Quit Pakistani refugee camp, Afghans staying illegally told (13)
Islamabad: The authorities have asked Afghans staying illegally in a refugee camp in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to vacate within 15 days to avoid eviction, a media report said Saturday. "We've asked illegal Afghans to leave the Azakhel camp or face eviction," a district administration official said. "We can shift them to Shamshatoo camp in Peshawar and provide them with tents and other necessary items if they show willingness," Dawn online quoted the official as saying. He said around 1,500 Afghan refugees have been illegally living in Azakhel camp. After the massacre of school children in Peshawar last month, the government had begun surveys of refugee camps in the province, including those in Azakhel, Akora Khattak, Khairabad, Jalozai and Pabbi, to learn about illegal occupants. The government has already informed the UN High Commissioner for Refugees about the refugees living in Azakhel camp illegally. The official said the administration had asked Afghan refugees to reveal their plans after vacating the camp. He said if refugees wanted to return home, then the law-enforcement agencies would provide them with security. Meanwhile, Afghan refugees living in Azakhel camp have appealed to the government to extend the camp vacation deadline. (Business Standard 3/1/15)

No humanitarian aid to 3 lakh displaced (13)
Guwahati: The Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) here on Friday said that Assam government failed to provide relief, particularly warm clothes, baby food, safe drinking water and assistance for pregnant women and lactating mothers, to those among over three lakh internally displaced persons after the carnage in Assam. The ACHR, which had sent a team to study the condition of the relief camps however said that some food items were supplied by local public and organisations but sanitation and hygiene were almost non-existent in the relief camps. In its report released on Friday, the ACHR said that there are over 3,00,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Assam which is largest displacement of world in 2014. Pointing out that among those displaced 2,87,182 are adivasis (plantation workers) reeling under a man-made humanitarian crisis in 65 relief camps Sonitpur, Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang districts. The ACHR also said, “The Assam government has been hesitant to fully extend humanitarian assistance to all displaced persons in order to prevent more displacement and reduce cost of rehabilitation.” There are about 13,091 displaced Bodos taking shelter in 20 relief camps in Chirang district. Out of these 20 relief camps, three camps with a population of 2,219 Bodo inmates are unregistered camps, the ACHR in its report claimed. The team of Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) assisted by the Adivasi civil society organisations visited the affected areas on December 27. The ACHR team had limited access as curfew was imposed in Sonitpur and Udalguri districts, and the police did not allow visit to the interior places for security reasons. The ACHR team however visited Jiagabharu High School Relief Camp, Hugrajuli Relief Camp and Tinisuti Relief Camps. The ACHR has asked the Assam government to fully extend humanitarian assistance. (Asian Age 4/1/15)

10,000 frightened villagers abandon homes in Kashmir (13)
Jammu: The number of people abandoning their homes in border villages of Jammu and Kashmir crossed 10,000 Tuesday amid heightened tension following Pakistan shelling on the international border that killed a trooper Monday. "Following indiscriminate targeting of civilian areas along the
international border by Pakistan yesterday (Monday), more people have abandoned their homes close to the border in Samba and Kathua districts," a senior official told IANS here. "The number of villagers lodged in makeshift accommodations at safer places has crossed 10,000 and their migration is continuing today (Tuesday)," the official added. Pakistan Rangers continued mortar shelling and firing at Border Security Force (BSF) positions in Kathua and Samba districts late Monday. "Pakistan Rangers targeted more than two dozen BSF posts in Kathua and Samba districts yesterday (Monday). The BSF retaliated effectively to silence Pakistan guns," a senior police officer here said. The officer said no firing has been reported from the Pakistan side Tuesday morning. A trooper was killed Monday when the border outpost manned by him was hit by Pakistan fired mortar. BSF Director General D.K. Pathak will visit the international border Tuesday to take stock of the situation.

West Pak refugees can now join paramilitary forces (13)

NEW DELHI: Seeking to address concerns of West Pakistan Refugees (WPRs) settled in Jammu and Kashmir, the Home Ministry on Tuesday decided to consider such people for jobs in paramilitary forces. This came as Home Minister Rajnath Singh approved “certain concessions” for WPRs that include a direction to directors-general of all paramilitary forces to consider such people from the state, who are Indian citizens and have valid Voter IDs, for recruitment to the forces. Singh also wrote to Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar that similar concessions like waiving off the condition of producing domicile certificates and other identity certificates. Singh’s move came a fortnight after the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs asked the Centre to take steps to ensure that these groups get benefits like other citizens. Jammu and Kashmir does not grant these section of people permanent resident status and they encounter problems in getting government jobs. According to the state government records, 5,674 families consisting of 47,215 persons migrated from west Pakistan and were settled in Jammu, Kathua and Rajouri districts during partition. As of now, these people face difficulty to fulfil documentary evidence of residency in support of their applications as the paramilitary recruitment rules seek furnishing of domicile certificates from the candidates while the state government issues only Voter ID with Non-Permanent Residency (NPR) status to such Indian nationals. Singh also wrote to the state government to resume issuing the domicile certificates to refugees settled in the state so as to enable such people to avail equal employment opportunities. The Home Ministry has also issued instructions to the Department of School Education under Human Resource Development Ministry to accommodate the children of such people for admission to the Kendriya Vidyalayas in the state.

Refugees Eye India's Help to Implement 13th Amendment for Returning Home (13)

CHENNAI: Sri Lankan refugees in India may be celebrating the defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa in the elections but the longing to return home is clouded by fear of persecution. "If India along with Tamil Nadu government helps the Sri Lankan government in implementing the 13th amendment and ensure safety and security for Tamils, then the refugees in Tamil Nadu won’t hesitate to return," said Jayanth, a refugee in India since 2006. After being detained in the Chengalpet camp, the 38-year-old refugee is living only on hope. "We want the Indian government to come forward and initiate talks with the Sri Lankan government to implement 13th amendment," he says. The 13th amendment to the constitution of Sri Lanka to establish provincial councils came into being after then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and then Sri Lanka president J R Jayawardne signed the Indo-Sri Lanka accord in 1987. “Sirisena is a Sinhalese and in what way he will be different from Rajapaksa,” asks Rangasamy Somasundram, who migrated from Mannur district. K Kamalan, another refugee who migrated to India in 1990, says that after the ethnic war, one of his relatives went back to Killinochi in SL. “He was picked up for inquiry and he never returned,” he says. The inmates of Anaiyur and Thiruvathur refugee camps in Madurai district expressed mixed feelings on the outcome of the election. Though the verdict was an emotive issue, no celebration was witnessed as police had upped security to keep refugees from going overboard. A cross-section of the refugees hoped that Sirisena would maintain a
stronger relationship with India, as against China and Pakistan, as it would benefit the Lankan Tamils. (New Indian Express 10/1/15)

SC seeks EC’s reply on plea seeking voting rights for migrants (13)
New Delhi: Supreme Court on Monday sought response from the Election Commission on a plea seeking to enable migrants within the country, including those who have left their constituencies for jobs, to cast their votes from their places of residence. A bench of Justice Chief Justice H L Dattu and Justice A K Sikri issued notice to EC on an application that the committee, which looked into the issue of extending voting rights to the NRIs, be asked to consider adopting alternate methods to enable migrants within the country itself to exercise franchise from their current places of residence. The application, filed by NRI Shamsheer VP through advocate Haris Beeran, said "it is the submission of the applicant that the true test of democracy is the inclusion of all persons who have a right in political discourse which leads it. True representation would only be made possible if every attempt was made to make every vote count. "This is seen in countries like Brazil where voting is made mandatory with the defaulter having to pay massive fines. Therefore, it is imperative that true weight is given to the importance of adult suffrage,” the plea said. According to the provisions of the Representation of People Act, when government servants and a class of certain other persons are allowed to vote through postal ballots, then the same right be given to private persons who are forced to leave their respective constituencies for reasons of employment. "There cannot be discrimination between the citizens on this ground on their right to vote," the plea said. The plea said that the spike in number of potential voters would be tremendous inasmuch as a large number of persons who have migrated would want to cast their vote if it were made possible. (Zee News 12/1/15)

Kashmir separatists oppose permanent settlement of Pakistani refugees (13)
Srinagar: The separatists have opposed the Indian parliament’s proposal to permanently settle Pakistani refugees in northern state Jammu and Kashmir, saying it was an attempt to tamper with state’s demography. Separatist leaders met in Srinagar city and discussed recommendations made by the parliament panel to grant permanent resident status to refugees from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Chairman of the moderate faction of Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, said that they had decided to constitute a special group to make people aware about it. “Any step that is likely to impact the provincial legislation (law) and future shouldn't be undertaken until Kashmir fundamental problem of Kashmir is addressed,” said Farooq. He added that some people want to impose agenda. “The objective behind this policy is that some people are talking about demographic changes in Jammu and Kashmir and some people want to impose their agenda,” added Farooq. Thousands of people from Pakistan-administered Kashmir flocked to Indian side when both the nations went to war in 1947 over Muslim-majority Kashmir immediately after gaining independence from Britain. Both the nuclear-armed nations rule Kashmir in part but claim it in full and have fought three wars over it. (New Kerala 13/1/15)

Two-thirds of Jordan`s Syria refugees in poverty: UN (13)
Amman: Two-thirds of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian war refugees in Jordan are living in poverty, the head of the UN refugee agency warned Wednesday, calling for “massive” international aid. “The conclusions... are extremely worrying for us all,” Antonio Guterres, the UN high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR), told a news conference in Amman at which he presented a detailed report. “Two-thirds of the Syrian refugees living with the community in Jordan are below the Jordanian-defined poverty line which is around three dollars (2.50 euros) per day for each person,” he said. The report was based on 170,000 visits to refugee households, pointing out that 84 percent of the 620,000 UNHCR-registered refugees in Jordan from neighbouring Syria live outside camps. “This report corresponds to the largest survey ever done in the world about living conditions of the refugee community,” he said. The report found that one in six Syrian refugees, rising to one in five for households led by a woman alone, has to survive on Jordan’s “extreme poverty line” of $1.30 a day. “My appeal is for massive support from the international community, massive support for the Syrians
and displaced Iraqis also," said Guterres, adding host communities and governments in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq also needed funding. International donors had provided only around half of the UNHCR’s needs in 2014, he added. More than three million Syrians have fled the civil war in their country which broke out in March 2011, mostly to neighbouring states. (Zee News 14/1/15)

SC shocked over govt’s stand on Bru refugees (13)
New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday expressed shock over the Centre’s contention that thousands of Bru tribals from Mizoram put in relief camp at Tripura were provided only one soap, one T-shirt, and one pant, as giving them further amenities would obstruct them to go back to their place of residence. “Is this how you treat people of this country,” a social justice bench headed by Justice Madan B Lokur said after going through an affidavit by Ministry of Home Affairs. Over 35,000 Bru tribals are put in six relief camps in Kanchanpur and Panisagar inside Tripura for about 17 years after they fled their villages in Mizoram following ethnic troubles. The bench found the affidavit “disturbing” which stated, “Efforts now on creating additional facilities in the camp life would only incentivise the Brus to their camp life in Tripura and shift the focus away from rehabilitation in Mizoram to relief measures in the refugee camps.” The court said that the government cannot say it did not want to improve the condition in the camp, because this would affect their going back to their original place of residence. The court asked the government to come up with some concrete plan after discussing the matter with the governments of Tripura and Mizoram. The government’s affidavit said it was extending grant-in-aid to the Tripura government since 1997 to help the Bru families in the six relief camps and the ministry so far had released approximately Rs 231 crore to Tripura government and Rs 35 crore to Mizoram government. The government submitted that it provided a cash dole of Rs 5 per day to each adults and Rs 2.50 to each minors staying in the camp, one T-shirt and one pant piece per adult, one mosquito net and blanket per family once in three years, and one bathing soap per head once in a year. The court told the ministry to file fresh affidavit and put the matter for further consideration on February 27. (Deccan Herald 17/1/15)

Tibetan community divided over citizenship rights (13)
NEW DELHI: The Election Commission’s recent directive allowing Tibetan refugees to register for voter identity card for Delhi Assembly elections, which will help them acquire Indian citizenship, has not been welcomed by all and created a deep chasm within the exiled community. Those against acquiring citizenship rights argue that the Tibetans living in India must remain refugees as becoming an Indian citizen would “dilute the struggle” for a free Tibet. N. K. Trikha, national convenor of Core Group for Tibetan Causse, a pan-India group which advocates Tibet’s independence from Chinese rule, said, “Acquiring Indian citizenship will knock the bottom out of their reason for living in exile with a determination to return to their motherland or see her become free at some point in time.” He said that by taking any other country’s citizenship in search of greener pastures, the exiled community would lose its sovereign identity as Tibetans for a few “mundane” advantages. “The cost will be too heavy for the overall Tibetan cause,” he warned. Tenzin Tsundue, a well-known Tibetan activist and writer, thanked the Indian Government for granting voting rights to his compatriots living in India but said, “it dilutes the struggle for a free Tibet because it naturally sets in complacency in the life of people and the urgency is lost in the process.” He said the moment Tibetans give up their nationality and swear loyalty to another country, they lose their authority to speak as a Tibetan. Tenzin Lekshay, a media coordinator in the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, said that according to the ‘Demographic Survey of Tibetans in Exile’ by planning commission of Central Tibetan Administration, a total number of 94,203 Tibetans reside in India. When asked how many of them have been accorded citizenship by the Indian government, he said that he did not have an exact number in this regard. PTI (The Hindu 19/1/15)

‘Refugees should not be forcibly sent back’ (13)
CUDDALORE: Tamizhaga Vazhvurimai Katchi founder T. Velmurugan has appealed to the Centre not to adopt any tactic to compulsorily send back the Tamil refugees to Sri Lanka. In a statement here, he
said that during the recent meeting of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and her Sri Lankan counterpart Mangala Samaraweera in New Delhi, the topic of sending back the Tamil refugees to the island nation was said to have figured prominently. Such a focussed approach on the refugee issue had created apprehension among the Tamil diaspora that there might be an element of compulsion involved in sending the refugees back. Mr. Velmuguran underscored the point that the change of regime, following the election of Maithripala Sirisena as President, was yet to instill confidence among the Tamils about their well being on the Sri Lankan soil. The Tamils left Sri Lanka in duress, leaving behind their property and relatives to escape from the ethnic cleansing and sought refuge in Tamil Nadu. But the so-called special camps set up for them in the State were no better than prisons as they lacked basic amenities. (The Hindu 21/1/15)

**Rohingyas deserve citizenship: U.S. official (13)**

Dhaka: Remarking that it is Myanmar's responsibility to take its nationals back, a senior U.S. official has said that the international community needs to put more pressure on Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya issue. Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration Anne C. Richard, who wrapped up her four-day visit to Bangladesh, also said the U.S. did not favour settling the Rohingya refugees to a third country. Responding to a question, she, however, said the Rohingya refugees in the two camps in Cox’s Bazar district preferred to stay in Bangladesh despite not having an ideal living condition. The visiting U.S. official on Wednesday commented that Rohingyas deserve Myanmarese citizenship to end their statelessness, which she identified as a root cause of their plight. Speaking at seminar here, Ms. Richard remarked that he Rohingya population remained stateless as “they are not recognised as a distinct ethnic group in the country’s citizenship law”. “Statelessness is... a key reason they flee to neighbouring countries,” she added. Ms. Richard arrived in Dhaka from Myanmar, her first after joining the post in Washington in 2012, “to learn the Bangladesh perspective” of the refugee situation. Bangladesh has sheltered thousands of Rohingya refugees who fled the Rakhine province following sectarian clashes spread over the years. (The Hindu 23/1/15)

**Special camps for Lankan refugee students earn praise (13)**

MADURAI: In a first-ever initiative of its kind, the district administration organised a special education camp for the students living in Sri Lankan refugee camps here who are sitting for public examinations this year. According to the organisers of the camp, it was an initiative by the district collector L Subramanian, who came to know that the students living in camps did not have access to special awareness and guidance sessions usually organised for students sitting for public examinations and gave his nod for the project. The 127 students from three camps in Annaiyur, Utchapatti and Thiruvathavur in the district who are sitting for the public examinations were selected for the camp that was held in Ezhumalai from Jan 16 to 18. They were provided free boarding and lodging in the three days, during which they were given yoga sessions and guidance on how to approach the exams. R Lavanya from the Utchapatti refugee camp, who is sitting for the SSLC examination this year, said this had been a first-of-its-kind opportunity and that she had been among the first from her camp to attend such a session. Her friend Y Rathidevi said that they had benefitted immensely from the camp. Remarking that they will approach the exams with confidence, they expressed hope that the exams would be conducted regularly. S Manikanda Prabu and M Satheeshkumar from the Thiruvathavur camp said they had thought that something like this was beyond their reach, even when their fellow students attended such sessions organized in many places. "It was very helpful and informative," they said. The parents of the students lauded the efforts of the district administration and S S Sivakumar, special tahsildar of refugee camps, to give their students this rare opportunity. Many NGOs and volunteers helped to make the camp a success, said the tahsildar, adding that this was the first time such a camp had been organised for the refugee students. (Times of India 24/1/15)

**UNHCR and EU to Help Repatriate Refugees From TN (13)**

COLOMBO: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Union (EU) have undertaken to help the Sri Lankan government repatriate Lankan Tamil refugees in
Tamil Nadu and resettle them in the island nation, the Lankan Ministry of Resettlement has said.

