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CM-Gurung ready for head-on collision, Hills brace for prolonged chaotic situation



HM Correspondent

Siliguri, June 10: The political tussle between the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) and Trinamool Congress supremo cum Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee in their effort to prove each other's might is set to land Darjeeling—the Queen of the hills—into prolonged turmoil. The state government has failed to handle the language issue sensitively. The GJM today called a shutdown for indefinite period in all government offices including banking

institutions. The CM in the other hand today announced that the ongoing crisis in the hills would be dealt with strong hands. All this only signals of a further turmoil imminent just before the GTA elections in the otherwise calm and peaceful hills.

The tenure of GTA will end on July while the CM has already hinted at an early election to the semi-autonomous body.

Banerjee who on Saturday held an administrative meeting in Siliguri before

leaving for Kolkata said that she will not tolerate what the GJM is doing in the hills indicating that the GJM's movement would be crushed with iron hands.

A special team comprising of three senior IPS officers overseeing the law and order situation in the hills is likely to submit its report soon. "We will take action when time comes," the CM today added.

The bad blood between the GJM and the CM has touched new heights. However, going by the statements

of GJM leadership, the party will not be covered down by the state government's 'highhandedness and pressure tactics.'

The GJM which seemed to have regained its much lost ground after the chief minister made confusing statements in regard to teaching Bengali language in schools across the hills—on Saturday sent a message that it is prepared for a head-on collision with the state government.

The language issue has hit hard all the Gorkha populace and they have been applauding the GJM and its president Bimal Gurung for their stiff resistance to the state government's said move. Though many say that the GJM is doing so to gain political mileage, a large section of the hills' people feel that GJM's opposition to Mamata's move is not a small task. It really needs courage to stay prepared for the worse to challenge the might of the state government.

Gurung and his team (against whom there are many allegations of financial irregularities) according to many are getting benefit of doubt as he has decided

to take the chief minister head on. The call for bandh in all government offices in the GTA area from Monday, at a time when the chief minister has already warned of strong action against those calling the bandh, is a clear reminder that the hills have really headed for unprecedented political tussle. And this is all likely to aggravate just before the GTA election.

Encouraged with the win in the Mirik Municipality election, Banerjee who is also the Trinamool Congress chief is desperate to win the hitherto and the only unconquered political territory of the hills. The CM is confident of her recent moves to be heading in right direction. However, for many observers, some of her moves will backfire and the GJM will gain out of it.

The GJM which has started gaining sympathy from a large section of people who were earlier disillusioned with its functioning, will now try its best to protect its fortress. However, this tug of war will usher the hills to prolonged turmoil causing distress to common people at large.

GJM calls for shutdown of government offices

HM Correspondent

Darjeeling, June 10: The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha declared an indefinite bandh in all Government offices, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) and Municipality offices and Banks in the Darjeeling Hills from Monday.

Addressing media persons after the central committee meeting Roshan Giri, GJM General Secretary stated "From Monday offices including State, Central, GTA, Municipality and banks will shut down for indefinite period. Banks will operate on Mondays and Thursdays of the week. All offices will however remain open from 27th June till 30th June. All

emergency services including fire brigade office, health, water supply, conservancy department of the Municipalities have been kept out of the bandh (strike) purview". Giri further added that the party's decision for the shutdown call across government institutions have been taken as per the GJM's strategy to pursue their demand for Gorkhaland. "It is for Gorkhaland. The separate state demand is the aspiration of the public. They (government employees) should be ready to sacrifice their salaries for Gorkhaland" stated Giri.

Giri stated that all signage (sign boards) in the Hills have to be in Nepali and

English. Fire torch rallies will be held on Mondays. On Thursdays and Sundays the GJM will take out rallies demanding the separate statehood.

"We will hold an all-party meeting for Gorkhaland on June 13th. All political parties will be invited" stated Giri. Signature campaigns for Gorkhaland will take place throughout the Hills.

Bimal Gurung, the GJM supremo has written to the Home Minister to initiate the process of carving out a separate state of Gorkhaland. A GJM team will soon meet the Prime Minister and Union Home Minister with this demand. Only Gorkhaland can free us from the oppressive rule of West Bengal" declared Giri.

Hawkers allege police harassment



Gangtok, June 10: Members of All Sikkim Hawkers Association (ASHA) have accused police of 'unnecessary' harassment in the name of sanitation for the past one week making life miserable for the hawkers at the Lal Bazaar (Kanchendzonga) Shopping Complex here in the capital.

