested the polls. Chowdhury, who was later appointed as convenor of the state unit's intellectual cell, joined the ruling TMC in presence of TMC secretary general Partha Chatterjee. He said he wants to be part of the developmental process started by West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. State BJP president Dilip Ghosh said Chowdhury's leaving the party would not have any impact in the state as he did not have the skill to form party organization. (PTI)

Three militants held in Manipur

IMPHAL, DEC 31 /--/ Three militants were arrested by security personnel from Imphal East district. The three militants of the newly floated United Naga People Council were arrested by a combined team of police and Assam Rifles from Lamlai Mayai Leikai in Imphal East district, an Assam Rifles release said on Saturday night. One 9 mm pistol along with five live rounds, three mobile phones and a two wheeler were seized from the possession of the arrested militants. (PTI)

SSB jawan attempts suicide

KISHANGANJ, DEC 31 /--/ A jawan of the Sashashtra Seema Bal (SSB) tried to commit suicide by shooting himself in Bihar's Kishanganj district. He is now under treatment in a critical condition, SSB deputy commandant Vinay Kumar Ojha said on Saturday. Raj Kumar Yadav of SSB 19th battalion shot himself in the head with an INSAS rifle of a colleague late last night while he was on duty at Kurlikot border outpost. After hearing the gun shot, BPO in-charge Bablu Kshetri and other jawans of the camp reached the spot and saw that Raj Kumar was bleeding profusely. He was admitted to a nursing home at Siliguri in West Bengal where has been put on ventilator, Ojha said. Why Yadav tried to kill himself is being probed, the police said. (PTI)

Various projects inaugurated at Bhubaneswar rly station

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 31 /--/ A host of projects including a second entry and station building with new ticket booking complex were inaugurated at Bhubaneswar station here on Saturday with the Centre promising to transform the Odisha capital into a modern city of global standards.

Union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan and minister of state for railways Rajen Gohain also dedicated to the public a new booking office with reserved and unreserved ticketing system at Sakhigopal station through video conferencing from Bhubaneswar, on this occasion. Praising the railways for development of infrastructure in the region, Pradhan sought steps to speed up the projects by continuous review and said the Centre was keen to make Bhubaneswar a modern and international city. The Centre's vision is to make Odisha the gateway of development in the East and the city will be centre and focus of development in the state, he said. Both Railways and Odisha government have to jointly work and solve the problems relating to land acquisition issues which emerged as a major bottleneck for railway projects, the union minister said. The allocation of funds for railway projects is very high and these funds should be fully utilised for the benefit of infrastructural projects, he said. Pradhan appreciated the efforts of East Coast Railway (ECoR) in planning 6-metre wide foot over bridges at Bhubaneswar and Bhadrakh and said all efforts should be made to complete the work in 2018. He said that the civil aviation ministry has submitted a proposal to the state for allotment of land for a second airport in Bhubaneswar. Stating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has plans for expansion of national highways and expansion of railways in Odisha will be its focal point. Hailing the performance of East Coast Railways, Gohain said funds for the projects will not be a constraint as the Railway ministry will provide full support for infrastructure development. Gohain said that the on-going railway projects in the region will be completed as per the target date. He also urged state Government to cooperate with the Railways by providing land so that the ongoing projects are completed at the earliest. The new station building on platform number six of Bhubaneswar station has been completed at a cost of Rs 1.97 crore having facilities like booking counter cum lobby, second class waiting hall, upper class waiting hall, food plaza, TCI office, toilets for divyang passengers, pay and use toilets and circulating area with barricade, a railway official said. The new station building at Sakhigopal station has been completed at a cost of Rs 1.55 crore with facilities like booking counter cum lobby, second class waiting hall, toilets for men and women, circulating area and approach road, he added. (PTI)

Four held in Balasore killing case

BALASORE, DEC 31 /--/ Four persons were arrested on saturday including the wife of a man who was hacked to death in Odisha's Balasore district two weeks ago, police said. The woman, allegedly with help of her paramour and two other hired killers, eliminated Madhav Behera on December 17.