Assurance of aid was given to the Lankan Minister for Resettlement, D.M. Swaminathan, when he met local representatives Gulam Abbas and Igor Ivanic of the UNHCR, and Jaime Royo-Olid and Libuse Soukupova of the EU. here last week, a Ministry statement said. The EU has already built 23,000 houses in the Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces, and an additional 3000 houses are to be built. The EU has set aside Euro 14 million for this project in 2015. There are still 26,056 internally displaced Tamils in Sri Lanka. Repatriation of the refugees from India and the resettlement of the existing internally displaced persons in Lanka will both be taken up “on a priority basis” as part of the Malithripala Sirisena government’s 100-day program, the Resettlement Ministry said. The program to repatriate Lankan Tamil refugees from Tamil Nadu was discussed when Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on January 19. Last week, the Lankan cabinet issued a statement saying the matter will be discussed during Modi’s talks with Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe when he visits Colombo in mid-March.

Both governments have assured that repatriation will be voluntary. “The refugees have to go back to reclaim their lost rights in Sri Lanka. Repatriation is essentially a Mannai Meetpom (Recover our Land) movement,” explained S.C. Chandrahasan of the Chennai-based Organization for Elangai Refugees’ Rehabilitation (OIERR), who has been working hard for repatriation. “I have submitted to all the three governments concerned, a draft aid package to facilitate repatriation. It can be the basis of an Indo-Lankan MoU on the matter,” he told Express. According Chandrahasan, there are 65,000 Lankan refugees living in 110 camps in Tamil Nadu. But the Tamil Nadu government says that there are 73,241 refugees in 115 camps, including those in Special Camps for suspected Tamil militants. In addition, 31,802 refugees live independently in rented houses outside the camps. (New Indian Express 26/1/15)

**Refugees given higher cash dole (13)**

CHENNAI: The Tamil Nadu government has been providing higher cash dole to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in the State than what has been allowed by the Union government. This was conveyed by a team of senior officers of the government to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice on Saturday. The State also brought to the notice of the committee the Centre’s decision on reduction in the sanctioned strength of staff to look after refugee camps. What was 280 had been brought down to 32, an official said. Chief Secretary K. Gnanadesikan and Director General of Police Ashok Kumar were among those who represented the State before the Committee, headed by E.M. Sudarsana Natchiappan. (The Hindu 1/2/15)

**CPI(M) urges for aid to Lankan refugees willing to return (13)**

Chennai: Observing that the Centre and the state governments have a responsibility to ensure a secure and dignified life for Sri Lankan refugees, CPI(M) on Monday said financial assistance must be extended to those willing to return to the island nation. "The Centre and state governments should extend financial assistance for their return home and guarantee a support structure for their livelihood such as house to ensure that they lead a new life," a resolution passed at the end of the party's three-day state committee meeting said. The governments have the responsibility to ensure a secure and dignified life for the refugees, who wished to return to the island nation, it said, adding various schemes, including those with specific provisions to aid their return, should be created. Senior party leaders P Sampath, Prakash Karat, K Varadarajan, G Ramakrishnan, T K Rangarajan, U K Balakrishnan, A Soundararajan participated in the meeting, which concluded today. (Zee News 2/1/15)

**For Lankan refugees, time may have come to return (13)**

Karthigaichelvan: The Indian government is mulling the idea of sending Lankan Tamil refugees like Sujivi - over one lakh still live in India - back home to Sri Lanka. This is not the first time that a refugee-return operation is being mounted. The earliest was in 1987-90 after the signing of the India-Sri Lanka accord. But unlike previous attempts the biggest positive now is that the war is over and
there's little chance of armed conflict breaking out or an imminent danger to the lives of Tamils in Sri Lanka on a mass scale. The new regime has been making the right noises whether in bringing normalcy to Tamil homelands, providing powers to the provincial government, or in taking up substantial measures for political rights. In the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, the most likely candidates for return are those in India. Though better off than the poor in India, many Lankan Tamils believe return is a possible option for the future since as refugees they will never be able to lead the life of a citizen in India. Things have not been easy for those who have returned until now. Based on their experiences the refugees in India have come up with a range of proposals that would help the process of repatriation. The key question that they ask is the assurance of a livelihood since those who came back have reported that as the biggest problem in their homelands. Tamil leaders in Sri Lanka advise caution -much like the Tamil Nadu government that has stayed away from trilateral talks in New Delhi. "The permanent solution for the refugees is coming down to the mother land. Though the new government has been showing some positive signs, it is too early to say that the situation in North has come to normalcy," said Mano Ganesan, TNA MP, over phone from Colombo. Activist and executive producer of documentary film "Waiting in Hop", Gladston Xavier said that the changes are visible in the northern areas of the country. "There has been steady progress in the returnees' life in Sri Lanka. The progress has speeded up in the last six months. They say early bird catches the worm," Gladston told TOI. "We have been screening the documentary in all refugee camps in Tamil Nadu as well as among diaspora Tamils. Many refugees who watched the film expressed a longing to go back home," says Gladston. But nearly every refugee family has a Sujivani -who were born and raised here. Some 24,000 children were born in Indian camps. Raised in India, they are apprehensive about taking a risk. Sujivani is positive, however. "The army is less interfering now. Inflation is high and livelihood is still a challenge. But we are hopeful of the future," she says. (Times of India 5/2/15)

Afghan families flee persecution in Pakistan after school attack: IOM (13)
KABUL: Thousands of Afghan families are fleeing Pakistan to escape harassment after a deadly Taliban attack on a school in Peshawar last December, the head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Afghanistan said on Saturday. More than 22,000 undocumented Afghans flocked across the border at Torkham in January, more than twice the figure for the whole of 2014, said Richard Danziger, the IOM's mission chief in Afghanistan. Almost 1,500 others were deported in the same month, double the number of deportees in December. "It all started with the attack on the school in Peshawar," Mr. Danziger told Reuters. "When something horrible happens, people start taking it out on foreigners." Taliban militants attacked a school in the north-western Pakistani city of Peshawar in December, killing more than 130 children and prompting Pakistan to step up operations against insurgent hideouts along the border with Afghanistan. Cooperation between Afghan and Pakistani security forces has also improved since the attack and has led to the arrest of suspects in Afghanistan, where officials believe it was planned by the Pakistani Taliban. However, Afghans living in Pakistan are reporting incidents of harassment such as raids on their homes and police coercion, the IOM and other officials said. Most of the Afghan families settled in Pakistan decades earlier and have nowhere to go once they return, Mr. Danziger said. "Their lives are in Pakistan," he said, adding it was unclear how long they would remain in Afghanistan. The flow of undocumented returnees increased steadily in January, from around 350 in the first week to 1,400 in the final week of the month. Mr. Danziger said it was difficult to predict when the numbers of refugees would ease. The unexpected arrival of thousands of people is pressuring Afghanistan's limited resources and only the most vulnerable are receiving assistance. "We are down to helping the most desperate there," Mr. Danziger said, adding that resources had been diverted from the Iranian border. Families lucky enough to qualify for help receive medical care, food and temporary shelter, but the IOM says it needs another $1.6 million to cope with an additional 17,000 vulnerable returnees this year. Most refugees are moving to nearby provinces including Kunar, the IOM said, where fighting between Afghan forces and Taliban militants has recently intensified. Others are heading for Kabul, where resources for thousands of internally displaced people settled there are already seriously strained. (The Hindu 7/2/15)
Rajnath to Visit Tripura on Repatriation of Reang Refugees (13)
AGARTALA: Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and Union Minister of State (Home) Kiren Rijiju will visit Tripura on Saturday to review the law and order situation and discuss the repatriation of Reang refugees, housed in six evacuee camps in the state, official sources said today. The Union Home Minister would arrive here by chopper from Imphal and then again fly by chopper for Khantlang border outpost, a remote area in Kanchanpur subdivision of North Tripura district to hold meeting with BSF officers, SP, Police Control, Uttam Bhowmick said. From Khantlang he would visit the evacuee camps of the internally displaced Reangs from neighbouring Mizoram and then return to Agartala to hold meeting with Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar and Mizoram Chief Minister Lalthanhawla at the Civil Secretariat, Bhowmick said. More than 32,000 Reang Bru refugees were huddled in six camps after they took shelter in Tripura since 1997 following ethnic clashes with the local Mizos over possession of land. The Union Home Minister would return to Delhi on the same day. (New Indian Express 11/2/15)

Rajnath Singh visits Bangladesh border in Tripura (13)
Agartala: Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh accompanied by his deputy, Kiren Rijiju, Saturday visited the India-Bangladesh border in Tripura and discussed issues with officials and BSF troopers. The two ministers also met Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar. "Rajnath Singh with Rijiju (minister of state for home affairs) and home ministry officials visited Khantlang in Tripura along the India-Bangladesh-Mizoram border," a Border Security Force (BSF) officer said. The home ministers interacted with the BSF officials and troopers at the Khantlang border outposts (195 km from Agartala), along the Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The militants set up camps in CHT and used the unfenced borders for their trans-border movements. "Senior BSF officials briefed both the ministers about the border issues and militancy related problems," the BSF official told IANS on condition of anonymity. The home minister appreciated the BSF troopers for their role in maintaining security in the mountainous areas. Earlier both the ministers accompanied by senior home ministry officials arrived here from Manipur, capital Imphal and left for the bordering areas by an Indian Air Force helicopter. After visiting the border areas, the union ministers met Sarkar and senior state government officials in Agartala to chalk out a plan to repatriate the tribal refugees to Mizoram. Mizoram Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla was scheduled to attend the meeting but could not make it. About 32,000 Reang tribals, locally called "Bru", are staying in seven camps in Tripura since October 1997 after fleeing their villages in Mizoram, following ethnic troubles after the killing of a Mizo forest official. Home Ministry’s Joint Secretary Shambhu Singh Jan 30 held a meeting in New Delhi with Tripura and Mizoram officials and discussed the repatriation of Mizoram’s tribal refugees. The Tripura government has been asking both Mizoram and the union home ministry to repatriate the tribal refugees to their homes in Mizoram. (Zee News 14/2/15)

Rajnath Singh assures all possible help in repatriation of all Bru migrants (13)
Kanchanpur: Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh has assured all possible help in repatriation of all Bru migrants in Tripura. The Home Minister was interacting with the representatives of Bru migrants living in relief camps at Kanchanpur during his visit to Tripura. The Government has released fund amounting to Rs. 242.35 crore for the year 2014-15 for maintenance of the Bru migrants living in relief camps. Earlier, Rajnath Singh has visited border areas along Chittagong Hill tracts to meet BSF personnel at Khantlang (North Tripura). BSF jawans have explained the functioning of monitoring equipments used at the BoPs. While addressing, Rajnath Singh has underlined the importance of their presence in border areas and saluted their courage. "I salute these brave men who stay away from home to perform their national duty," he added. The Union Home Minister has met the Chief Minister of Tripura Manik Sarkar and reviewed the security situation in the state. While addressing a press conference, Rajnath Singh has said that Insurgency was the biggest problem facing the North-Eastern region. "Our government is committed to the North East development but insurgency and militancy hamper its progress," he added. The Union Home Minister has appealed to insurgent groups
operating in the North-East to shun violence and give the region a change to progress and develop. The Union Home Minister has assured Tripura government of all cooperation to deal with the issues of insurgency and other security related issues. The government is planning 100 percent repatriation of all Bru refugees and the Centre will provide all assistance to expedite the process, he added. The Union Home Minister appealed to Mizoram government to provide adequate security to Bru refugees and help them in their rehabilitation. (New Kerala 16/2/15)

Myanmar conflict: China rules out intervention (13)
BEIJING: China has assured Myanmar that it will not interfere in its domestic affairs, despite a cross-border surge in the Yunnan province of refugees, who are escaping fighting following a military offensive in northern Myanmar. Heavy fighting between the Myanmar army and Kokang rebels for control of Laukkai township in the northern Shan State, is causing civilians to flee across the border, Myanmar’s newspaper, The Irrawaddy, quoting a rebel source, reported. Despite the close ethnic ties between the Kokang people and mainland groups, China has made it plain it will not be drawn into the conflict. The Chinese are also debating whether a win-win partnership for durable peace in Myanmar with India and Thailand is possible, which could reconcile China’s “One Road, One Belt” strategy with New Delhi’s “Look East” policy. Analysts say that China wants to quickly restore stability in Myanmar, which is central to the fulfilment of the its grand strategy of the developing the 21st century Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt, which aims to integrate the economies of Asia and Europe, anchored by China. A strongly worded editorial in Global Times, the newspaper affiliated with the Communist Party of China (CPC), stressed that the Kokang people are not entitled to the rights that Chinese citizens exercise. The write up follows an appeal in an open letter by Kokang leader Pheung Kya-shin for support from Chinese people all over the world, spurring speculation in sections of the western and social media that a situation similar to Crimea has developed along China’s border with Myanmar, following the refugee rush. The editorial warned that that there “are no grounds for comparing Kokang to Crimea”, and those “who are stuck in such comparisons are either spouting nonsense, or have ulterior motives”. It added that, “China should play a role in fostering peace in northern Myanmar and persuading Myanmar government troops and ethnic armed forces to solve the problem through negotiations”. Recognising Myanmar’s criticality to the fulfilment of “One Road, One Belt” strategy, another commentary, appearing earlier this month in the Global Times, advocated joint efforts by China, India and Thailand to restore win-win peace in Myanmar. The commentary added that all three countries will benefit from stability in Myanmar, which can become a hub that connects China, India and Thailand”. (The Hindu 18/2/15)

‘Lankan refugees should not be forced to leave’ (13)
MADURAI: The ‘Samam Kudimakkal Iyakkam,’ a Madurai-based human rights organisation, has appealed to the Union government to sign the 1951 United Nations Convention Related to the Status of Refugees. In a resolution passed here on Friday, it said the government should come out with a law on refugee rights. Thyagu, Editor, Tamil Desam, felt that discussions on refugees centred around only the facilities made available to them and not their rights. He wondered how the refugees could be sent back when Tamils living in Sri Lanka were still under surveillance of the army. The government was talking about sending back only refugees from Sri Lanka and not those from Myanmar, Bangladesh or Tibet, Mr. Thyagu said. Human rights educationist Devasagayam said that Sri Lankan Tamils were neither accepted as refugees nor recognised as citizens here as India was not a signatory to the UN Convention. According to a press release, C. J. Rajan, State president, Samam, said that Sri Lankan Tamil refugees residing in camps across Tamil Nadu should not be forced to go back. The individual’s wish should be ascertained before making any attempt at deportation. The government should not act in any manner that would be detrimental to freedom of Sri Lankan Tamils living in 107 refugee camps in the State. (The Hindu 21/2/15)

HRW urges Pak to halt forceful return of Afghan refugees in wake of Peshawar school attack (13)
Islamabad: The Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged Pakistan to halt forced return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan in the wake of the recent Peshawar school attack. A substantial rise in the number of Afghan refugees leaving the country has been noted since the Dec 16 Taliban attack on Peshawar's Army Public School. According to Dawn, UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said that nine times as many Afghan refugees repatriated from Pakistan in January 2015 than in December 2014. The increase in the count of refugees leaving the country seems to indicate that they are being forced to go back to Afghanistan by the local authorities. Phelim Kine, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch said that Pakistani officials should not be scapegoating Afghans because of the Taliban's atrocities in Peshawar. He further said that it was “inhumane” and “unlawful” to coerce Afghans to return to places where they were likely to face harassment and abuse, the report added. (New Kerala 24/2/15)

Don't question Christian missionaries: Alexis Prem Kumar (13)

New Delhi: Statements such as those made by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat questioning the intent behind Mother Teresa's service are politically motivated, according to Father Alexis Prem Kumar, who was just released after eight months of Taliban captivity in Afghanistan. Kumar, in an interview to PTI today, said he did not have any mindset of conversion while working with refugees in Afghanistan and even this identity was not of a Christian priest as people knew him as "Mr Prem Kumar". "For me religion is not the thing. For me goal of religion is service. To bring humanity joy, peace, justice and equality. All the religions must work towards that. That must be the goal. Actually all this fight is politically motivated... That is why I think India must grow out of it," he said on the statements of Bhagwat on Mother Teresa. Recounting his experience of captivity, Kumar said that he was not tortured even once by the militants during the eight months and they took good care of him by providing him good food and basic facilities. "The only torture was that they had kept me tied 24 hours. I could not move around," he recounted. He said he was grateful to the efforts undertaken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his release. Kumar, 47, who was serving for three years as Country Director of Jesuit Refugee Service, a voluntary group working for the refugees, in Afghanistan was abducted by a group of Taliban militants on June 2, 2014 from Sohadat village, 25 km from Herat where he had gone to inspect a school supported by his organisation. "The talks of militants planning to kidnap a foreigner were very common. But it was only after attack on Indian consulate in Herat in May that Indian diplomats had warned me to be careful in my activities. This was the first serious warning that was issued to me," Kumar said. Kumar said the regional director of his organisation held hectic negotiations with the Taliban in Qatar during the period even as government of India continued with its efforts. Describing his kidnapping, he said no one in Sohadat had any idea that he would be visiting the area as he had planned to visit Bamyan to oversee work done by his organisation but the flight was cancelled. "I was a routine early morning visit to Sohadat after 15 days to the area. I had also gone to nearby district from where I returned at about 12.30 in afternoon. When I came back, I saw four people in an SUV full of weapons approaching us. They just asked who was the foreigner and fired upon a building," he said. Kumar said in order to save his people from militants he came forward and identified himself. "They put me in the vehicle, tied my hands and blindfolded me. They kept driving for nearly eight hours after which we rested the night in a cave," he said. According to Kumar, "Language was a major problem. During entire period of eight months, I did not see a single child, woman or an elderly person. I could only guess from Helmand river and desert that I was kept somewhere around Baluchistan and Afghanistan border but I could be completely wrong." He said he did not speak to his family or any Indian official during the entire eight-month period but he knew that his captives were in touch with the family members through his cell phone which was taken by them. He said the group that kidnapped him had handed him to another group of armed men who kept him in captivity during entire period and kept shifting bases. "When the first group handed me over to the second group, I was told that they had sold me for 20 million dollars, a figure which I did not believe," he said. "Sometimes I was shifted within eight days while at some other places I was kept for nearly 81 days," he said. On January 15, Kumar said they informed him that he would be released soon but it took nearly one month that he was actually released. "They left me at a place where firing was going
on. One of the militants gave me his cell phone and from other side for the first time I could hear English. It was then I realised that I am safe. They asked me to run towards a highway, where officials were present," he said. DNA 25/2/15)