Speaking to media persons, ASHA President Lakpa Sherpa alleged that police personnel from the Sadar Thana have been continuously visiting the shopping complex for the past one week and unnecessarily harassing the hawkers on pretext of cleanliness. The unnecessary harassment has not only hampered daily business but also installed fear in the minds of the hawkers as well as the customers, Sherpa asserted. The hawkers are being penalized for displaying their items outside their shops. If the shops are not allowed to display their items, then how will they attract customers? How will the customers come to know what the shops are selling if they are not allowed to display their items? It is not as if the displays have blocked

the walking path completely but the harassment continues to persist and this has badly affected the business, Sherpa added.

Sherpa also said that every shop in the complex has kept a dustbin in front of the shop and maintain cleanliness of the surrounding but even then the police continue to harass them.

He further asserted that it is the duty of the GMC to collect the garbage from the dustbins. What's the use of paying 150 rupees every month to the GMC for sanitation when they don't collect trash from the dustbins? The hawkers themselves clean the litter left behind by customers and also maintain cleanliness of the complex. But still then we are being harassed by the police. Should the hawkers leave behind all their work and clean the complex all day?, questioned Sherpa.

He also alleged the police of addressing the hawkers as "Madisay" which is used for outsiders.

"They use words like 'Madisay' (outsider) and 'Tero' while talking with the hawkers. This is highly de-

rogatory and uncalled for", Sherpa said.

Meanwhile, SP (West) D.B. Giri commenting on the issue said that the inspections were being conducted on public demand. We were receiving complaints from the general public on a regular basis about the lack of sanitation in the shopping complex.

Despite several warnings from the UD&H department to the hawkers to maintain cleanliness in the vicinity, the situation was not getting any better. Hence the department had sought help from the police department on the matter.

"The department had conducted an inspection of the complex a few days ago and had also met with the representatives of ASHA and apprised them about the unsatisfactory condition of the complex. They were also apprised that the police would initiate action against the same in the coming days. If the hawkers felt that they were being harassed by the police then they should voice their grievances at the appropriate forum", Giri stated.

Six more officers join special audit team

HM Report

Siliguri, June 10: Mamata Banerjee government has increased the number of officers in the special audit team to twelve from the initial six to scrutinize alleged financial irregularities in utilization of funds sanctioned to Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA)—the semi-autonomous body formed for carrying out various developmental activities in the hills. The move is to exert more pressure on Bimal Gurung, the GTA chief cum supremo of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) after fresh skirmishes on Friday in Darjeeling that saw violent clashes between police and GJM supporters putting up fierce resistance to the CM's efforts to introduce Bengali in schools across the hills. With the first tenure of GTA formed in 2012 to end shortly, the state government is in a hurry to complete the audit and hence the increase in numbers of officers in the audit team. The CM who had declared to stay put in Darjeeling until normalcy returns is reported to have discreetly left for Siliguri on Friday around 9.30 pm. Meanwhile, Amit P.Javalagi who had been serving as the Darjeeling SP has been sent 'on leave' and replaced by Akhilesh Chaturvedi, ex-Deputy Commissioner (Central Division) Kolkata Police. While the state government has been alleging gross financial irregularities in the GTA, Gurung who is also the CEO of GTA has been claiming the state government of meddling in affairs of the GTA with many of the departments yet to be transferred even though the tenure of the semi-autonomous body will come to an end this month. Gurung claims that the developmental activities been carried out

in the hills is from the funds received from central government as the state funds to the GTA have been inadequate. Fresh election to the GTA is due and expected to be held soon. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) party which has the Bengal CM as its supremo is buoyed with its first ever electoral victory in the hills where the party won in 12 of the total 84 municipal seats in Mirik, Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. Meanwhile, Mamata who had been facing stiff opposition from the GJM on the Bengali language issue reached Mirik on June 5 and announced her government's decision to conduct special audit in the GTA. After the violent clash in Darjeeling on June 8 during which an NBSTC bus and police vehicle was set on fire, the CM today though without naming Gurung, said "Since I have started visiting the Darjeeling hills on a regular basis, it has become difficult for 'him' to continue indulging in financial irregularities in the GTA and thus his anger". Today, the six officers who reached Darjeeling on Friday to conduct the audit met Don Bosco Lepcha the GTA secretary, Nimesh Sundas, chief controller of finance and Sangay Bhutia, financial officer. With visits to different GTA offices in Darjeeling, the special team is set to formally kick-start scrutiny of the GTA accounts on Monday. Meanwhile, normalcy prevailed across the hills today after the peaceful 12-hour strike called by the Gorkha Janmukti Yuva Morcha (GJYM). Visitors who had arrived in Darjeeling to spend their holidays for a couple of days prior to the strike call stayed back while new arrivals were also recorded across places of tourist interest in the hills today.

