

‘Genocide forms top of pyramid of hate’

# Teesta sees advent of ‘devil’

MEGHDEEP BHATTACHARYYA

**Calcutta:** Rights defender Teesta Setalvad has said she fears the Narendra Modi government will begin thrusting the “bhayanak shaitan (terrifying devil)” of its contentious citizenship matrix upon the nation from next year, asserting that it could, with the venom of hatred, destroy beyond recognition India’s social fabric.

Setalvad was participating in a panel discussion titled “Indian Constitution and Democracy” at the Kyd Street-based Iran Society here on Saturday evening. She has said where India has apparently descended as a nation now is ignominious and things have come to such a pass only because most of the people and much of the nation remain silent.

“The bhayanak shaitan of the citizenship (tripod) is going to be thrust upon us in 2023-24, that is what I suspect. The CAA (amended citizenship law) was passed illegally in 2019, its rules are yet to be drafted, but in 19 Indian states, counters have already been set up for fast-tracking citizenship for non-Muslim minorities from five neighbouring nations,” said the 60-year-old social activist.

“Without even passing the rules, in some ways, the steps to implement the CAA are already underway,” she added. “In no country on this planet is citizenship determined on the basis of such documentation. Not one other country.”

Setalvad had recently been held in custody for 57 days in an Ahmedabad prison on the charge of falsifying evidence on the 2002 Gujarat riots. She spoke alongside Justice (retired) Asok Kumar Ganguly, academics Ram Punyani and Ratan Khasnabis; and actor Badshah Moitra. The panelists unanimously voiced anxiety and apprehension over the future of Indian democracy, given the current state of affairs that is resulting in the weakening of vital fundamentals of the Constitution.

The Iran Society is the country’s oldest functioning centre for Persian studies.

Setalvad suspects the two other prongs of the citizenship trident — the National Population Register and the National Register of Citizens — are also not going to be left far behind.

“About the NPR, a notification has come, which says begin the update from January 2023. It is dangerous, because for the first time in the NPR, details of birth registration of forefathers are being sought, which has no place in the census,” she said.

Drawing from her organisation’s extensive experience of working in Assam through the NRC exercise there, Setalvad said it was nothing short of madness.

“Nineteen lakh people in Assam are outside the final NRC and another 2.2 lakh are declared foreigners and doubtful voters by the Election Commission. So, 22 lakh people in Assam today are deprived of citizenship.... Despite there being provisions in the law of the land, how you keep abusing laws so that they are used against the people,” she said.

“When 19 lakh people were declared non-Indians, only 5.5 lakh of them are Muslims. That devastated them (the saffron camp) because their political project was that a vast majority of these people would be Muslims. Now they demand that the NRC be done all over again....” added Setalvad.

Setalvad spoke at length about hate as a state project, as a political tool. “There is this pyramid of hate. Prejudiced attitudes at the base, then acts of prejudice, then discrimination, after that violence, finally genocide,” warned Setalvad.

“If we are able to be alert from the early stages and take the necessary steps, whatever possible, from complaints before authorities to demonstrations. There are many options available, although there are risks... but are we willing to do the needful and organise against this, despite the risks?” she asked.



Teesta Setalvad talks at the panel discussion titled ‘Indian Constitution and Democracy’ in Calcutta on Saturday. Picture by Sanat Kr Sinha

# 1 dead and 3 injured as liquid steel spills at DSP

ABHIJEET CHATTERJEE

**Durgapur:** A contractual worker was killed and three others were injured when molten steel spilled out of a ladle at the Durgapur Steel Plant of the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) on Sunday morning.

Sources at the plant in Durgapur town said the deceased, Poltu Bauri, 30, got buried under liquid steel and died instantly. Three others tried to escape but suffered severe burns on coming into contact with molten steel.

Injured workers Prashanta Banerjee, Gopi Ram and Prashanta Ghosh were rushed to Durgapur Steel Plant hospital and later transferred to a private super speciality hospital in the town.

The incident occurred around 11am at the permanent way engineering (PWE) department of the plant’s blast furnace. Sources said liquid steel was being drawn in by a ladle mechanically from the blast furnace to the slag pusher line when it overturned owing to a technical glitch.

“These four contractual workers were working under the ladle at PWE,”



An injured worker of Durgapur Steel Plant being taken to the hospital. Picture by Dipika Sarkar

said a source. Sources said that Poltu Bauri’s body could not be removed till afternoon as it was buried under hot slag. Fire-fighters worked for hours to retrieve the charred body for a post-mortem.

Of the three injured, Banerjee and Ram suffered more than 70 per cent burns and were critical, their doctors said.

Steel plant authorities in the evening described the incident as “unfortunate” and

constituted an inquiry team to investigate the cause of the accident.

All trade unions of the DSP jointly demanded proper inquiry and compensation to victims’ family members under the norms of SAIL. “The steel plant authorities should carry out a proper inquiry into the incident and take necessary actions as such incidents are recurring,” said Snehasish Ghosh, assistant general secretary of the INT-TUC-backed union at the DSP.