**My captors starved with me and told me I'd live, says Jesuit priest.. (13)**

CHENNAI: Jesuit priest Father Alexis Prem Kumar, who was released from captivity in Afghanistan, said on Thursday that he didn't know who his captors were. He said he didn't know the reason for his abduction. Addressing a press meet at Loyola College in Chennai, Fr Alexis narrated the hardships he had undergone in captivity. The priest said he had lived in harsh environment after being abducted by some men while he was working with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the Herat province. The men moved him from one place to another after abducting him on June 2. He said his hands and legs had been chained. The chains were removed only when he wanted to relieve himself. A gun wielding man was watching over him always. "The man who was tasked with watching me was nice to me. He kept reassuring me that I would live," the priest said. Fr Alexis said he had starved at times. "But my captors also starved with me as there was no food." Fr Alexis, hailing from Devakottai in the Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu, was released after India pursued his case at the highest level. "While releasing me, my captors warned me that they would shoot me if they saw me again in Afghanistan," the priest said. (Times of India 26/2/15)

**Fate of Mizo refugees hangs in balance (13)**

Hyderabad: Despite fresh initiatives by the central and Tripura governments, the repatriation to Mizoram of about 35,000 tribal refugees sheltered in Tripura for over 17 years still hangs in balance. Refugee leaders told Home Minister Rajnath Singh and his deputy Kiren Rijiju recently that they were willing to return to their homes in Mizoram if their 10 demands, including security and rehabilitation, were met. Brus left Mizoram en masse after Lalzawmlia, a forest guard, was gunned down by Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) militants in October 1997 and were lodged in North Tripura district since then. The plans to repatriate the Brus from Tripura from November 16, 2009, the murder of Zarzokima, a young boy from Bungthuam village by Bru militants not only derailed the proposed repatriation, but triggered another round of exodus due to heightened communal tension. Mizoram says that those Brus lodged in six relief camps in Tripura, who refuse to return to Mizoram after six months following the next repatriation efforts would be disfranchised as Mizoram voters. The government remains ambiguous on the refugees' demands, including free supply of food grain for two years and allotment of land to them. The demands have also run into objections from Mizos. Tripura and Mizoram share a 109-km border. The immigrants live in small thatched homes made of bamboo and hemp in seven transitory relief camps in Kanchanpur in northern Tripura, adjoining Mizoram. Most adult men and women sit idle through the day. After meeting the refugee leaders at Kanchanpur in northern Tripura, the central ministers and officials met Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar in Agartala. The meeting remained inconclusive as Mizoram Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla did not attend it. About 35,000 Reang tribals, who call themselves "Bru", have lived in seven camps in Tripura since October 1997 after fleeing western Mizoram after the killing of a Mizo forest officer triggered ethnic troubles. Reangs are officially categorised a primitive tribe. The Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum submitted a six-page memorandum to the central ministers accusing the Mizoram government of discriminating against them. "We are ready to go back to our homes in Mizoram. But before that the Mizoram and central governments must implement our demands," its general secretary Bruno Msha told IANS. Home ministry officials met officers from Tripura and Mizoram in New Delhi Jan 30 and finalised a roadmap to repatriate the refugees by June 2015. "The Tripura government will provide all logistical help if Mizoram takes back the refugees," Tripura Relief and Rehabilitation Department Additional Secretary Karnamani Das said. The central government took the initiative to repatriate the refugees in view of the Supreme Court directions on January 16. Following a Tripura High Court order, the union home ministry last year set up a seven-member panel headed by Rajiv Gauba, an additional secretary, to oversee the condition of the refugees in the Tripura camps. The central team submitted its report to the Tripura HC. The refugees say they should
be treated like Kashmiri pundits. But the Mizo Students Federation argues that the Reang tribals were not refugees in the first place and so can never be compared with the Kashmiri Pundits. Tripura Revenue and Relief Minister Badal Choudhury said: "A serious socio-economic problem has cropped up due to the long stay of the refugees in Tripura." "Some refugees are involved in terrorism activities. The refugees also work for cheap wages, creating an awkward situation for local labourers," he added. (The Hans India 3/3/15)

**Send back tribal refugees to Mizoram: Tripura urges centre (13)**

Agartala: The Tripura government on Tuesday again urged the central government to take steps to send over 31,000 tribal refugees back to Mizoram to maintain ethnic harmony in the northeastern region. The Tripura assembly on Tuesday discussed the 17-year-old issue. After replying to a series of questions of the legislators, Revenue and Relief Minister Badal Choudhury told the assembly: "We urge upon the central government to ask the Mizoram government to take back the refugees." "The central and Mizoram governments recently took a fresh initiative to repatriate the refugees in view of the Supreme Court directions Jan 16. Union home minister Rajnath Singh and his deputy Kiren Rijiju recently visited Tripura and persuaded the refugee leaders to go back to their homes in Mizoram," he said. Choudhury said: "Union home minister tried to hold a meeting with the chief ministers of Tripura and Mizoram to finalise a road map to repatriate the refugees to Mizoram. However, Mizoram chief minister did not attend the meeting nor did he send his representative." "It is very unfortunate that the tribals despite being Indians nationals and permanent inhabitant of a state, are unable to live in their homeland. This is dangerous for the ethnic amity, stability and peace," the minister said. He said: "A serious socio-economic problem has cropped up due to the long stay of the refugees in Tripura. The refugees have damaged vast areas in forests in Kanchanpur causing serious environmental problems." "Some refugees are involved in terrorist activities. The refugees also work for cheap wages, creating an awkward situation for local labourers," the minister stated. The Reang tribals, who call themselves "Bru", have lived in seven camps in Tripura since October 1997 when they fled western Mizoram after the killing of a Mizo forest officer triggered ethnic troubles. Refugee leaders told Home Minister Rajnath Singh and his deputy Kiren Rijiju that they were willing to return to their homes in Mizoram if their 10 demands, including security and rehabilitation, were met. The Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum submitted a six-page memorandum to the central ministers accusing the Mizoram government of discriminating against them. The Mizoram government remains ambiguous on the refugees' demands, which also included free supply of foodgrain for two years, and allotting land to them. Mizo organisations have opposed the demands. (Business Standard 3.3.15)

**Rescued Tripura tribal kids to be sent back home (13)**

Agartala: Sixteen of the 19 children rescued from the Guwahati railway station by the Assam Police CID and Childline, an NGO, belong to tribal refugees living in Tripura and will be handed over to their parents, an official said here on Thursday. "All the 19 children, rescued by the Assam Police CID and Childline from the Guwahati railway station on February 25, are now staying at a children's home run by the Assam government in Guwahati," Tripura social welfare department secretary M. Nagaraju told reporters. He said: "A team of officials from north Tripura's child welfare committee would go to Guwahati and the children would be brought back to Tripura by March 10." Of the 19 children, all below 18 years of age, 16 belong to the Reang refugees of Mizoram who are currently living in seven camps in North Tripura and remaining three are inhabitants of Hilakhandhi of southern Assam. Childline officials in Guwahati suspect it was a case of child trafficking. The Assam police are still investigating the motive of the two adults accompanying the children. An official of Tripura social welfare department on condition of anonymity said that the children were being trafficked to Haryana/Uttar Pradesh to be forced into child labour. "The children accompanied by two adults would have boarded a Delhi-bound train, had the Assam CID and Childline functionaries not reached the Guwahati railway station in time," the official said. Around 31,300 Reang tribals have been living in seven camps in north Tripura adjoing Mizoram since October 1997 when they fled western Mizoram after the killing of a Mizo forest officer triggered ethnic troubles.(Business Standard 5/3/15)
Afghan delegation protests harassment of refugees in Pakistan (13)

Peshawar: A visiting Afghan parliamentary delegation on Monday complained about the harassment of Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the aftermath of a deadly Taliban attack on an army-run school here last December. The Afghan delegation, led by Minister for Refugees and Repatriation Syed Hussain Balkhi, met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Governor Mehtab Ahmad Khan and Chief Minister Pervez Khattak and discussed cooperation between the two countries. The Afghan minister complained that the police was harassing Afghan refugees in Peshawar and their houses were being raided in the aftermath of Peshawar school attack last December that killed over 150 people, mostly students. The ghastly attack was claimed by Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whose leader Maulana Fazlullah is believed to be operating from Afghanistan. The minister further said that Afghan government was devising comprehensive strategy for repatriation of the Afghan refugees and sought Pakistan's support in this regard. The KP governor denied harassment of the Afghan refugees and said that the registered Afghan refugees were living in Pakistan without any problem. He said that despite bad economic condition, Pakistan has taken care of the Afghan refugees for more than 30 years. He assured the Afghan delegation that registered Afghan refugees in custody, if any, would be released soon. (Zee News 9/3/15)

J&K govt approves 3,000 posts for Kashmiri pandits under PM's package (13)

JAMMU: The Jammu & Kashmir government on Tuesday approved 3,000 supernumerary posts to Kashmiri pandit migrants under the Prime Minister's package in the Valley. "The state government has approved 3,000 supernumerary posts for Kashmiri pandit migrants under PM's package in Valley," a senior officer of the state government said. Minister for law, justice and parliamentary affairs and relief and rehabilitation, Syed Basharat Bukhari held extensive discussions on relief and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants. In this regard, Bukhari directed the relief commissioner to collect data of migrant unemployed youth who are registered as Kashmiri migrants in Jammu or outside the state besides enjoining the youth to submit their details within a period of 20 days. While taking stock of the relief and rehabilitation measures for Kashmiri migrants, the minister directed the reconstitution of the Apex Advisory Committee (AAC), an apex body of representatives of Kashmiri migrants, who migrated from the Valley. "Creation of 3,000 supernumerary posts for providing employment to migrant youth in the Valley under PM's package for return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants was also decided in the meeting," he said. It was informed in the meeting that presently 18,589 families are drawing relief of the 41,117 migrant families. District wise, Srinagar has the maximum number of migrant families at 13,491 followed by Anantnag which has 9,291. During 2014-15, an amount of Rs 127.28 crore has been incurred on cash assistance, food grains, building infrastructure facilities in camps and on civic action programme for migrant families. The facilities and living conditions in various camps including Purkho, Muthi, Nagrota and Jagiti were also informed in the meeting. The minister said that he would carry out on spot inspection of these camps in due course of time to have a first-hand experience of the living conditions. In order to address various issues of the migrant families, the minister directed the Secretary Revenue for constitution of a grievance cell in the office of additional secretary revenue.: The Jammu & Kashmir government on Tuesday approved 3,000 supernumerary posts to Kashmiri pandit migrants under the Prime Minister's package in the Valley. "The state government has approved 3,000 supernumerary posts for Kahsmiri pandit migrants under PM's package in Valley," a senior officer of the state government said. Minister for law, justice and parliamentary affairs and relief and rehabilitation, Syed Basharat Bukhari held extensive discussions on relief and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants. In this regard, Bukhari directed the relief commissioner to collect data of migrant unemployed youth who are registered as Kashmiri migrants in Jammu or outside the state besides enjoining the youth to submit their details within a period of 20 days. While taking stock of the relief and rehabilitation measures for Kashmiri migrants, the minister directed the reconstitution of the Apex Advisory Committee (AAC), an apex body of representatives of Kashmiri migrants, who migrated from the Valley. "Creation of 3,000 supernumerary posts for providing employment to migrant youth in the Valley under PM's package for return and rehabilitation
of Kashmiri migrants was also decided in the meeting,” he said. It was informed in the meeting that presently 18,589 families are drawing relief of the 41,117 migrant families. District wise, Srinagar has the maximum number of migrant families at 13,491 followed by Anantnag which has 9,291. During 2014-15, an amount of Rs 127.28 crore has been incurred on cash assistance, food grains, building infrastructure facilities in camps and on civic action programme for migrant families. The facilities and living conditions in various camps including Purkhoo, Muthi, Nagrota and Jagiti were also informed in the meeting. The minister said that he would carry out on spot inspection of these camps in due course of time to have a first-hand experience of the living conditions. In order to address various issues of the migrant families, the minister directed the Secretary Revenue for constitution of a grievance cell in the office of additional secretary revenue. (Times of India 11/3/15)

**Need for effective treaty with Bangla stressed (13)**

GUWAHATI, March 14 – Highlighting the urgent need for a repatriation treaty between India and Bangladesh for effectively deporting the illegal migrants from Assam, the Assam Jatiya Gana Sangram Parishad today organised a seminar on the topic ‘Why do we need an Indo-Bangladesh repatriation treaty’ and launched a public awareness campaign on the issue. Introducing the topic, Dr Aroop J Kalita, chief convenor of the forum, said that the treaty was a must for facilitating a concrete mechanism for deporting migrants from Bangladesh. Stressing the fact that in the absence of a concrete mechanism to deport the illegal migrants, the authorities only push back the detected Bangladeshis from the border, the Parishad said that eventually the expelled migrants re-enter India, as the Bangladesh government does not formally receive them. The Parishad argued that a large portion of illegal migrants do not fall under the jurisdiction of the existing extradition treaty between the two countries due to some legal hitch. Throwing light on the legal aspects of the problem of illegal infiltration, Dr Ramesh Chandra Borpatragohain, Dean, Faculty of Law, Gauhati University, said that the issue was no longer a national issue. “It is an international issue because it involves two sovereign countries, and therefore, this has to be dealt by the principles of international laws. “Since the entire issue of deportation has become vague in the absence of a properly laid down mechanism, and given the Supreme Court’s recent directions on the issue, it is the bounden duty of the Government of India to immediately negotiate it with the Government of Bangladesh and sign a repatriation treaty to resolve the entire problem,” he added. Advocate Durlav Mahanta, while speaking on the occasion said that it was necessary to raise the issue in Delhi from a political perspective as the pressure groups of the State were not strong enough to make a difference in policy making. Former bureaucrat Dr Rohini Kr Baruah gave a historical perspective of the entire issue. Several noted personalities spoke on the occasion. (The Assam Tribune 14/3/15)

**Thousands of Afghan refugees facing harassment flee Pakistan (13)**

Torkham (Afghanistan): Crossing back into his native Afghanistan from Pakistan, Nezamuddin wept as he recounted the hardships his family of 11 had faced in their years as refugees, troubles that only grew insufferable after a recent terror attack there killed 150 people. “Whenever there was a bomb blast they would arrest us for it, beat us up, take our money,” said Nezamuddin, who goes by one name like many Afghans. “Now I don't know how I am going to look after my old father, myself and my mother.” Since January, almost 50,000 Afghans like Nezamuddin's family have passed through Torkham, double the amount of all refugees returning through the border town in 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration. Many like Nezamuddin say they fled Pakistan over increased harassment by police who told them to return to Afghanistan, a country many have never even seen, putting new pressure on both countries to find solutions to the decades-old flow of refugees. There are some 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and up to an estimated 1.5 million unregistered Afghans live there, said Abdul Quadir Baloch, the Pakistani minister responsible for refugee issues. Exact figures remain elusive as tens of thousands cross the border daily. Pakistan initially welcomed waves of Afghan refugees after the 1979 invasion by the Soviet Union. But as years progressed, attitudes hardened. Many now see Afghan refugees as criminals or militants or taking jobs from Pakistanis. Then came the Dec. 16 Taliban attack on an army-run school
in Peshawar, in which 150 people, most of them children, were killed. Suddenly, Afghan refugees reported increased harassment by authorities checking their documents, demanding bribes and telling them they had to return to Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch said. At Torkham, Afghan refugees now pour over the border with little more than the clothes on their backs. Some arrive on foot, others in rented trucks with family members huddled between bags, boxes, mattresses and suitcases. Awal Khan, a father of seven, spent 35 years in Pakistan, arriving as a baby when his parents fled after the 1979 invasion. Khan said he worked as a daily laborer, earning just enough to feed his family. Serious harassment began after the school attack, he said. "They went house to house, looking for Afghan refugees. They forced us to leave," he told The Associated Press. "I have no house to live in and no money to rent one. We will have to live in a tent." Syed Liaqat Banori, who heads the Islamabad-based Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid, said authorities often harass Afghan refugees following security incidents but this time was much worse. (Zee News 16/3/15)

**J&K govt ambiguous on west Pak refugees' issue: Hurriyat (13)**

Srinagar: Hardline Hurriyat conference led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani on Saturday accused the Jammu and Kashmir government of taking an ambiguous stand on west Pakistan refugees, saying the state was under no obligation to rehabilitate them. The Hurriyat was reacting to Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's statement that the state government will ensure employment opportunities for the West Pakistan Refugees in the private sector. "The government has ambiguous stand with regarding to the Pakistan Refugees and it seems that the government is shying away from expressing their stand," Hurriyat spokesman Ayaz Akbar said. (Zee News 21/3/15)