TMC takes out peace rally in Kalimpong



Nisha Chettri

Kalimpong, June 10: The Trinamool Congress (TMC), Kalimpong unit today took out a peace rally and alleged Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) of instigating the Thursday violence in Darjeeling. Darjeeling was up in flames after a violent clash between the police and GJM supporters on Thursday after which the GJM had called for a general strike across the hills on Friday which went off peacefully. "The bandh call by the GJM was illogical which only affected the locals as they incurred huge revenue loss in the ongoing peak tourist season. The GJM had no proper issue to

put forth in the state cabinet meeting that was held at Raj Bhawan on Thursday. It was heart wrenching for us to witness the bedlam which the morcha created on Thursday and the unnecessary hassles faced by the local people and tourists on Friday due to their (GJM's) sudden bandh call," said Chewang Bhutia, the working executive president of hills TMC. The TMC local unit will counter every anti-state government move of the GJM, Chewang said adding that the two newly elected TMC municipal councilors of Kalimpong who had failed to appear in the oath taking ceremony on May 30 would take the oath on Monday. Backing the

Chief Minister's decision to conduct the GTA audit, Chewang said that the GTA office bearers should be answerable to the status of fund utilization amounting to more than Rs. 400 crores sanctioned by the state government to the semi-autonomous body (GTA) during its first 5 years of tenure, due to end this month. However, when asked about the GJM's demand to conduct audit across the 15 development boards formed by the Mamata government, Chewang said, "Go and check the houses built for the poor in the outskirts of Kalimpong. The green and blue color roofs are the audit report".

From July 1, Aadhaar mandatory for filing I-T returns: CBDT

New Delhi, June 10: The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said on Sunday that the Aadhaar card will be mandatory for filing Income Tax returns and applying for Permanent Account Number (PAN) from July 1, 2017.

"Those allotted PAN as on July 1 and have Aadhaar number or are eligible to obtain it, shall intimate Aadhaar number to Income

Tax authorities for linking PAN and Aadhaar," the CBDT said in a statement.

The announcement comes a day after the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the law making Aadhaar mandatory for allotment of PAN and filing of I-T returns. However, the apex court had put a partial stay to exempt those without Aadhaar for now until the larger privacy issue is

decided. Making it clear that the Supreme Court's ruling was only a "partial relief", the policy-making body of the Income Tax Department explained what will happen in a case of "non-compliance" or where a person does not possess Aadhaar.

"Only a partial relief by the Court (SC) has been

Darjeeling unrest: Sikkim unaffected while tourists shy away from Darj

Gangtok, June 10: Fresh rounds of brick-battening and vandalism in Darjeeling have led to cancellations of hotel bookings by several tourists at a time business was at its peak.

While thousands of stranded tourists having a torrid time in West Bengal's hill town, neighbouring Sikkim — also a popular tourist destination — remains unaffected, a senior Sikkim government official informed.

Tourism in Sikkim is largely unaffected right now as the highway (National Highway 10) connecting Gangtok and West Bengal's Siliguri is open. There are no transportation issues in and out of Sikkim now, the official stated.

However, he said there might be an element of fear, especially among first-time tourists, as the road to Sikkim passes through violence-hit Darjeeling. Yes there might be an element of fear among the new tourists, especially while travelling through the NH-10 that is the gateway to Sikkim after the recent unrest. However, the strike (shutdown) at other places hardly impacts us, he claimed.

Sikkim Tourism and Civil Aviation Secretary C. Zangpo concurred, saying the tourists in Sikkim were not impacted as the shutdown in the Bengal hills was for just 12 hours.

This was just a one-day strike in Darjeeling. So the tourists who are already in

Sikkim need not worry. Initially there was panic among the tourists here, but the situation is completely under control, he said.

Meanwhile, since the political unrest, tourists have started fleeing Darjeeling and most of those who had prior bookings are in a hurry to cancel their trips.

"What happened in Darjeeling was uncalled for. This has terrified tourists. Since morning, we have received hundreds of calls from panicky tourists who had their bookings in Darjeeling hotels. Many are already cancelling," said Pradip Lama, secretary of the Darjeeling Association of Travel Agents. Among those who are cancelling rooms, a