# Anubrata ‘chest pain’

ABHIJEET CHATTERJEE

**Durgapur:** Trinamul Birhum chief Anubrata Mondal, in judicial custody for nearly 100 days, complained of chest pain on Sunday morning, prompting Asansol correctional home authorities to take him to the district hospital for a check-up.

A team of three physicians, including a surgeon and cardiologist at the government hospital, after examining him for 45 minutes, said his condition was stable without any sign of a major cardiac problem.

This incident comes ahead of the hearing of Mondal’s transit remand to Delhi by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) scheduled for Tuesday.

The ED arrested Mondal on November 17 for allegedly laundering crores in a cattle smuggling case after questioning him for five hours at the correctional home.

The CBI arrested Mondal on August 11 for his alleged role in cattle smuggling. On Saturday, a CBI team quizzed Mondal at the correctional for an hour. Mondal also met his lawyers on Saturday.

A doctor said Mondal had lost 10kg and weighed 100kg now.

# Trinamul’s anti-statehood rally today

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**Siliguri:** A number of prominent Trinamul leaders and hundreds of party workers from four districts of north Bengal will congregate here on Monday for a rally against the demand for statehood.

In recent times, this is the first centralised rally where Trinamul leaders from Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar districts will protest against any further division of Bengal.

In recent times, many political parties and outfits have demanded a state comprising north Bengal districts, backed by a number of BJP legislators from this region.

“We will organise a rally on Monday in protest against the conspiracy to divide Bengal. Issues like cattle smuggling and other crimes on borders where the BSF is posted will also be raised,” said Papiya Ghosh, the Darjeeling (plains) district Trinamul president.

North Bengal development minister Udayan Guha, Siliguri mayor Gautam Deb and Trinamul youth wing state president Saayoni Ghosh, among others, will join the rally, she added.

Trinamul leaders told reporters here on Sunday that they would also protest the BJP’s “politics of slander”.

“Some BJP leaders constantly slap false allegations and pass derogatory comments on our leaders. This has to stop. In north Bengal, the BJP is trying to play the polarisation card again. We won’t let it happen. People shunned them in the civic polls and will do so in the rural polls too,” said a senior Trinamul functionary.

Political observers pointed out that the districts from where leaders and workers have been called to the Trinamul rally are BJP strongholds. Pro-statehood parties and outfits also have their roots in those districts.

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# 4 die in firing near mine

ACHINTYA GANGULY

**Ranchi:** Four persons died when security personnel opened fire on suspected coal thieves in Dhanbad district on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday. At least two persons were injured in the firing.

Central Industrial Security Force personnel, who were patrolling the area, opened fire after allegedly facing resistance from the suspected thieves.

“Four died and two injured persons were hospitalised,” said Amar Kumar Pandey, the Dhanbad deputy superintendent of police (headquarters), who went to the spot on Sunday morning.

According to reports, a large group of people had



CISF DIG Vinay Kajla (second from left) and other officers at the spot of the firing in Dhanbad on Sunday. (Shabbir Hussain)

reached Benidih siding of Bharat Coking Coal Limited within the Baghmara police station limits in Dhanbad district on motorcycles to lift coal that was stocked for subsequent loading into rakes for dispatch.

A group of CISF personnel that went for patrolling tried to intervene but faced resist-

ance and subsequently opened fire when attacked, resulting in the death of four persons, a senior CISF officer said.

The bodies were sent for post-mortem to the Dhanbad medical college. The dead were Preetam Chauhan, Sajjad Khan, Sahjada Khan and Ataul Ansari — all from nearby Telotanr village.

“It’s unfortunate that four persons died in the firing,” CISF deputy inspector-general Vinay Kajla who visited the area told reporters, adding the security personnel had to “open fire in self-defence”.

Two of their men had faced the coal lifters first but those people dragged one of them out of their vehicle and also tried to snatch his weapon when they opened fire in self-defence, Kajla said.



The remains of the houses burnt in Saturday’s blaze in Siliguri on Sunday. Picture by Passang Yolmo

# Siliguri fire leaves 300 homeless

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**Siliguri:** A fire that broke out on Saturday evening at Rana Busty and Khudiram Colony — two adjoining localities in ward 18 of Siliguri — left 300-odd people homeless.

Officials of Siliguri fire station and the civic body suspect the fire was accidental. No casualty has been reported.

The incident prompted the Trinamul-run Siliguri Municipal Corporation (SMC) to convene a meeting on November 24 for steps to avert such mishaps in 150 slums of the city.

Around 7.15pm, a fire broke out in a kitchen, engulfing some 30 hutments and houses.

Firemen found it difficult to take fire engines into narrow bylanes, delaying the damage-control process.

“Preliminary report shows 31 houses are completely damaged and some others partially. Around 300 people are homeless. The estimated loss is around Rs 50 lakh. A copy of the report will be sent to the district magistrate (of Darjeeling) on Monday,” said an SMC official.

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