**Minority Status for Pandits Irks Sikhs, PoK Refugees (13)**

SRI NAGAR: The recommendation by a Parliamentary Panel to grant minority status to migrant Kashmiri Pandits (KPs) in Jammu and Kashmir has led to strong resentment from Sikhs and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) refugees, who have warned of a strong agitation. "The recommendation by Parliamentary Panel is in contravention to the guidelines set by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) as far as classification of minorities is concerned," All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee (APSCC) chairman Jagmohan Singh Raina told reporters here on Monday. He said the NCM had made it clear that there were six minority communities in the country -- Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains. "Recommending minority status to the Pandits is against the procedure laid down by the NCM. Granting minority status to Pandits would upset the whole equilibrium in the society," said Raina. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs in its report on rehabilitation of migrant KPs had urged the J&K government to look into the demand for granting minority status to the Pandits, who migrated from the Valley after the eruption of militancy in 1989. "J&K has a special status in the Indian Constitution so the state government should look into the demand of the Pandits for conferring on them minority status keeping in mind their pitiable condition," the panel has stated. The J&K government has recently revealed that 37,128 Kashmiri Pandit families had migrated from Kashmir following the outbreak of militancy in 1989. Raina warned that if the Central government went ahead with granting minority status to Kashmiri Pandits then the Sikhs would have no option but to come out on to the streets and stage strong protests in support of their demands. "We have suffered a lot in the past and we cannot live with it forever. Justice has to be done and there cannot be any compromise in this regard. We will launch an agitation so that justice is done and injustice is rooted out," he said. The APSCC chairman said the National Minority Act needed to be implemented in letter and spirit in Jammu and Kashmir so that the Sikh community gets the privileges that they were entitled to. Rajiv Chuni, chairman of SOS International, an organisation for PoK refugees, said the Centre’s move to grant minority status to KPs was unacceptable. "The Parliamentary Committee recommended minority status to Kashmiri Pandits by looking at their pitiable condition but the panel has not been moved by the miserable plight of PoK refugees, who are living in gloom since 1947," he said. The PoK refugees migrated to the state from Pok after 1947. Chuni said Kashmiri Pandits had their safe homes in the state while PoK refugees and Chammb refugees had lost their homes, land, everything and were forced to live in despondent conditions. "We
will oppose tooth and nail granting of minority status to Pandits. We will mobilise people and launch an agitation if the Pandits are granted the status,” Chuni said, adding they would also approach the courts if the Centre went against the people’s aspirations and provided minority status to Pandits. (New Indian Express 24/3/15)

**Rijiju visits refugee camp (13)**

KANCHEEPURAM: Framing of a refugee policy will be considered if needed, Union Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju has said. Talking to reporters at the Sri Lankan Refugee Camp at Gummidipoondi in Tiruvallur district, on Tuesday, the Minister said that all humanitarian support was being extended to refugees in the country, even though India was not a signatory to the Refugee Convention. When asked whether the present government was contemplating of signing the treaty in view of the influx of refugees faced by border States, Mr.Rijiju said as of now there was no such proposal. Earlier, addressing refugee camp inmates, the Minister assured them that as long as they stayed in the country, the Indian government would take care of them and extend whatever necessary help in association with the State Government. He complemented the State government for providing basic civic amenities and other steps initiated to provide good care to the refugees in the camps. Meanwhile, representative of the Gummidipoondi refugee camp, P.Sivakumar, in his memorandum stated that five per cent of the refugees were willing to return to their homeland in view of the steps initiated by Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena. Further, 30 percent of them would wish to return after the completion of the education of their children, whereas five per cent preferred to stay in India, it added. Stating that some Sri Lankan Tamils, living in camps and as well as outside, were languishing in the absence of registration as refugees, the memorandum made a request that they too should be registered as refugees. (The Hindu 25/3/15)

**UNHCR says highest ever number of asylum applications submitted by Pak in 2014 (13)**

Karachi: A report has revealed that more than 26,000 applications seeking asylum were received from Pakistan in 2014, the highest-ever number of such applications received from a country on record, making the nation the sixth largest source of asylum seekers. A report published by the UNHCR titled “Asylum Trends 2014,” showed that about 26,300 applications were submitted by asylum seekers in Pakistan, which is slightly over four percent higher than 25,200 applications received in 2013, reported The Express Tribune. The UN agency noted that although the increase was nominal, just 4.3 percent higher than previous year’s numbers, yet in comparison to the global increase of approximately 45 percent last year, it was the fourth consecutive annual rise for the country. While request for asylum to Italy from Pakistanis rose by more than 100% from 3,000 claims in 2013 to 7,100 last year, the number of Pakistanis seeking asylum in Hungary decreased significantly from over 3,000 claims in 2013 to just 300 last year. Barring Italy, Germany and United Kingdom were the other major destinations for asylum seekers from Pakistan with 4,000 and 3,900 applications, respectively. (New Kerala 27/3/15)

**Pak to Expel 11,000 Illegal Afghan Refugees in Pok (13)**

ISLAMABAD: Authorities in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir today said they will expel about 11,000 illegal Afghan refugees living in the disputed region. The decision has been taken after Pakistan launched a crackdown on illegal refugees in the wake of the deadly Taliban attack on an army school in Peshawar that killed 136 students in December. Senior police official Faheem Abbasi said in PoK capital Muzaffarabad that "some 11,000 Afghans would be expelled" from the region. There are about 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan who fled to the country during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. A majority of them have permission to live under agreement with the UN and Afghan government and are issued special cards. They live in designated camps and are also allowed to work. But about 1.4 million are illegal refugees and they are targeted by security forces and are being asked to leave or register to become legal refugees. Pakistan recently decided to take action against illegal Afghan
refugees and about 30,000 have already left after the Peshawar school attack. (New Indian Express 2/4/15)

Mass exodus: 100,000 villagers migrate from Chhattisgarh in 3 years (13)

RAIPUR: There's a deathly silence in many villages across Chhattisgarh these days. The houses are locked as entire families have left for greener pastures for want of work, despite Central government's rural job scheme and availability of rice at Rs1 per kg. "We (55 labourers and 15 children) are leaving for Faizabad (in Uttar Pradesh) where we will make bricks. The payment is Rs 400 for 1,000 bricks. Two labourers can make 1,000 bricks in a day. We will come back after working for six months there," Kans Nishad of Baloda Bazaar said at the Raipur railway station. According to government statistics, 95,324 people have left their homes in last three years. A substantial part of the migration - 29,190 - took place from Janjgir-Champa district. Inquiries revealed that people living below the poverty line are not getting jobs under MGNREGA scheme. Chhattisgarh revenue minister Prem Prakash Pandey accepted the migration issue in state assembly but didn't have any solutions. Apart from Janjgir-Champa, there are also reports of migration from Bemetara, Balod, Kawardha, Gariaband, Durg and Dhamtari districts, among others. The migrants have moved to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh where they are engaged in construction of houses, roads and canals or they work in brick kilns. Official records in Maoist-hit Sukma district show that no villager has been given employment under MGNREGA in last nine months. This apart, government officials working on the scheme say they have not been paid for the past six to 10 months. Ironically, neighbouring Dantewada district, which is also Maoist-affected, was given a national award earlier this year for its good performance under the scheme. Statistics of Baloda district are stark with some 500 labourers migrating every month. Besides, statistics show that 20,000 labourers have moved out of Lavan area, leaving hundreds of houses in around 15 villages locked. "The labourers have not derived any benefit inspite of state's small size. That's why a large number of labourers are migrating to other states," Rajesh Mishra, general-secretary of NGO Gram Vikas Samiti said. "The statistics of economic development are lying in cold storage, far away from the ground reality. That's why people of Chhattisgarh are moving away. A major question that arises here is till when would this continue," Mishra said. (Times of India 6/4/15)

Palestinians urge UN to ensure safety of besieged refugees (13)

United Nations: The Palestinian UN ambassador is urging the UN Security Council to take action to ensure safe passage for up to 18,000 Palestinians besieged in a refugee camp in the Syrian capital. The council held an emergency meeting today on the crisis at the Yarmouk camp, which is now mainly controlled by the Islamic State group. The Palestinian ambassador, Riyad Mansour, told reporters that saving the refugees is his government's top priority. He appealed to all nations to help the refugees relocate to safer areas in Syria or in other countries. Mansour said about 2,000 of the estimated 18,000 refugees in Yarmouk had made it to safety on their own. The Security Council was being briefed behind closed doors by the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, Pierre Krahenbuhl. (Zee News 7/4/15)

UN warns of "slaughter of innocents" in Syrian refugee camp (13)

London: United Nations officials warn of a potential "slaughter of innocents" unless aid and assistance reached a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria where thousands of civilians are trapped up in a vicious battle. United Nations officials warned on Wednesday of a potential "slaughter of innocents" unless aid and assistance reached a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria where thousands of civilians are trapped up in a vicious battle. Some 18,000 civilians, including 3,500 children, are caught in the camp outside Damascus just a few miles from President Bashar al-Assad's palace. The camp largely fell under Islamic State (IS) control last week and is surrounded by the Syrian army. The Yarmouk camp, which was home to half a million Palestinians before the conflict began in 2011, has been held by anti-Assad insurgents and besieged by government troops since the early days of the war and many have already fled. But as fighting intensified in and around the camp, the remaining refugees have
been left without food, water and medical supplies prompting aid agencies to call for the warring parties to allow access for aid and evacuations. "The level of inhumanity that Yarmouk has descended to is frankly unimaginable," Chris Gunness, spokesman for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) from Jerusalem. "The situation is absolutely desperate. We need urgently to have humanitarian access, which is why UNRWA is calling for all parties to exercise influence with their clients on the ground so that we can get into the camp." Gunness said since the fighting escalated a week ago, UNRWA aid convoys have not been able to enter the camp and the already dire situation has become more desperate with people left without water, food or medicine and the growing risk of disease. Gunness said a few Palestinian charities had managed to get some supplies to the camp but otherwise people were cut off with the risk of disease rising daily. "When you have public health system completely shot to pieces, when you have such terrible levels of food insecurity ... disease is going to soar," said Gunness. "We have tragic pictures of children and others scooping up water out of holes in the streets." Gunness said UNRWA had not been a regular presence in the camp for at least two years so it was impossible to estimate the number of people now ill or the death toll. The war in Syria has killed 220,000 people and displaced millions of Syrians. The United Nations has said it is extremely concerned about the safety and protection of Syrian and Palestinian civilians at the Yarmouk camp. Gunness said an estimated 94 civilians, including 43 women and 20 children, managed to leave the camp on Sunday and were provided with humanitarian support so there was no reason why more could not be helped to safety. "For me it is unconceivable that the so-called civilised world can stand and watch what is going on in Yarmouk," he said. "We are facing a potential slaughter of the innocents and the world cannot stand by and watch that happen." (DNA 8/4/15)

Kashmiri Pandits Demand "Composite Township" Amid Separatist's Protests (13)

JAMMU: Various organisations representing people of Kashmiri Pandit community today held protests here against the separatists and political parties opposed to the idea of creation of a "composite township" in Kashmir Valley for the displaced people. Members of the community living in various satellite townships here demanded townships in the Valley where they can live peacefully. "It has been 25 years that we were forced to leave Kashmir valley and now we want to go back to our homeland. At present the situation is not conducive for our return to our native places so we want a Jagti-type township in Kashmir Valley where we can go and live peacefully," said Kakaji Bhat, a resident of the Jagti satellite township for Kashmiri migrants. He said Kashmiri Pandits want to return to their native places, but the opposition from separatists has shown that situation is not conducive for their return. "There are certain villages in the Valley where only one or two Kashmiri Pandit families used to live. They were forced to leave their houses, how can you expect them to return to their native place where they will have to live under the shadow of militant guns always," Kakaji said. Raising slogans against separatist leaders, the residents demanded that the state government should not succumb to the pressure of the separatists and should go ahead with the township proposal. "The state and Central governments must not succumb to the dictate of these separatists and must go ahead with the proposal," Shadi Lal Pandita President of Jagti Tenement Committee said. He said Kashmiri Pandits want to return to their native places, but the opposition from separatists has shown that situation is not conducive for their return. "There are certain villages in the Valley where only one or two Kashmiri Pandit families used to live. They were forced to leave their houses, how can you expect them to return to their native place where they will have to live under the shadow of militant guns always," Kakaji said. Raising slogans against separatist leaders, the residents demanded that the state government should not succumb to the pressure of the separatists and should go ahead with the township proposal. "The state and Central governments must not succumb to the dictate of these separatists and must go ahead with the proposal," Shadi Lal Pandita President of Jagti Tenement Committee said. He said opposition to the proposal was part of a conspiracy to stop the rehabilitation of the community. "The opposition is a well-planned conspiracy hatched so as to stop the rehabilitation of the Kashmiri Pandit community back in the Valley. Actually they don't want us to resettle there," Shadi Lal said. The activists of Youth All India Kashmiri Samaj (YAIKS) also held a protest in Jammu, demanding action against the separatist leaders who have been opposing the creation of the township in Kashmir. Meanwhile, other organisations representing the community have also expressed their resentment over the opposition shown by several mainstream and separatists parties to the proposal. Organisations like All State Kashmiri Pandit conference (ASKPC), Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti (KPSS), Kashmiri Displaced Lawyers Forum Jammu (KDLFJ), Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch (JKVM) have demanded that the government must go ahead with the proposal of setting up of the township. (New Indian Express 10/4/15)

Australia says Iran should take back failed asylum-seekers (13)
Sydney: Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said Saturday that Iran should take back its citizens who failed in their bids for refugee status, confirming his government will lobby Tehran on the issue. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop is expected to raise the deportation of Iranian nationals when she visits Tehran next week, a move which could ease pressure on Australian immigration camps on the Pacific islands of Nauru and Papua New Guinea. "It's important that those who are found not to be refugees go home," Abbott told reporters in Sydney. "And this is where we will be talking to the Iranian government about taking back people who are... Iranian citizens, because they deserve to be in Iran. They belong in Iran." Refugee advocates say Iran refuses to take back failed asylum-seekers returned against their will, and have raised questions about their safety if they are returned to their homeland. "Obviously we are looking after those who are found to be refugees," Abbott said when asked about the possible persecution of Iranians sent home. "But those who are not found to be refugees should go back to their home country, and if their home country is Iran, that's where they belong." Iranians make up about 20 percent of the 1,848 people held in immigration detention centres in Australia, according to official figures from late March, and account for many of the 1,707 held on Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Several thousand more are understood to be living in the community on bridging visas but still awaiting the final assessment of their claims for refugee status. "The key point is, we have a significant number of people in immigration detention at the moment from Iran," government MP Paul Fletcher told Sky News. "Our objective is ultimately to have those people returned to the country that they came from," he added, acknowledging this could raise "difficulties and challenges". The Sydney Morning Herald reported that the issue of returning failed asylum-seekers had already been a matter of diplomatic discussion between Bishop and her Iranian counterpart. "One of the biggest challenges that we are facing with failed asylum-seekers is those refusing to return home," the unnamed diplomatic source told the newspaper. Refugee advocates say there are about 45 Iranian asylum-seekers in indefinite detention in Australia who have already had their claims for refugee status denied and are refusing to go home. Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young said sending asylum-seekers back was "going to put the lives of men, women and children at high risk". Under Canberra's immigration policy, asylum-seekers arriving by boat are subject to mandatory detention, and since 2013 have been denied resettlement in Australia, even if found to be genuine refugees, and are instead housed on Nauru or PNG. (Zee News 11/4/15)

Eight lakh children forced from homes in Boko Haram violence (13)
Lagos, Nigeria: The children's drawings show men with guns, a coffin, a car exploding. One picture has stick-like figures of eight siblings missed by their teenage sister. The disturbing images come from some of an estimated 800,000 children forced from the homes by Boko Haram extremists, according to a UNICEF report published on Monday. It says the number of refugee children has doubled in the past year, making them about half of all the 1.5 million Nigerians made homeless in the Islamic uprising. "Children have become deliberate targets, often subjected to extreme violence," the report says. The number of children absent from primary school in Nigeria has increased from 8 million in 2007 to 10.5 million — the highest figure in the world, it says. Boko Haram has targeted schools, destroying or severely damaging more than 300 and killing 314 students and 196 teachers, UNICEF says. The nickname of Nigeria’s home-grown Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, means “Western education is forbidden” or sinful. Called “Missing Childhoods,” it was published ahead of the first anniversary of the mass kidnappings the night of April 14-15, 2014, of nearly 300 schoolgirls from Chibok. Dozens escaped on their own but 219 remain missing. AP (The Hindu 14/4/15)

Presumed deaths of 400 migrants among worst recent tragedies (13)
Milan: The UN refugee agency says the shipwreck in the Mediterranean this week, in which 400 migrants are presumed to have died, is among the deadliest single incidents in the last decade. The tragedy comes amid an unprecedented wave of migration toward Europe from Africa and the Middle East. The Italian Coast Guard said it rescued nearly 10,000 people at sea since Friday, which was an unprecedented rate in such a short period, according to spokesman, Cmdr. Filippo Marini. UNHCR Italy spokeswoman Barbara Molinario says 900 migrants have died or gone missing at sea so far this
year, part of a phenomenon the agency has been tracking since 2011. In most cases, no bodies are found and the deaths are presumed based on survivor accounts or, when no boats are recovered, reports by family members whose loved ones never arrive in Europe. The UNHCR estimates 3,500 migrants died in the Mediterranean last year, up from 600 in 2013. (Zee News 15/4/15)