The arrested woman was identified as Basanti Behera (37), her paramour Bhagirathi Patra (40), Akash Das of Basta (23) and Banchhanidhi Chanda (28) of Baisinga under Mayurbhanj district. The accused persons were forwarded to court after being booked under section of murder, suppression of evidence and common intention, said Inspector-in-charge of Sahadevkhunta police station Paresh Rout. According to police, Basanti, the wife of the slain Madhab Behera, was the mastermind behind the crime. The police said Madhab Behera (42) was allegedly physically and mentally torturing his wife Basanti. Basanti along with her brother-in-law cum paramour conspired to eliminate her husband. They took help of the accused duo Ashok and Banchhanidhi to commission the crime. Accordingly, Rs 50,000 was given as supari to the duo to kill Madahab, police said. While Basanti had given Rs 30,000, her paramour Bhagirathi chipped in with another Rs 20,000 for the purpose. At around 10 pm on December 17, the locals found Madhab with serious injures under a bridge near Naharpatna beside NH-60, police said. Though he was rushed to the district headquarter hospital, the doctors declared Madhab dead. (PTI)

Puri pandas to visit shrines for tips on hygiene, good conduct

PURI, DEC 31 /--/ The New Year promises to be a good one for those hoping to visit Puri's revered Jagannath Temple, for plans are afoot to train its pandas or priests by taking them on a tour of shrines across India. A group of pandas, who perform a spate of rituals, will travel to other noted places of worship to pick up tips on cleanliness, a temple official said. The temple authorities are working out an itinerary for the tour, which is expected to start in next winters.

The move follows complaints about the behaviour of the pandas, many of whom are said to intimidate worshippers with demands for dakshina or by forcing them to undergo rituals. "We are planning to take around 60 sevayats to different religious places such as the Vaishno Devi temple, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Tirupati Balaji and the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Kerala. We call it an exposure trip because it will show them how others behave with devotees," a highly-placed temple official told PTI. The Puri temple has some 120 categories of sevaks or pandas tasked with performing specific duties. The 2015 census states that there are about 8,000 sevaks, or about 1,200 families.

"Most of them have never moved out of Puri. They are confined to the temple premises. Their behaviour and attitude towards devotees and hygiene had been very poor," said former chief administrator of the temple and ex-collector of Puri, Suresh Chandra Mohapatra. Mahopatra, during an earlier stint as the temple's chief administrator, had started the exercise. From 2006 to 2008, pandas were taken to other shrines, with the temple administration bearing all expenses. "We arranged this anubhav yatra because we wanted to expose them to some other big temples and gurudwaras. It was a structured programme and they were given notebooks to write their experiences down," said the IAS officer, who accompanied them to Vaishno Devi in Jammu and the Padmanabhaswamy temple in Kerala.

In four groups of 60-65 people, the pandas visited the shrines, and Mohapatra recalled that they were overwhelmed when the chief jathedar of the Golden Temple received them in Amritsar. "The yatra had a very good impact on their mindset and we saw a lot of change in their attitude after that," he said. The teams also visited the kitchen in Tirupati and saw how priests there maintained hygiene and cleanliness, said Mohapatra, who joined the temple again in 2015 on the same post for a short period. The official said that the temple administration plans to have regular sessions with priests on how to behave with devotees. Some eminent people from their community will also address the pandas. Saints will deliver lectures on religious matters. They will also be given lectures on how to behave with pilgrims. "He said. (PTI)

Puri pandas in front of the chariot of Lord Jagannath

Nitish lays foundations of more than hundred projects

PATNA, DEC 31 /--/ Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday laid foundation stones for more than 100 projects worth Rs 700 crore in Nalanda district as part of his state-wide "Vikas Samiksha Yatra".

At Chamera village in Ekangarsarai block, the Kumar dedicated to the public 132 projects worth Rs 97.63 crore in addition to the 114, worth Rs 698.65 crore, for which foundation stones were laid, an official release said. Addressing a public meeting on the occasion, the chief minister spoke about various development

schemes run by his government in addition to social reform measures like ban on alcohol and campaigns against dowry and child marriage. Kumar also said that agriculture in the state was likely to receive a major boost as part of his government's third roadmap for the period 2017-22 which was recently launched by President Ramnath Kovind. He also exhorted the people to whole-heartedly participate in a human chain, to be formed on January 21 next year, as a message against dowry and child marriage, exactly a year after a similar exercise was undertaken to galvanize public support in favour of prohibition. The chief minister covered six districts in the second phase of his state-wide tour which began on Thursday. (PTI)

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Mohammad Talat Bari S/O Mohammed Abdul Bari Khan R/O 7/2B Miajan Ostagar Lane, P.O-Circus Avenue, P.S.Karaya,Kolkata-700017 have changed my name Mohammad Talat Bari Khan to Mohammad Talat Bari as per an affidavit sworn before Notary Public Kolkata on 27.11.2017.

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