

THE CITY
DIARYTurtles
rescued

Police rescued 645 star turtles and arrested two men for allegedly transporting the animals in 43 sacks on Sunday night. The arrest came a day after forest department officials seized around 400 star turtles and four baby gharials from Ashokenagar market in North 24-Parganas. According to the police, the duo — Palas Das and Tarun Roy — were carrying the turtles in a truck when they were arrested near Liluah on NH6.

Special trains

Eastern Railway will extend the run of winter-special trains between Calcutta and Kamakhya (Assam) to tackle passenger rush. The special trains will leave Kamakhya on January 16, 23 and 30 and the corresponding return trains will leave Kolkata (Chitpur) station on January 17, 24 and 31.

Defamation

Justice Aniruddha Bose of Calcutta High Court on Monday admitted a defamation petition moved by US-based doctor Kunal Saha against Justice G.C. De, a former high court judge. De had allegedly made defamatory comments against Saha during a trial involving the death case of Saha's wife Anuradha.

Rape charge

A 40-year-old rickshaw puller was arrested on Monday for allegedly raping a five-year-old. Police said Gopal Mondal, a resident of Putiari, had lured the girl, his neighbour's daughter, to his house on Sunday night and allegedly raped her. He was arrested after the girl's father lodged a complaint on Monday.

Govt in the line of highrise fire

A STAFF REPORTER

Politicians and the administration on Monday came under fire from residents of city high-rises, who blamed them for getting in the way of implementation of fire safety norms.

Representatives of around 500 highrises in central, south and southeast Calcutta and the eastern suburban division interacted with the top brass of police and the Calcutta Municipal Corporation on Monday to discuss ways to ensure safety.

The meeting was convened after chief minister Mamata Banerjee recently asked mayor Sovan Chatterjee to crack down on illegal constructions in the wake of the AMRI fire that left 91 dead.

"The chief minister wanted the CMC, police and fire brigade to work together to secure the lives of highrise residents. Responding to her call, today's meeting was organised," said an officer.

Eight of the nine representatives who spoke at the meet-



Highrise residents have blamed the administration for creating hurdles in the way of fire preparedness

ing expressed concern over lack of firefighting preparedness and the hurdles faced in implementing safety measures though the police reminded the residents that the meeting was not about fire safety alone.

R. Khanna of Karnani Estate in Beniapur police station area said a restaurant that had come up on the ground floor of the building

used six LPG cylinders and also kept a diesel-run generator in the open.

"We had invited representatives from police, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and the fire department on November 15 to highlight our problems. But no one turned up," Khanna said. "We want to know if the restaurant has a fire licence."

D.P. Tarania, director general of the fire department, said all buildings should adhere to the National Building Code. "In most cases, we have seen that driveways are not wide enough for the fire engines to get access the spot," he said.

Tapas Mukherjee of Rajakatra market in Burrabazar police station area pointed out that the National Building Code did not apply to buildings that are more than six to eight decades old. "The new building norms cannot be imposed on the old buildings because those were constructed when the code did not even exist."

Elaborating on the impediments, Mukherjee said: "The roads are wide enough in Burrabazar and Posta but hawkers encroach on the space. They also light fires for cooking. When we protest against them, political parties ask us to shut up. Please guide us on what to do."

Bharati Das, resident of a highrise at Mandeville Gardens, said buses and pool cars

of a nearby school occupy most of the adjoining link roads at most times of the day. "If a fire breaks out in any of the buildings during that time, not only would it be difficult for fire engines to reach the spot but it would also be difficult to rush injured to hospital," she said.

OM Prakash, representative of Natural View at Ultadanga, also aired his grievance against hawkers not being removed. He said the approach road to the building was blocked by hawkers and repeated appeals to the authorities had fallen on deaf ears.

The highrise residents also called for more inspections by police, CMC and the fire department.

"Regular inspections will help you (the authorities) understand the realities and the practical problems faced by residents of highrises in implementing fire safety norms. We cannot do anything without help from the authorities," said Prakash.

Procession
of famous
names

FROM PAGE 17

M.F. Husain, Gaitonde, Amrita Sher-Gil, Tyeb Mehta, Swaminathan, Altaf, Ara, Ramkumar, Akbar Padamsee, Binode Behari Mukherjee, Sailoz Mukherjee, Ramkinkar Baij... you name him and he is there.

If the procession of famous names leaves one breathless it is only because it is an attempt to cram all of contemporary Indian art history — and that too in not a state of chaos — on the walls of these two halls, large though they are.

Of course, it is a rare opportunity for the people of Calcutta to see so many masterpieces under one roof but one would have appreciated it better if the exhibition took us on a journey through the visual arts history of pre- and post-independence India instead of



The sculpture by Louise Bourgeois

hitting one between the eyes with an overload of images.

The third floor with its array of 19th century, medieval and ancient Indian art is more pleasing to the eye — although in no particular order — if only because of the limited number of exhibits. There are illustrated manuscripts dating back to 10th century AD, Mughal, Rajasthani, Deccani and Kangra miniatures in all their glory, not to speak of Chola bronzes and Buddhist deities. This is to be expected, for the Birlas have been collecting for ages.

And then there is the fourth floor.

Caution over
civic freebies

A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta has failed where Bangalore scores. Not only is the city the last among the metros in claiming Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) funds, it has also missed out on shoring up revenue with paid services, said a senior central official.

Union urban development secretary Sudhir Krishnan on Monday countered mayor Sovan Chatterjee's defence of funds scarcity for the lack of new projects with the example of the silicon city. "The secretary cited the example of how Bangalore's Municipal Corporation increased its revenue from Rs 300 crore to Rs 1,600 crore by imposing service charges," a CMC official said.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee is known to be averse to introducing fresh taxes. When Subrata Mukherjee was the mayor between 2000 and 2005, he had imposed water tax but the move was scuttled after Mamata raised objections.

The CMC has so far got projects worth Rs 1,850 crore cleared under the JNNURM since the Centre introduced the

scheme in 2005. The central and state governments each contribute 35 per cent of the project cost. The commissioning agency, in this case the CMC, has to provide the remaining 30 per cent. The Trinamul-run CMC board, cash-strapped like the state government, hasn't been able to start any infrastructure projects since it came to power in June 2010.

"Among all the metros, Calcutta is by far the last in drawing funds under the JNNURM scheme," the official quoted Krishnan as saying.

"The secretary tried to convince the mayor that infrastructure projects are essential and they require money. Levying service charges is the only way to garner funds required to meet the CMC's share of funding in JNNURM projects," the officer said.

"Sudhir Krishnan stressed the need for self-sustaining projects by imposing service charges on basic utility services," Chatterjee told Metro. "We told him it is a matter of high-level policy-making and our present policy is not to burden the middle class and lower middle class with extra taxes."

Poll body
inputs for
college code

A STAFF REPORTER

The state higher education department will take the help of the state election commission to draw up the common election code for colleges.

Higher education minister Bratya Basu said on Monday evening that he had authorised state higher education council chairman Sugata Marjit to speak with election commission officials and frame guidelines that are meant to ensure free and fair polls in the colleges. The two had met earlier.

Basu also said the code would be modelled on the recommendations of the Lyndoh Committee in 2006 for ensuring transparency in student body elections.

The minister has invited the student wings of different parties to a meeting on the common college election code on January 17.

"Once we get the views of all the stakeholders, the matter would be sent to Mamata Banerjee," said the higher education minister.

Sugata Marjit said he would meet election commission officials this week.



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