**700 migrants feared dead off Libya (13)**
As many as 700 migrants were feared drowned Sunday after their packed boat capsized off Libya in what was described as the deadliest such disaster to date in the Mediterranean. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) and Italy’s Coast Guard said only 28 people had survived the wreck. Their testimonies suggested there had been about 700 people on board the 20-metre (70-foot) fishing boat, officials said. “It seems we are looking at the worst massacre ever seen in the Mediterranean,” UNHCR spokeswoman Carlotta Sami said. The European Union announced an emergency meeting of foreign and interior ministers to discuss what Amnesty International blasted as an avoidable “man-made tragedy”. Coastal authorities in Italy and Malta picked up a distress signal from the stricken vessel around midnight on Saturday, when it was about 126 km off the Libyan coast and 177 km south of the Italian island of Lampedusa. The Coast Guard instructed a nearby merchant ship to go to the scene and it was when the Portuguese-registered King Jacob arrived at the scene that the fishing boat capsized, most likely as a result of the terrified passengers stampeding to one side in their desperation to get off, the UNHCR’s Sami said. A total of 17 boats scoured the area for survivors on Sunday but only 24 bodies had been recovered so far, the Coast Guard said. The disaster was the latest in a growing catalogue of mass drownings of migrants attempting to reach Europe on overcrowded, unseaworthy boats run by people smugglers who are able to operate out of Libya with impunity because of the chaos engulfing the north African state. The most serious incident prior to Sunday occurred off Malta in September 2014. An estimated 500 migrants drowned in a shipwreck caused by traffickers deliberately ramming the boat in an attempt to force the people on board onto another, smaller vessel. In October 2013, more than 360 Africans perished when the tiny fishing boat they were crammed onto caught fire within sight of the coast of Lampedusa. That horrific tragedy was described at the time as a wake-up call to the world but 18 months later there is no sign of a let-up in the numbers attempting the perilous crossing in search of a better life in Europe. The latest disaster comes after a week in which two other migrant shipwrecks left an estimated 450 people dead. If the worst fears about Sunday’s tragedy are confirmed, it will take the death toll since the start of 2015 to more than 1,600. More than 11,000 other would-be immigrants have been rescued since the middle of last week and current trends suggest last year’s total of 170,000 migrants landing in Italy is likely to be at least match in 2015. (Asian Age 20/4/15)

**446 rescued migrants arrive in Sicily port (13)**
Rome, April 22 (IANS/EFE) A group of 446 migrants, including 95 women and 59 children, landed on Wednesday at the port of Augusta in Sicily after being rescued by the Italian coast guard. The victims were in good condition and will stay in housing projects reserved for illegal migrants in the southeastern Sicilian town of Augusta. The migrants were rescued on Tuesday when they were adrift on a barge off the coast of Calabria in southern Italy by two Italian navy patrol vessels, according to a statement issued by the Italian armed forces. It is expected that 545 more migrants will arrive on Wednesday at the port in Salerno, in the southern region of Campania, after they were recently rescued. (Business Standard 22/4/15)

**National Migration Policy Demanded (13)**
BHUBANESWAR:More than 700 migrant children in 22 brick kilns located on the outskirts of the Capital City stay under hazardous conditions. The number is much higher when migrant children living with their parents and employed at construction sites and crusher units in and around Bhubaneswar are taken into account, Regional Head, Aide et Action, Umi Daniel said here on Thursday. Daniel was addressing a conference on “Protection of Children in Migration”, organised by an NGO ‘Destination Unknown - Children on Move (DU-COM)’. “In most cases, these children are
bereft of potable water, nutritious food and hygienic surroundings. Adolescent females, who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking, are the worst affected in these surroundings and the situation worsens as one moves into backward districts and interior parts of the State," Daniel added.

Addressing the conference, Convenor of DU-COM Umesh Purohit said in recent times, Odisha has been the source, transit and destination hotspot for migration. An upswing in rail linkage has acted as a catalyst for inward and outward movement of wage earners from the State. According to a survey conducted by DU-COM, the major factors which trigger migration in Odisha are poverty, natural disaster, unrest in Maoist-hit districts and communal violence. While only 15 percent of children move with their parents during transit or migration, the survey indicated that the street children, runaways, missing children and refugees form a sizeable majority of the migrant children population. Minors from the State are engaged at textile industries in Surat, brick kilns in Andhra Pradesh, carpentry units in Kerala and children from Gajapati and Phulbani districts work as domestic helps in Goa. “The State Government is not doing enough to enumerate inter-State and intra-State migrants. There is no proper audit of worksites of the MSME and industries functioning here to check the living standards,” Purohit said. The forum sought a National Migration Policy to be drafted in consultation with migration-prone States and its early implementation. Among others, Bincy Wilson, Programme Officer at Terre des Hommes, Netherlands spoke on the occasion. (New Indian Express 24/4/15)

**BJP promises Indian citizenship for B'deshi Hindu refugees (13)**

Guwahati: BJP national president Amit Shah on Sunday promised protection to Hindus who had immigrated to Assam following religious persecution in Bangladesh. Hindu refugees from Bangladesh will be given Indian citizenship if BJP comes to power in Assam in next year's assembly polls, Shah said. "Some Hindus have come from Bangladesh due to religious disturbances. BJP will give all of them citizenship once we come to power in Assam next year," Shah said at a rally here. At a BJP rally here, Shah reiterated PM Narendra Modi's promise in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls that other states would share the burden of providing shelter to the Hindu refugees from Bangladesh. "I want to assure you that Hindus who have suffered religious persecution (in Bangladesh) need not worry. BJP will give all the necessary protection to them. Assam alone will not have to bear the burden of sheltering the Hindu refugees. Other states will also share the responsibility," Shah said. Shah's statement came close on the heels of chief minister Tarun Gogoi's assurance of giving protection to Hindu refugees from the neighbouring country. At a time when the process of updating the National Register for Citizens (NRC) is under way, the issue of giving protection and citizenship to Hindu refugees has stirred a heated debate among political and non-political organizations. While BJP wanted to include Hindu refugees' name in the NRC, the All Assam Students' Union has been maintaining that any foreigner who entered Assam after March 25, 1971, should be deported. However, the issue of giving protection to Hindu refugees has always been an electoral gambit, with BJP and Congress eyeing votes among the community ahead of elections. On the issue of infiltration, Shah said BJP could only solve the problem once it came to power in the state. Shah alleged that Congress did not want infiltration from Bangladesh to end for the cause of vote-bank politics. "The problem of infiltration from Bangladesh has robbed the indigenous people of their rights. BJP has to come to power to stop infiltration for good. Our government at the Centre is very serious about the problem. That is why our government has provided Rs 140 crore to update the NRC to tackle the problem of influx," Shah added. (Times of India 27/4/15)

**More than 5,000 Burundians flee to Rwanda in two days: UN (13)**

Geneva: More than 5,000 Burundians fled to Rwanda over the weekend following mounting tensions in the central African country, bringing the total number of arrivals in April to nearly 21,000, the UN said Tuesday. “There has been a sharp increase in the number of Burundian refugees arriving in Rwanda,” Ariane Rummery, spokeswoman for the UN refugee agency said. “Five thousand people entering the country in two days is quite a significant jump... It is certainly concerning,” she told reporters in Geneva. The Rwandan government has put the number of Burundians arriving in the country since the beginning of April at 21,000, and expects the number could rise to 50,000. Another
3,800 Burundian nationals have meanwhile fled to the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo since the beginning of the month, UNHCR said. Most of the new arrivals in Rwanda are women and children, Rummery said, adding that the refugees had reported facing intimidation and threats of violence linked to upcoming elections. The outflow came as the official list of candidates for Burundi’s presidential elections on June 26 was published at the weekend, with President Pierre Nkurunziza’s bid to cling to power for a third term sparking massive demonstrations. At least five people have died since clashes broke out Sunday after the ruling CNDD-FDD party, which has been accused of intimidating opponents, confirmed Nkurunziza’s candidacy. The government has banned all protests and deployed large numbers of police and troops to quell the unrest. Some of those killed were shot at close range. Hundreds of stone-throwing protesters have been arrested. "The situation is quite chaotic at the moment," UNHCR spokeswoman Karin de Gruijl told reporters. "We think that this violence might continue and this fear of violence might continue and that there might be a bigger outflux, particularly to Rwanda," she warned. Rwanda, which is already hosting more than 74,000 refugees mainly from neighbouring DR Congo, has allocated land in Mahama in the Eastern Province for a new refugee camp, with the capacity to hold up to 50,000 people. UNHCR said it was helping move refugees there in daily convoys of up to 1,500 people. (Zee News 28/4/15)

Migrants return to Karimnagar (13)
KARIMNAGAR: A total of 133 persons belonging to 56 families of Budugu Jangala community belonging to various parts of Karimnagar district and who migrated to Nepal to eke out a living have returned back to their native villages on Thursday. All the migrants have arrived in Gorakhpur Express train at Ramagundam railway station. The revenue authorities received them at the station and provided them food. They also distributed Rs. 1,000 and 50 kilograms of rice to each family. The district administration had also provided transportation to all the persons to reach their villages safely. A record 99 persons were belonging from Ramakrishna colony of Thimmapur mandal. Remaining people hailed from Ramadugu, Karimangar, Manakondur and Huzurabad mandals. (The Hindu 1/5/15)

Number of South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia passes 200,000: UN (13)
New York: The number of South Sudanese refugees who have fled to Ethiopia since fighting broke out in South Sudan in mid-December 2013 has passed the 200,000 mark and more are expected amid fresh conflict across the border, the United Nations refugee agency reported on Friday. "We have to save lives. We are conducting registration of refugees with an increased number of staff at entry points," said Alexander Kishara, who heads the activities of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Gambella, Ethiopia. "UNHCR is also working with partners to provide water, sanitation and shelter," he added. Some 199,000 of the refugees are in western Ethiopia's Gambella region while about 3,000 are in neighbouring Benishangul-Gumuz region. UNHCR field staff has observed a sharp increase in new South Sudanese arrivals from some 1,000 people a month in the first quarter of this year to more than 4,000 refugees registered in April. The UN refugee agency is currently registering more than 10,000 new arrivals at various entry points in the Gambella region. The new arrivals tell stories of "walking for several days through the bush with little or no food and water and carrying few or no belongings," UNHCR has reported. The refugees are being relocated to the Pugnido Refugee Camp, which currently hosts nearly 60,000 South Sudanese refugees, and the Tierkidi Refugee Camp, which hosts about 50,000. These camps are being enlarged to cope with the new influx. The refugees are mainly women, children and older people. Most are fleeing from renewed fighting in Upper Nile and Jonglei states or as a precautionary measure. Some young men say they are fleeing from alleged forced conscription. A young mother told UNHCR that she fled her home when nine months pregnant and gave birth on the way. She crossed into Ethiopia with her family at the Pagak entry point, where more than 7,000 new arrivals are being registered before being transferred to camps. The arrivals since December 2013 add to a
refugee population from southern Sudan of about 58,000, most of who have been staying in the country for more than 20 years. Ethiopia is Africa's largest refugee-hosting nation with nearly 700,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, including South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. The new arrivals, who are being provided with high energy biscuits and relief items such as mattresses and plastic sheets for shelter, say more people are on their way to Ethiopia. UNHCR is working with Ethiopia's Government and other partners to provide humanitarian assistance. (New Kerala 2/5/15)

50 killed as mortar shells hit refugee camp in Yemen (13)
Aden (Yemen) : At least 50 people, mostly women and children, were killed and 100 others wounded when random mortar shells struck a refugee camp in Yemen's southern port city of Aden on Wednesday, a medical official and witnesses told Xinhua news agency. "Several mortar rounds and tank shells randomly struck a refugee camp in Tawahi district of Aden, while hundreds of people were gathering and preparing to escape from fierce battles by boats to other places," the medical official of Aden's health department said. According to the initial counts from local medical centres, 50 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in the incident. Witnesses near the scene confirmed to Xinhua by phone that "scores of civilians were either killed or wounded after being hit by random shells while they were trying to reach small boats to flee the fighting in Tawahi". The fighting between the Shia Houthi group and tribal militia loyal to Yemen's President Abdu-Rabbu Mansour Hadi escalated in Aden's district of Tawahi, forcing thousands of people to flee their homes by boats to the Buraiga district in western Aden. So far, neither side has commented on the incident. Tens of thousands of civilians have fled their homes due to fierce street battles between the two sides since late March. The pro-Hadi militia covered by warplanes of the Saudi-led coalition forces on Wednesday failed to repel an attack by the Houthi gunmen who stormed and took control of the densely populated Tawahi in Aden, where key government facilities and headquarters of the Fourth Regional Military Command are located, according to government officials based in Aden. Several sources in the area said tens of thousands of residents who fled their homes in Tawahi, Mu'alla and Crater had sought refuge in neighbouring areas as the fierce battles between the two warring rivals and Saudi-led airstrikes were heavily intensified during the past three days. A security source confirmed to Xinhua that the Houthi gunmen killed Major General Ali Nasser Hadi, the commander of the Fourth Regional Military Command that announced loyalty to Hadi, during armed confrontations near the main entrance of the Tawahi district in Aden early on Wednesday. Experts said that the Houthi gunmen backed by some army units gained ground during the fighting against the pro-Hadi militia. They said that the pro-Houthi forces advanced from several directions toward Tawahi after they seized several towns around the area, prompting the Saudi-led coalition forces to launch intensified airstrikes on Houthi-controlled buildings in the area on Wednesday afternoon. Information on the number of casualties and extent of damages caused by the Saudi-led airstrikes remains unclear. Yemen's southern provinces have witnessed an escalation of battles since late March when deadly armed clashes erupted between Houthi gunmen and tribal militia linked to President Hadi who is currently taking refuge in Saudi Arabia after fleeing his presidential palace in Aden. The deadly fighting still flares over the control of the main port city of Aden and about five other southern provinces amid sharp shortages of basic needs such as food, drinking water, medicine and fuel supplies. (Business Standard 6/5/15)

24 more Myanmar nationals held in Tripura (13)
Agartala: Twentyfour more Mayanmarese, including six women and 12 children, have been arrested for illegally entering Tripura, police said on Sunday. Two Indians, including a resident of Kashmir, were also arrested along with the foreigners. "Acting on a tip off, 24 Myanmaresees were arrested from a house at Meleghar in western Tripura on Saturday," police officer Ashok Kumar Sinha said. The house owner, Kurban Ali, and a Kashmiri youth, Amir Hossain, were arrested too. With the arrest, the total number of Myanmarese held in the state in the past two years has risen to 125. Most entered India looking for work. "They told police that they are recognised as refugees by the UNHCR (United Nations refugee agency)," the official said. The Myanmar nationals would be presented before a court
on Monday and then it would be decided whether they should be pushed back to Bangladesh or jailed. The Myanmarese told police that following the ethnic violence in Mayanmar, they left the country four years ago and worked in Kashmir. They came to Tripura in search of jobs, Sinha added. More than 50,000 Myanmarese have been living in different parts of neighbouring Mizoram, which borders Myanmar and Bangladesh, and working at shops and factories after obtaining work permits. Since the mid-1990s, over 225,000 Myanmar nationals, mostly Rohingya Muslims, have been living in the Teknaf region in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district. Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Assam share an 1,880 km border with Bangladesh, while Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh share a 1,640 km unfenced border with Myanmar. (Business Standard 10/5/15)

Around 6,000 Rohingya, Bangladeshi migrants stranded at sea (13)
JAKARTA: Hundreds of migrants abandoned at sea by smugglers in Southeast Asia have reached land and relative safety in the past two days. But an estimated 6,000 Bangladeshis and Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar remain trapped in crowded, wooden boats, migrant officials and activists said. With food and clean water running low, some could be in grave danger. One vessel that reached Indonesian waters early Monday, was stopped by the Navy and given food, water and directions to Malaysia. Worried that boats will start washing to shore with dead bodies, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the United States and several other foreign governments and international organizations have held emergency meetings, but participants say there are no immediate plans to search for vessels in the busy Malacca Strait. One of the concerns is what to do with the Rohingya if a rescue is launched. The minority group is denied citizenship in Myanmar, and other countries have long worried that opening their doors to a few would result in an unstemmable flow of poor, uneducated migrants. "These are people in desperate straits," said Phil Robertson of Human Rights Watch in Bangkok, calling on governments to band together to help those still stranded at sea, some for two months or longer. "Time is not on their side." The Rohingya, who are Muslim, have for decades suffered from state-sanctioned discrimination in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, which considers them illegal settlers from Bangladesh even though their families have lived there for generations. Attacks on members of the religious minority, numbering at around 1.3 million, have in the past three years left up to 280 people dead and forced 140,000 others from their homes. They now live under apartheid-like conditions in crowded camps just outside the Rakhine state capital, Sittwe, where they have little access to school or adequate health care. The conditions at home and lack of job opportunities have sparked one of the biggest exoduses of boat people since the Vietnam War. Chris Lewa, director of the non-profit Arakan Project, which has been monitoring boat departures and arrivals for more than a decade, estimates more than 100,000 men, women and children have boarded ships since mid-2012. Most are trying to reach Malaysia, but recent regional crackdowns on human trafficking networks have sent brokers and agents into hiding, making it impossible for migrants to disembark in some cases even after family members have paid $2,000 or more for their release, she said. Lewa believes up to 7,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis are still on small and large boats in the Malacca Strait and nearby international waters. Tightly confined, and with limited access to food and clean water, their health is deteriorating, she said, adding that dozens of deaths have been reported. "I'm very concerned about smugglers abandoning boatloads at sea," said Lewa. In the last two days, 1,600 Rohingya have washed to shore in two Southeast Asian countries... (Times of India 12/5/15)

41 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees head back home(13)
TIRUCHI: Having spent several years in refugee camps in the State, a group of 41 Sri Lankan Tamils headed back home from Tiruchi on Wednesday upon getting clearance. The refugees, including 16 women and 13 children, arrived at the crack of dawn at the airport to board the Sri Lankan Airlines flight (UL-132) to Colombo after completion of immigration and Customs formalities. Some of them had landed in Tamil Nadu in the 1990s by boats after fleeing the island nation that was plagued by civil war during that period. The refugees, who left on Wednesday morning, had been staying in camps at Pudukottai, Sivaganga, Madurai, Dharmapuri, Karur, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Tiruchi,
Ramanathapuram and Salem districts, police sources said. The highest number of refugees was from Madurai district from where 12 of them returned. They were allowed to return home from the respective camps after it was found that no case was pending against them in the State, sources said. Prior to their departure, the refugees obtained written clearance from the State police in order to get temporary passports from the Sri Lankan High Commission and exit clearance certificates from the respective district administration authorities where the camps had been functioning. Some of the refugees had landed as early as in 1990 and few others in 1997 and 2007 in Tamil Nadu and were accommodated in refugee camps, the sources said. (The Hindu 14/5/15)

Mizoram to take back its tribal citizens from Tripura after 18 years

Agartala: Following pressure from the union home ministry and the Tripura government, Mizoram has finally agreed to take back all the tribal refugees sheltering in Tripura for the past 18 years. “The repatriation of refugees expected to start from June 8. A tripartite meeting between the officials of Tripura and Mizoram governments and refugee leaders took this decision,” Panisagar Sub-divisional magistrate Biplab Das told IANS. He said: “It was decided in the meeting that from June 2 to June 4, a study would be done about how many of the refugees' names have been enrolled in the electoral list of Mizoram. Then sub-divisional level officials of the two states in presence of the refugee leaders would be held before starting of the repatriation on June 8.” According to Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Badal Choudhury, there are 5,286 tribal families comprising 31,223 men, women and children sheltered in seven camps in Kanchanpur and Panisagar sub-divisions under North Tripura district adjoining Mizoram. The Reang tribals, who locally call themselves "Bru", have lived in makeshift camps in Tripura since October 1997 when they fled western Mizoram after the killing of a Mizo forest officer triggered ethnic trouble. The Mizoram government earlier refused to take back all the refugees citing that all the migrants are not the resident of Mizoram. "In the Friday's district magistrate-level meeting, the Mizoram government officials more or less agreed to take back all the refugees sheltered in Tripura," said Das, who was also present in the meeting. The Tripura government team was led by additional district magistrate of North Tripura district Ranjit Das while Mizoram's team was led by Mamit district Deputy Commissioner Vanlalngaihsaka. Meanwhile, Mizoram's additional secretary of home department Lalbiakzama said in Aizawl that following the Supreme Court's directives and the decision made in the meeting of the union home ministry in presence of Mizoram and Tripura governments' officials on January 30, it was proposed to repatriate all the remaining tribal families from the relief camps in north Tripura district. "The union home ministry has recently released Rs.4.7 crore for the repatriation purposes, but the amount would not be sufficient for repatriation of all the remaining Reang tribal families," Lalbiakzama said. The Mizoram government earlier sought around Rs.70 crore financial assistance from the union home ministry to rehabilitate the repatriated tribal refugees. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and his deputy Kiren Rijiju had visited the refugee camps and held talks with the refugee leaders on February 14 and persuaded the tribal to go back to their villages in western Mizoram. Refugee leaders told the central ministers that they were willing to return to their homes in Mizoram if their 10 points demands, including security and rehabilitation, were met. The Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF), an organisation of the refugees, submitted a six-page memorandum to the central ministers accusing the Mizoram government of discriminating against them.... (Business Standard 17/5/15)

UN chief voices growing concern over migrant crisis

UNITED NATIONS, United States: UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said on Sunday that he was increasingly concerned by the humanitarian crisis sparked by refugees stranded in boats in Southeast Asia, and offered help from the United Nations. Ban said he had spoken by phone with the prime ministers of Malaysia and Thailand while his deputy Jan Eliasson had discussed the crisis with ministers from Bangladesh and Indonesia. "In their discussion with leaders in the region, they reiterated the need to protect lives and uphold international law," Ban's spokesman said in a statement. They urged the leaders to "uphold the obligation of rescue at sea" and not turn away the refugees. Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have sparked outrage by turning away vessels
overloaded with migrants from Myanmar's ethnic Rohingya minority and with poor Bangladeshis. Ban said he was encouraged by plans for Thailand to host a regional meeting to try to resolve the crisis and encouraged leaders to take part. "The United Nations stands ready to assist all efforts to address the situation, including at the proposed meeting," he said. Ban is due to travel to South Korea on Monday for a visit that will later take him to Vietnam. (Times of India 18/5/15)

**Rohingya crisis: US envoy urges region to cooperate (13)**

Myanmar: A top US diplomat has urged Myanmar's government to work with its regional partners to address the migrant crisis in Southeast Asia. Deputy secretary of State Anthony Blinken met with Myanmar officials in the capital, Naypyidaw, on Thursday. More than 3,000 people have landed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in recent weeks, most of them members of the Rohingya minority who were fleeing Myanmar or were tricked by traffickers and then abandoned at sea. The embassy in Yangon posted on Facebook that Blinken shared the US government's concerns about the migrant crisis. State Department officials in Washington said earlier that the US was willing to lead multicity efforts organized by the UN refugee agency to resettle the most vulnerable migrants. Blinken said earlier on his trip to Southeast Asia that the only sustainable solution to the problem was addressing the conditions that led the Rohingya to flee. (Times of India 21/5/15)

**Cholera infects 3,000 Burundian refugees, UN calls for help (13)**

KAMPALA, Uganda: The UN refugee agency says an outbreak of cholera has infected 3,000 people in a Tanzanian border region where refugees from Burundi have massed. UNHCR says 300 to 400 new cases are being reported daily. At least 31 people, including two Tanzanians, have died of cholera recently. More than 64,000 Burundians have fled to Tanzania in recent weeks to escape political unrest sparked by their president's bid for an unconstitutional third term, according to the UN. UNHCR and its partners appealed for help Friday, saying $207 million is needed to respond to the humanitarian crisis caused by the influx of refugees. Thousands more Burundians have fled to Congo and Rwanda. (Times of India 22/5/15)

**Yearning for original home (13)**

CHENNAI: Six years after the civil war ended in Sri Lanka, over a lakh nationals are unwilling to return to their country as there is no viable repatriation package on offer. Even as Sri Lanka is preparing to observe the sixth anniversary of the end of the civil war on Tuesday, over a lakh nationals from the island nation, who arrived in Tamil Nadu since 1983 continue to live as refugees in the State, in the absence of a viable voluntary repatriation package. Though several batches of refugees voluntarily returned after the Lankan government officially declared the end of the 25-year-long civil war on May 19, 2009, the lack of a complete repatriation package seem to add to the reasons behind the refugees in the State hesitating to return. "We support repatriation whenever it can take place on a well-informed request of refugees, in safety and dignity and with prospects for sustainable reintegration back home," says UNHCR India's Public Information Officer Shuchita Mehta. Despite the financial assistance available for repatriation, over 1.02 lakh refugees remain in the State as on March 1 this year. "Most of the refugees hesitate because they have to leave the things they have earned all these years here and might have to start from scratch and rebuild their lives there," says the treasurer of Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OIERR) S.C. Chandrakanthan. “All the governments involved in the issue should come together and offer a repatriation package allowing refugees to take back the assets they have earned all these years with them to Lank. Of course, there can be an upper limit," he says. The package could include repatriation on board a ship with some of their assets and continuing financial assistance from the Government of India to refugees for a few years till they rebuild their livelihood, he adds. An official of the Sri Lankan Deputy High Commission in Chennai says, “We have always been encouraging the refugees to go for voluntary repatriation. We process their documents free of cost.” An effort by the Government of India to discuss voluntary repatriation of refugees with all stakeholders early this year fell through after the Tamil Nadu government contended that the conditions in Lanka “were still not conducive” and it could
be considered only after concrete and credible measures are taken by the island nation. (The Hindu 26/5/15)

‘Migrant boat still being held off Myanmar coast’ (13)
More than 700 migrants found packed aboard an overcrowded boat in the Andaman Sea were still being held offshore by Myanmar’s navy on Monday, more than three days after the converted fishing vessel was intercepted off the country’s coast. “The government is checking their identity, asking what they want to do and where they want to go,” government spokesman Ye Htut said, without providing further details of the boat’s location. “Usually, most of them want to go back to Bangladesh, so we will arrange according to their wishes.” Government officials have been tight-lipped about the identities of 727 migrants on the overcrowded fishing boat, found drifting and taking on water early Friday, as well as their eventual destination. The government initially labeled the migrants “Bengalis”, a term used to refer to both Bangladeshis and Rohingya Muslims, a largely stateless minority in Myanmar that the government refuses to refer to by name. Officials later said they believed most of those on board were from Bangladesh. A senior US official said Monday that resettlement in a third country is not the answer to the swelling tide of boat people in Southeast Asia and called for Myanmar to give citizenship to Rohingya Muslims fleeing persecution there. Anne Richard, US assistant secretary of state for population, migration and refugees, said resettling all Rohingya refugees in the United States would entice others to leave their homeland. “The answer to the issue is peace and stability and citizenship for the Rohingyas in Rakhine state, and that is the solution.” she said. (Asian Age 2/6/15)

Families of IDPs to receive resettlement allowance (13)
COLOMBO: As many as 2,175 internally displaced Tamil families in Jaffna and Trincomalee districts are set to receive a financial assistance of Rs. 38,000 per family for resettlement with the Cabinet of the Sri Lankan government sanctioning Rs. 16 crore Lankan. Two hundred and four families in Sampur, Trincomalee district of the Eastern Province, and 1,971 families in Jaffna of the Northern Province will get the assistance initially. Of the amount of assistance, Rs. 25,000 is set apart for resettlement allowance and the remaining Rs. 13,000 for purposes such as clearing land and purchase of tools. The payment will be made on verification of claims by district-level officials, says an official in the Ministry of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs. Resettlement Minister D.M. Swaminathan, when asked for a reaction said he would not like to comment now. (The Hindu 2/6/15)

Migrants trapped in tussle between Myanmar and Bangladesh (13)
Maungdaw: Unwanted by Bangladesh and unwelcome in Myanmar, hundreds of stick-thin migrants found adrift at sea as a transnational trafficking route collapsed are now living in tents on a frontier scrubland. After weeks crammed together on a boat bound for Malaysia -- a treacherous journey many braved to flee persecution or poverty -- they are back near to where they began. Since Southeast Asia’s migrant crisis erupted more than a month ago, 4,500 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants have been washed ashore, and the UN estimates that around 2,000 others are still trapped at sea. Myanmar found the boat of 733 Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis -- the majority men but also including women and children -- abandoned by people-smugglers late last month, and eventually allowed them to disembark in its western Rakhine state Wednesday. The would-be migrants were then driven to camps in a remote region near the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, where an earlier boatload of 200 men was already being held, to wait in limbo as authorities wrangle over which country they belong to. Neither nation has shown a willingness to accept them and rights groups are concerned some could be pushed to the wrong side of the border.Arriving at one of the camps, the men bathed for the first time in days and received urgent medical treatment, some attached to IV drips, as Myanmar immigration officials noted down names, ages and addresses of migrants now at the heart of a diplomatic tussle with Bangladesh. "I want to go back to Bangladesh. I’m praying to God to be able to go back home quickly,” said 20-year-old Shophikuu from Chittagong in Bangladesh,
who like many others boarded the boat in the hope of earning a better living in Malaysia. Nishok, 24, is also desperate to get back to his family, saying he was forced to leave at gunpoint. "A broker asked me whether I would like to go to Malaysia. When I refused to go, he pointed his gun at me and took me to the boat," he told AFP of the moment he was cornered by traffickers in Cox’s Bazar, an impoverished coastal region in Bangladesh where around 300,000 Rohingya refugees eke out a life alongside poor Bangladeshis….. (Zee News 6/6/15)

Deportation of illegal migrants remains a farce (13)
GUWAHATI, June 7 –The process of detection and deportation remains a farce even after the scrapping of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act by the Supreme Court, as the Government of Bangladesh often refuses to accept those sought to be deported as its own citizens, while, taking advantage of the loopholes in the system, the suspects manage to escape when their cases are tried by the tribunals set up under the provisions of the Foreigner’s Act. This trend is the reason for the growing demand for signing of a repatriation treaty with Bangladesh. Moreover, the new system of deportation of foreigners, introduced by the Government of India in 2013, slowed down the process of deportation even further and only 35 foreigners could be deported from Assam in the last two years. Following objections from Bangladesh, the Government of India introduced a new system of deportation of foreigners in 2013, which is a lengthy process and prevents forcible push back of foreigners. Highly placed official sources told The Assam Tribune that as per the new system, whenever a person is declared as illegal migrant by a Tribunal, the Border Police informs the State Government with details of the person along with photograph. The State Government refers the matter to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and then the details are sent to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The MEA, in turn, take up the issue with the Bangladesh High Commission. The Government of Bangladesh verifies the address given by the person declared as foreigner by the Tribunal and if that is found to be true, only then the person can be deported formally. After getting the clarification, the person is handed over to the Border Security Force, which arranges a flag meeting with the Border Guards Bangladesh to hand over the person formally. It turned out to be a very lengthy process and often, the Government of Bangladesh refuses to accept the person sought to be deported as its citizen. Sources revealed that the persons declared as foreigners by the Tribunals are kept in three detention centres. At present, 113 are kept in the detention centre in Goalpara, 49 in Kokrajhar and 45 are in Silchar. Interestingly, 28 persons kept in the detention camps are citizens of Myanmar. However, taking advantage of the loopholes in the system, majority of the suspected foreigners manage to escape when the trial is going on in the Tribunals. Sources admitted that there is no system of keeping the suspects under surveillance and taking advantage of it, the suspects manage to escape from one place to the other, making it impossible for the police to locate them. According to records available, during the period from 1986 to March this year, 6,16,213 inquiries were initiated by the Border Police and 6,09,377 of those have been completed. Altogether 1,19,641 cases were referred to the Tribunals and 49,314 persons have been declared as illegal migrants. However, only 900 of those could be deported and majority of those declared as foreigners are missing. During the same period, 27,251 fresh and re-infiltrators were pushed back. Sources said that 2,31,657 cases of Doubtful voters were referred to the Tribunals and 1,27,955 cases are pending before the Tribunals. (The Assam Tribune 8/6/15)

Sri Lankan refugee seeks compensation for daughter’s death (13)
MADURAI: An inmate of a refugee camp for Sri Lankan Tamils at Tiruvadavur near here has approached the Madras High Court Bench here seeking a direction to the State to pay his family a compensation of Rs.10 lakh for the death of his 11-year-old daughter when the asbestos sheets laid on the roof of their dilapidated house in the camp caved in on May 12 last year. When the matter came up for admission before Justice R. Mahadevan on Monday, he directed a government counsel to take notice on behalf of the Health and Family Welfare Secretary, Commissioner of Refugee Rehabilitation and the Collector. The writ petition had been filed by S. Athipathi who claimed to be residing in the refugee camp for more than 12 years. The petitioner, father of four children including
the girl who died, said that the State Government had established the refugee camp in Tiruvadavur in 2002 by building about 400 houses measuring around 100 square feet each. The camp was filled up by shifting the inmates of another camp at Avaniapuram near here and his family was part of the migration. The occupants of Tiruvadavur camp faced several problems such as poor quality construction of their houses and absence of safe drinking water. Though several representations were made to the officials concerned to improve the infrastructural facilities, their pleas went unheeded, the petitioner said and claimed that the State was liable to pay adequate compensation for his daughter’s death. (The Hindu 9/6/15)

Centre Told to Make Clear Stand on Medical Seats to Sri Lankan Refugees (13)
CHENNAI: Madras High Court has directed the Centre to make clear its stand on whether it is inclined to make any provisions to allot medical seats for Sri Lankan refugees. The First Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice TS Sivagnanam passed the order on a petition from R Sri Priya, a practising advocate. T Nandini, daughter of a refugee couple who came to Tamil Nadu in 1990 and settled down in the refugee camp at Arachalur, Erode district, had passed the Plus Two examination, scoring 1170 marks out of 1200. She applied for admission to the MBBS course in Government Kilpauk Medical College and was called for counselling. But, her candidature was rejected as she was a Lankan refugee. Based on news reports about her ordeal, the advocate moved the PIL seeking a direction to reserve seats for Sri Lankan refugees. Responding to the PIL, Additional Solicitor General G Rajagopalan submitted that a communication from the Union Home Ministry about the existing scheme to accommodate candidates from friendly foreign countries including Sri Lanka, would not apply to children of refugees. Recording the submission, the Bench directed the Central government to clarify its stand on providing medical seats to Sri Lankan refugees, in the context of the present case where the candidate was born and educated in India. (New Indian Express 12/6/15)

Govt grants citizenship to 4,300 refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan (13)
NEW DELHI: As a first step to grant Indian nationality to nearly two lakh refugees from neighbouring countries, the NDA government has given citizenship to around 4,300 Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan and Afghanistan in one year. During the entire tenure of UPA-II, the figure stood at 1,023. The citizenship to these refugees have been given at the initiative of Home Minister Rajnath Singh following BJP's declared policy that India is a "natural home for persecuted Hindus" who will be welcome to seek refuge. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had, during the Lok Sabha election campaign, said that Pakistani and Bangladeshi Hindu refugees will be treated like any other Indian citizen. There are around two lakh Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan currently living in India. Ever since the Modi government assumed charge in May 2014, nearly 19,000 refugees have been given long-term visas in Madhya Pradesh. Around 11,000 long-term visas were given in Rajasthan and 4,000 long-term visas were given in Gujarat, official sources said. In April, the home ministry had rolled out an online system for submission of Long Term Visa application and for its processing by various agencies. The decision has been taken to address the difficulty being faced by Hindu and Sikh minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who come to India with the intention to settle permanently. There are about 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements in cities like Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jaipur. Hindu refugees from Bangladesh mostly live in West Bengal and northeastern states. Sikh refugees mostly live in Punjab, Delhi and Chandigarh. (Times of India 14/6/15)

Myanmar Tamils another victims of human trafficking (13)
Kuala Lumpur: As the plight of Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar hit headlines, minority Tamils are lesser known victims of human trafficking crisis and their situation is worse as they are not recognised as refugees. Tamils, who are predominately Hindus and Christians and are descendants of rice growers in the Thaton and Bhamo districts of Myanmar, are conned by job agents who send them to Malaysia as bonded slaves. They were fleeced by agents of human trafficking rackets who lured them
to leave the country with promises of job in Malaysia, the Star paper reported. However, they ended up being packed in the same boats with Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants, sailing for up to two weeks without food and after that being tortured at transit camps along the Thailand and Malaysia border, the daily said. Many of them said they had sold their properties to pay the agents but ended up as bonded slaves for the trafficking syndicates, which sent them to construction sites in Penang, Kedah and Perlis states in Malaysia, the Star said. 21-year-old Tamil migrant S Parimala said many in her group left home before the military junta in Myanmar announced the issuance of identification cards during the middle of last year. "We are in limbo because according to Rohingyas who just arrived, we could be shot if we return without identification papers and we are also living in fear of the authorities in Malaysia. We are stateless but UNHCR office refuses to give us refugee status," she told the daily. She said about 110 Myanmar Tamils were now spread out in construction sites and living in squalid conditions. Another migrant, James Kanna, said, "I was duped into believing that I could enter the country legally." He added that he too tried to get refugee status but was rejected. "I have not seen my son for a year and I don't think I can see him again. He probably thinks I am already dead," said the widower who left his son with a neighbour. Tens of thousands of minority Rohingya Muslims facing persecution in Myanmar have fled the country in recent years. Joined increasingly by economic migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh, they mainly headed for Malaysia and Indonesia. The exodus was largely ignored until a crackdown on the people-smuggling trade in Thailand last month caused chaos as gangmasters abandoned their human cargos on land and sea. (Deccan Herald 15/6/15)

Amnesty condemns ‘shameful’ world response (13)

London: Rights group Amnesty International on Monday slammed world leaders for "condemning millions of refugees to an unbearable existence" and demanded they work closely to resolve the "worst crisis" since WWII. "From the Andaman to the Mediterranean people are losing their lives as they desperately seek safe haven," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty's secretary general, as the group published a report ahead of World Refugee Day on June 20. "The current refugee crisis will not be solved unless the international community recognises that it is a global problem that requires states to significantly step up international cooperation," he added. In its report, the London-based group urged the international community to establish a fund for refugees and collectively commit to resettling a million refugees over the next four years. "The refugee crisis is one of the defining challenges of the 21st century, but the response of the international community has been a shameful failure," said Shetty. "We need a radical overhaul of policy and practice to create a coherent and comprehensive global strategy." The situation is particularly "desperate" for four million Syrian refugees, 95 percent of whom live in five countries neighbouring Syria (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt). Amnesty warned that these countries were being overwhelmed by "such huge burdens". "No country should be left to deal with a massive humanitarian emergency with so little help from others, just because it happens to share a border with a country in conflict," said Shetty. On the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, Amnesty welcomed measures taken by European Union members to strengthen the Triton border security operation, but called for further action, notably by creating more legal avenues for resettling refugees.AFP(The Hindu 16/6/15)

India observes World Refugee Day (13)

New Delhi: Aiming to raise awareness about the plight of refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today held series of programmes across the country to mark the World Refugee Day. "Today is World Refugee Day. On this day, we celebrate the courage and resilience of refugees and join together in our support for displaced people around the world," UNHCR said in an official statement. In an event organised in Mumbai, Bollywood actor and UNHCR celebrity supporter John Abraham interacted with young refugees from Afghan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Somalia. He also addressed the youth about "empowerment, importance of education and of living a meaningful life", it said. Delhi marked the Refugee Day with an exhibition of renowned photographer Raghu Rai's photographs depicting refugees' daily struggle to restore their lives, organised at Rajiv
Chowk metro station in collaboration with Delhi Metro Rail Corporation. A Youth Meet was also organised in Delhi earlier this week featuring wide range of activities of UNHCR, including film screening, food kiosks, painting exhibition, dance programmes and other traditional cultural activities. Annual World Refugee Day campaign was launched in India earlier this week at Don Bosco school in the national capital. The theme for the celebrations this year was "With courage let us all combine", aiming to bring the public closer to the human side of the refugee stories by sharing stories of hope and resilience of displaced people, showing them as "ordinary humans living in extraordinary circumstances" UNHCR said. There are around 32,000 persons of concern to UNHCR in India, of whom some 26,500 are recognised refugees and another 5,700 are currently registered as asylum seekers, mostly from Afghan and Myanmar, with smaller groups from countries other countries including Somalia, Iraq and Iran, it added. Most of them are based in Delhi, with smaller pockets in other locations in Telangana, Jammu, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and UP. (Zee News 20/6/15)

Plight of refugees moves UNHCR ambassador John Abraham (13)
MUMBAI: “We left the Sri Lankan coast in a fishing boat and luckily made it to India. The boat that went before us capsized and there were no survivors,” 25-year-old Krishandhini recalls that fateful day when she was forced to leave her war-stricken homeland. She is one of the many Sri Lankan Tamils who had to flee their country and find refuge in India. She is now living with her family in a refugee camp near Chennai. Krishandhini is just one of the 32,000 refugees registered under United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) India, and was one of the seven young refugees to open her heart out to actor John Abraham on the World Refugee Day. Mr. Abraham, a celebrity supporter of UNHCR India, spent a few hours with the refugees from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Somalia on Saturday. Mr. Abraham, star of films like Dhoom and Kabul Express, found their stories extremely moving. “While shooting for Kabul Express in Afghanistan, I had a firsthand experience of a war-torn area and saw a lot of Afghans leave their country. Also, the Sri Lankan crisis has been very close to my heart. These experiences have been an eye-opener. The plight of refugees not only in India but all over the world has to be taken note of,” Mr. Abraham said. It has been 25 years, but the struggle for survival continues for Krishandhini and her family. She and her elder sister, Divya 27, were sent to college by her parents. They hold an MCA and B.Tech-IT degrees respectively, but have found it extremely difficult to find a decent job due to their refugee status. “Our mother stayed away from us for 12 years. She went abroad and found a job as a cook. She had to leave to raise the money for our education. We are well educated but since we are refugees, we do not have a proper identification document and are consequently unable to find a job that pays well and can support our family,” Ms. Divya told The Hindu. Jafar belongs to the Rohingya community in Myanmar and had to abandon his home due to the oppression of the government. They initially found refuge in Bangladesh but due to frequent communal tension in that country, they soon moved to India. He now lives in Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi with his family. “We had to take an official permission even for travelling from one village to another. Men are forcefully taken by the Myanmar army to work as labourers. Many have never returned, nobody knows if they are dead or alive. Even to get married, we need to take permission from the government. They refuse to recognise us as equal citizens,” Jafar said. He finds going back to his native land a far dream. Though this new land has not imposed restrictions on him, there exists a thick air of distrust between the refugees and the locals. Finding a well paid job is very difficult for him and people from his community. He wishes to study but earning enough to make the ends meet is his first priority. 20-year-old Barlin lost her father to the Somalian conflict in 2005. She was separated from her family and even today does not know their whereabouts. In 2010, she was adopted and brought to India. Her new friends in India helped her learn Hindi and now she works as a translator, helping other Somali refugees settled in New Delhi. As much as she likes her new home, she wishes to be at a better place. (The Hindu 22/6/15)

SL Refugees Allege Illegal Custody, Torture by Police (13)
MADURAI: Sri Lankan Tamil refugees of Aanaiyur camp here are living in morbid fear borne out of police torture. They allege that the police have been taking them into illegal custody, torture them
without even filing a First Information Report (FIR) and release them after they are found innocent. In the past week alone, the rural police have taken four refugees - R Muthu Kumar (34), N Denikaran (29), V Alaguraja (48) and J Pratap (23) - into custody suspecting their hand in various theft cases. They were later released, but only after being subjected to physical abuse. "The police made a call to my friend's mobile and said they wanted to question me regarding a quarrel case. Later on Monday night, four policemen, most of them in mufti, took me to the Alanganallur station. There they beat me up and forced me to take responsibility for a theft that occurred at Dinamani Nagar near Anaiyur. They released me only on Wednesday morning," Denikaran said. M Saraswathi, wife of Muthukumar, one of the victims, claimed that the police took her husband while they were sleeping on Tuesday night. "I told them that he was not involved in any crime and requested them to spare him. I assured that I will bring him to the station in the morning if they wanted to question him. But they did not pay heed and dragged him into their vehicle even as my children held on to him tightly," she alleged. Narrating the police torture, Muthukumar, a building painter, said, "They thrashed me with sticks and kicked me with their boots causing injuries all over my body. I pleaded with them that I was not involved in any theft but still they tortured me for about five hours." Muthukumar is not new to police atrocities. In the past too, he had been taken into custody and tortured only to be released later after they found that it was another person, his namesake, who had committed the offence. Another victim Pratap alleged that he was released only after the police forcefully took `6000 from him. Meanwhile, a senior police official said "Seasoned criminals are booked under Section 41 of CrPc and taken into custody for investigation." But he denied beating them up. Henri Tiphagne, a human right activist, said "Taking anyone into custody without a summons is a human rights violation." (New Indian Express 25/6/15)

China and India stay quiet as refugee crisis worsens (13)
HONG KONG:When a deadly earthquake rocked Nepal in April, China and India rushed to send relief supplies and search-and-rescue teams. But when another humanitarian crisis - boats bearing thousands of migrants - appeared off Southeast Asian shores a month later, Asia's two most populous countries said and did little. Instead, offers to resettle the migrants came from Gambia and the United States. The wealthiest nations in the Asia-Pacific region stood back as well. Australia declared it would not resettle the migrants, mostly Rohingya Muslims fleeing religious persecution in Myanmar or poor Bangladeshis seeking jobs. Japan pledged $3.5 million in emergency assistance but also refrained from offering to take in any displaced people. More than a month after Malaysia and Indonesia agreed to provide temporary shelter for up to 7,000 of the migrants stranded at sea, there has been no sign of progress in finding them a permanent home, nor any hint that Myanmar would address the conditions driving the Rohingya exodus. And Asia's most powerful nations are essentially sitting out the crisis. Their passivity is all the more striking because, halfway around the world, European leaders have been actively debating a response to their own migrant crisis, in which more than 1,700 people from Africa and the Middle East have died trying to cross the Mediterranean this year. President Xi Jinping of China and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India often present their nations as emerging global powers, promoting regional cooperation. Both countries also share a border with Myanmar and enjoy economic leverage as major trading partners, and in China's case, as a top source of foreign investment. But neither has pressured the government on its treatment of the Rohingya or played a significant role in efforts to resettle them. During a meeting of the UN Security Council last month, China insisted that the matter was an internal one for Myanmar to resolve. .... (Times of India 29/6/15)

‘137,000 refugees, migrants crossed Mediterranean’ (13)
A record 137,000 people made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe in the first half of 2015, most of them fleeing war, conflict and persecution, the United Nations said Wednesday “Europe is living through a maritime refugee crisis of historic proportions,” the UN refugee agency warned in a report, adding that the number of people making the crossing swelled 83 percent in the first six months of 2015 compared to a year earlier. The situation is expected to worsen as more
clement summer weather allows ruthless people smugglers to dispatch more people on the dangerous crossing, often in rickety boats and at the mercy of human traffickers. The immigration crisis is a burning issue for the EU, where member states have been wrangling over the best ways to tackle human trafficking and arguing over how to share the burden of helping new arrivals, many of them ill, starving and destitute. The soaring numbers arriving in Italy and Greece, before moving on to other northern European states in the hope of finding jobs, has sparked outcry and growing anti-foreigner rhetoric in many countries. It hailed Brussel’s decision to redistribute 40,000 Syrian and Eritrean asylum-seekers. (Asian Age 2/7/15)

173 Uighur refugees arrive in Turkey from Thailand (13)
Ankara (Turkey): A total of 173 people from the minority Chinese Muslim community of Uighurs have arrived in Turkey from Thailand, where they were being held after fleeing China, a Turkey-based Uighur group said on Thursday. Recep Akyol of the East Turkestan Migrants Association told The Associated Press the group, mostly women and children, arrived in Istanbul on June 30 and were being resettled in the central Turkish city of Kayseri, which boasts a strong Uighur community. Turkey has ethnic and linguistic ties to the Uighurs. Under pressure from Turkish nationalist groups who advocate closer links, it has been trying for months to convince Thailand and China to allow the group to resettle in Turkey. The refugees had faced repatriation to China, where they feared mistreatment. The Uighurs’ resettlement comes as relations between China and Turkey have been strained over Turkish media reports suggesting that Uighurs were being banned from worship and fasting during the Muslim month of Ramadan. Turkey this week summoned the Chinese ambassador to convey Turkey’s concerns over the reports. Beijing in turn, expressed its displeasure with Turkey’s complaint. Seyit Tumturk, the deputy head of the World Uighur Congress, thanked Turkish authorities on Wednesday for securing the 173 Uighurs’ release. He said they were among a group of about 250 Uighurs held in Thai camps and hoped that the remaining refugees would also be allowed to leave Thailand. (The Hindu 2/7/15)

Indrakaran meets President, seeks High Court bifurcation (13)
Law Minister A. Indrakaran Reddy on Monday urged President Pranab Mukherjee to use his good offices towards bifurcation of Hyderabad High Court, a demand which has been pending since formation of Telangana State. The informal appeal came during a meeting that Mr. Reddy had with the President along with Sirpur MLA Koneru Konappa and others. The MLA submitted a petition urging the President to look into the issue of giving SC caste certificates to Bangladeshi refugees who live in refugee camps in Kagaznagar, Sirpur and Koutala mandals in his constituency. He apprisedMr. Mukherjee of the economic and social condition of the 12,000 refugee families, half of which are Namashudras. According to Mr. Konappa, the government had recognised the Namashudra people as SCs when they started coming into the country since 1965. The Union government, however, cancelled the certificates in 1995 which brought untold hardships upon the poor families, he added. (The Hindu 7/7/15)

Government is Gagging Us: Vamsadhara Oustees (13)
SRIKAKULAM: Displaced people of the Vamsadhara project staged a maha dharna at Hiramandalam Monday, sparking tension in the area. People of the villages in the reservoir area gathered at Hiramandalam and took out a rally to the Tahsildar’s Office, protesting the 10-year delay in solving the problems of the project oustees. Chaotic scenes marked the rally as police stopped protestors who tried to barge into the Tahsildar’s Office. The protestors raised slogans demanding the tahsildar to come out and solve their problems. When even the MRO did not respond, they again tried to enter the office only to be stopped by the police who had already laid siege to the protestors. On the occasion, CPM leaders Ch Tejeswar Rao, Krishna Murthy and Simhachalam said that though the people vacated the places and ceded their lands for the project, the government was suppressing the displaced people. They alleged that the government was gagging them by using police force. The problem would not be solved unless the displaced people get justice, the CPM leaders said. There
was a stampede-like situation when the oustees got into an argument with the police. The protestors staged a sit-in on the road when the police tried to move them back. They threatened to stop the project works till the government provided proper rehabilitation measures and jobs to the oustees. It is not proper to command without paying compensation to the displaced people, they said. The protestors submitted a memorandum ventilating their grievances to MRO J Ramarao. (New Indian Express 7/7/15)

**Manipur govt gives in, withdraws ‘migrant’ Bill (13)**

Imphal: The Manipur government on Sunday withdrew the controversial Manipur Regulation of Visitors, Tenants and Migrant Workers’ (MRVTMW) Bill, 2015, which was one of the primary demands of the agitators seeking implementation of the inner line permit (ILP) system to restrict and regulate migration of ‘outsiders’ to the state. The Bill, which was passed by the state assembly on March 16, has been termed ineffective by the Joint Committee on ILPS System (JCILPS). The governor had reserved the Bill for consideration with the President of India. The decision comes after five days of intense agitation spearheaded by JCILPS, a conglomerate of civil society organizations, and a day after chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh submitted at a security review with Union home minister Rajnath Singh in Guwahati that the ongoing agitation for ILP in his state was a genuine demand and the Centre needed to find a solution. JCILPS has also been demanding that the government scrap the MRVTMW Bill and replace it with a fresh one, which restricts and regulates influx of ‘outsiders’ to the state. Taking into account the JCILPS demand and the people’s movement, the government has decided to withdraw the MRVTMW Bill. To this purpose, a special assembly sitting would be convened soon, said chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh in a hurriedly summoned media conference at his office secretariat on Sunday evening. "The assembly sitting schedule would be decided at a state cabinet meeting to be convened on Monday morning at 10," the CM added. The ILP agitation intensified after student protestor Sapam Robinhood was killed in police action here on Wednesday, which compelled the district magistrates (Imphal East and Imphal West) to immediately clamp indefinite curfew as a precautionary measure. District magistrates (Imphal East and Imphal West) on Sunday relaxed curfew for seven hours from 5 am to 12 noon during which people thronged Imphal markets to procure essential commodities. On the other hand, police have moved migrant workers, staying on rent on the outskirts of Imphal, to Dharamsala here in Imphal city for their safety in view of the intense agitation. As in the past four days, ILP protesters engaged in a pitched clash with police in several parts of the twin capital districts, while women demonstrated in various parts defying the curfew. Women have also been bringing out widespread torch rallies in the night across the four valley districts including Bishnupur and Thoubal. There have been reports of injuries being inflicted on both the protestors and police as a result of the pitched clashes…. (Times of India 13/7/15)

**Seal porous Bangla border: Supreme Court to govt (13)**

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court today directed the Centre and Assam government to take effective steps on the ground to prevent influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh observing that making policies is not sufficient to check the menace. After going through the report filed by Supreme Court appointed commissioner who visited the border areas, a bench of Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Rohinton F Nariman said that the report highlighted lots of deficiencies in the measures taken by governments in handling the situation. The bench said fencing of international border has not been completed and sufficient number of police and BSF personnel have not been deployed near the border to check entry of illegal migrants. "Court directs Centre and Assam government to take all corrective steps. They should take steps for improvement of border roads, electrification of flood lights on border areas. This is the least what they owe to the nation," the bench said. The court ordered the government to send its officials to visit the area to get a first hand account of ground realities. In May, the court had appointed senior advocate Upamanyu Hazarika as court commissioner to do an on-ground assessment of the eastern border. It had asked him to file a report on whether steps are being taken by governments to implement its direction for fencing the India-Bangladesh border and for maintaining strict vigil through effective patrolling to prevent influx of illegal migrants. The court in its judgment
passed in December last year had said Assam's culture was being eroded and peace and harmony of the area disturbed as it got swamped by persons "who have no right to continue to live in this country resulting in periodic clashes between citizens and migrants". "Not only is there an assault on the life of the citizenry of the state of Assam but there is an assault on their way of life as well. The culture of an entire people is being eroded in such a way that they will ultimately be swamped by persons who have no right to continue to live in this country," it had said. (Times of India 15/7/15)

**Govt readies Rs 2,000 crore rehabilitation package for Kashmiri Pandits (13)**

New Delhi: A Rs 2,000 crore rehabilitation package for the Kashmiri Pandits is being readied by the Home Ministry under which 3,000 government jobs and 6,000 new flats would be offered to the displaced community. A note is being prepared for the approval of the Union Cabinet for the Rs 2,000 crore package for the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits, who had to leave their homeland following rise of militancy in late 1980s, in Kashmir valley, a government official said. Under the proposal, 3,000 government jobs will be provided to educated youths of the community and 6,000 new flats will be offered as transit accommodation along with a long-term plan of constructing two-three composite townships in the Valley. The Jammu and Kashmir government has already assured to provide land for the proposed flats. These jobs will be in addition to the 3,000 jobs already offered to the Pandits under the previous UPA government's 2004 package of Rs 1,618 crore and 5,242 two-room tenements constructed in Jammu and allotted to the migrants. The new flats to be built in the Valley will not be on twin-sharing basis as earlier so as to enable migrants to move back with their families. The Home Ministry is also working on a Phase-II plan which involves permanent rehabilitation of Pandits in two-three composite townships of 2,500 families each to be built near Srinagar and Anantnag. Currently, there is a small transit accommodation of 200 flats in Sheikhpura, Budgam in the Valley. (Zee News 15/7/15)

**SC refers migrants’ kids issue to bench (13)**

New Delhi, July 21: The Supreme Court today referred the issue of providing Indian citizenship to children of illegal migrants born in this country to a Constitution bench. "We are referring to the Constitution bench the question as to the whether the children of illegal migrants would get the benefit of Section 3 of the Citizenship Act, as amended," a bench of Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice R.F. Nariman said. The two-judge bench, however, declined to entertain the plea of the Centre and the Assam government to extend the date of publishing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) by six months and reiterated that the NRC should be completed by January 1, 2016, as stated in its earlier order. The bench also clarified that all original inhabitants of Assam, including the tea tribes, and all other Indian citizens "who may have moved to the State of Assam, subsequent to 24 March 1971" would be eligible for inclusion in the NRC subject to the condition that the applicants produce valid proofs "beyond reasonable doubt" to the satisfaction of the authorities concerned. The bench, which is hearing various pleas on influx of illegal Bangladeshi migrants to Assam, appointed a three-member committee, comprising former Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir A.H. Saikia and retired Gauhati High Court judges, Justice B. Biswas and Justice B.N. Choudhary, "to take care of any clarification that would be required for working out the modalities of the NRC." Writing the order, Justice Gogoi said the committee could submit a report to it if any person causes any obstruction to the smooth preparation of the NRC. It asked all civil and police authorities to extend necessary cooperation towards this purpose. The bench referred the question of citizenship for children born to illegal migrants who entered Assam after 24 March, 1971 to the five-judge Constitution bench on a petition filed by one Deepak Kumar. Appearing for Kumar, counsel Somiran Sharma told the court that Section 6A (applicable to Assam) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 grants citizenship only to those migrants who came before March 25, 1971. The section, read with the Assam Accord of August 1985, clearly states that all illegal migrants coming after the midnight of March 24, 1971 "will be expelled in accordance with law" (Clause 5.8 of the Assam Accord)....(The Telegraph 22/7/15)

**After Terror Threat in Hyderabad, Cops Step up Vigil on Rohingyas (13)**
HYDERABAD: With intelligence inputs suggesting terror threat from Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, who have sought refuge and settled in Hyderabad, city police have stepped up vigil on those living here. In fact, after the National Investigation Agency (NIA) nabbed Khalid Mohammed, a Rohingya, from Balapur last November in connection with the Burdwan blast case, the city police perception had changed. Caught off foot by the presence of the Jamat-Ul Mujahideen Bangladesh, an off-shoot of Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, in their backyard, they have taken a host of measures including fingerprinting, employment status, demographic details and photographs while vigil has been stepped up. The city police, though, is tight-lipped about any recent intelligence inputs about members of the community being in touch with radical groups abroad. Police officials do not deny the vulnerability factor of Rohingyas, who, they believe could be easily exploited by extremists to take up radical paths. As many as 1679 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar live in parts of Hyderabad and Cyberabad according to police records. After their exodus in June 2012 in the aftermath of ethnic violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar to various parts of India, including Hyderabad, and considering their susceptibility towards extremists outfits, the city police have been keeping a strict surveillance on the community. A senior police officer on condition of anonymity, said, “Since they are poor, uneducated and alien to the land here, they are likely to be exploited and might be used by hardliners. There is no hard evidence to suspect anyone and police are maintaining total surveillance.” Mazher Hussain, Convenor, COVA, who has been working with the refugees said many of them are yet to be united with their relatives. “Their living conditions are pathetic. Most of them are illiterate or semi-literate and do daily wage jobs and earn Rs 6,000-7,000 per month,” said Hussain. “There is no hard evidence in the case till date against him. Other than offences relating to fake passport or Aadhaar, they have not been involved in any act threatening the security of the nation,” said a police official. (New Indian Express 23/7/15)

Pakistan's Rohingya tears stoke India's fears (13)

NEW DELHI: With Pakistan recently sponsoring a UN resolution expressing "serious concern" over the "plight" of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state of Myanmar, India is worried that Pakistan-based jehadi outfits like Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) will be further emboldened to radicalize the community and train its members for carrying out terrorist activities in Myanmar and elsewhere. Pakistan has, for some time now, been gathering support, both domestically and internationally, for Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. "ISI-backed terror outfits have been hobnobbing with Rohingya community leaders and organizing jehadi training along Bangladesh-Myanmar border," a senior Indian intelligence official said adding that Islamabad's open support to Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar comes hand-in-hand with its attempts to improve relations at the government level. "This is another instance of classic double speak that Pakistan is well known for," commented the officer. Earlier this month, on July 3, Pakistan, in a bid to embarrass Myanmar, sponsored a resolution at the 29th session of the UN Human Rights Council, condemning "all violations and abuses of human rights in Myanmar, in particular against Rohingya Muslims". It called upon Myanmar government to ensure protection of the community and take necessary measures to ensure accountability by undertaking transparent and independent investigation into human rights violations by it. The resolution urged Myanmar to protect places of worship, ensure return of refugees, grant full citizenship rights to Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state, and allow full access of humanitarian assistance to affected persons and communities. The sponsorship of the above resolution by Pakistan, castigating Myanmar, is not an isolated event. Pakistan-based terror outfits like LeT, JuD and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FiF) have all been known for their deep links with Rohingya Muslims. In 2012, JuD had organized a 'Difa e Musalman Arakan Conference' in Karachi to mobilize its cadres for anti-Myanmar campaign. JuD chairman and 26/11 attacks mastermind Hafiz Muhammad Sayeed shared the dais with Maulana Abdul Qudus Bumi, chief of Harkat-ud-Jihad Islami, Arakan, and Noor Hussain Arakani (Rohinya Solidarity Organisation). Shortly after, a JuD team visited Bangladesh-Myanmar border to set up training camps for Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar. FiF vice-chairman Shahid Mehmood had in 2011, along with JuD spokesperson (Sind) Nadeem Awan, visited the Bangladesh-Myanmar border to assess the condition of Rohingya Muslims. Though FiF was engaged in extensive
activities among Rohingya Muslims displaced to Bangladesh, agencies here believe its cadres were working to radicalize the community and impart terror training in the garb of relief and rehabilitation work. (Times of India 28/7/15)

**Lankan refugee observes fast (13)**

TIRUCHI: A Sri Lankan refugee lodged in the Special Camp here went on a fast on Wednesday demanding that he should be released. Police sources said the inmate Hasan Mohamed (30) had completed his conviction period in a fake visa case booked against him. Seeking his release and his return to his homeland, Hasan Mohamed observed fast prompting a revenue official to hold talks with him. The official is said to have told Hasan that his demand would be conveyed to the State government. However, he continued with his fast, the sources added. (The Hindu 30/7/15)

**Cry for Indian Citizenship (13)**

Silchar, July 31: A human rights body will impress upon members of Parliament to pass a legislation to grant citizenship to the victims of Partition. A team of Citizens' Rights Preservation Committee will soon go to Delhi to meet MPs of various political parties and urge them to draft a legislation to safeguard the citizenship status, rights and privileges of the people who migrated to Assam from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) because of civil disturbances and religious persecution. The secretary-general of the committee, Sadhan Purkayastha, told reporters here today that they would continue their fight till the victims of Partition who came to Assam from East Pakistan after being harassed and tortured, were given citizenship. "We will not accept refugee status to these people as prescribed by the BJP. They should be granted citizenship status," he added. Purkayastha said Jawaharlal Nehru, in his message to his countrymen on August 15, 1947, had clearly said that "there is no doubt, of course, that those displaced persons who have come to settle in India are bound to have their citizenship. If the law is inadequate in this respect, the law should be changed". "Not only Nehru, even leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and others had made the commitment to the people during Partition that the victims would be given proper citizenship status and rehabilitation in free India," he added. Mujamil Ali Laskar, an advocate, said with the Centre granting citizenship even today to the people who came from Pakistan, "why can't it give the same status to the people who came to India from East Pakistan following civil disturbances?" "Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his rally last year at Ramnagar here, promised to close down all detention camps if the BJP came to power. But the Modi government which has already completed one year continues to maintain silence on the issue," he added. The Vajpayee government took the decision to give citizenship to the Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan and Afghanistan. But, it maintained silence on granting citizenship to the people who came to India from Bangladesh. It shows the apathy of the BJP towards Bengali-speaking people," Laskar added. Swadesh Biswas, an adviser to the committee, said that if BJP came to power in Assam in 2016, the life of Bengalis would become more miserable. (The Telegraph 1/8/15)

**Citizenship soon for those who fled religious persecution (13)**

NEW DELHI: In a move that will have far-reaching implications in Assam and some parts of north-west India, the Union Home Ministry will amend the Citizenship Act, 1955, to grant citizenship to undocumented migrants who fled religious persecution in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The migrants include not just Hindus but also Buddhists, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sikhs and Jains. Top Home Ministry sources have confirmed that a Bill is in the works to amend the Act and make changes to some provisions in the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, and the Passport (Entry into India) Rules, 1950. The Law Ministry has vetted the amendments. "This is an idea floated right after the Modi government came to power, but it was found that many people who fled into India fearing religious persecution do not have valid documents, or have their visas expired. Therefore, these people are illegal migrants and ineligible for citizenship," a top official said. Several high-level meetings were held by the Ministry with the Law Minister, the Law Secretary and the Home
Secretary to remedy the situation. “Basically, two changes need to be made to the Passport Act, 1920, and Passport Rules, 1950, to exempt people who fled religious persecution from Pakistan or Bangladesh from being termed illegal migrants and offer them long-term visas while their case for citizenship is being considered,” a source said. Citizenship issue can affect relations with neighbours. The cut-off date proposed for victims of religious persecution from Pakistan and Bangladesh who can apply for citizenship is December 31, 2014. Citizenship by registration (a minimum stay of seven years) and naturalisation (a minimum of 12 years) will be the two routes. The External Affairs Ministry has cautioned the Home Ministry that the move could hurt India’s relations with its neighbours. Nevertheless, the political call has been taken. The Citizenship Act, 1955, would have to be amended to reflect the exemption from the status of illegal migrant. “Section 2, sub-section 1’s clause (b) will have a proviso which will reflect this exemption,” a source said. The amendment to the Passports Act, 1920, and Passport Rules, 1950, will have to be notified and tabled in Parliament for two months to allow for objections, if any, before being deemed clear. The amendments to the Citizenship Act, 1950, will be cleared as a Bill after being debated in Parliament. On Monday, BJP general secretary Ram Madhav said in Silchar: “No person who came from Bangladesh because of persecution or harassment will have to leave Assam or India. The NDA government will soon bring in necessary amendments to the Citizenship Act.” “At his first public rally in Assam during the 2014 election campaign, Narendra Modi had said Hindu Bangladeshis would be removed from camps and given citizenship,” a senior BJP leader said. (The Hindu 5/8/15)

Refugees as citizens (13)
None can object to the Union government’s move to grant citizenship to undocumented migrants who have come to India fleeing religious persecution in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Not just Hindus but also Buddhists, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sikhs and Jains are eligible for citizenship under the proposed amendment to the Citizenship Act. But ideally, so long as those seeking citizenship are able to prove they are victims of religious persecution in the neighbouring country, their religious persuasion should not be a criterion for grant of citizenship. Minority sects within Islam too face persecution, especially in Pakistan. The real difficulty, however, would be to distinguish between illegal migrants who came to India seeking work opportunities and a better life, and those who fled Pakistan or Bangladesh fearing persecution. In a situation where the Narendra Modi government continues to push for a tough stand against “infiltration” and illegal migration, the religious identity of the migrants should not be the basis for deciding their eligibility for citizenship. Given the past rhetoric of the BJP, which in the 2014 election manifesto described India as the “natural home of persecuted Hindus”, and the election speeches of Mr. Modi himself, in which he asked Bangladeshis to be ready to pack up and leave, the initial fears were that only Hindus, or at the most those adhering to Indian-origin religions, would be chosen for citizenship. That there has been some rethinking is a welcome sign. The government ought to make this religion-neutral. However, what needs to change more urgently is India’s attitude to refugees in general. India must remain open to all those seeking refuge, and not just those fleeing religious persecution. Although not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, under which it would have been obliged not to send refugees back to a territory against their will if they fear threats to life or freedom, India cannot escape its responsibilities under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to respect the rights and freedoms of all people in its territories. Article 14(1) is categorical in stating that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” Any well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or political opinion qualifies for refugee status. Worries about the impact this would have on relations with Bangladesh at a time when a friendly government is in place are misplaced. In any case, India cannot compromise on its commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. If there is a problem with the proposals, it is that they do not go far enough. (The Hindu 6/8/15)

Gaza infant mortality rises for first time in 53 years: UN (13)
Jerusalem: The infant mortality rate in Gaza has risen for the first time in more than half a century, a new study by the UN aid agency for Palestinian refugees says. “The number of babies dying before
the age of one has consistently gone down over the last decades in Gaza, from 127 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 20.2 in 2008. At the last count, in 2013, it had risen to 22.4 per 1,000 live births," a statement from the UNRWA relief agency released at the weekend said. "Every five years UNRWA conducts a survey of infant mortality across the region, and the 2013 results were released this week," it said, adding that because of the data it would conduct a new Gaza-specific survey this year. It said that neonatal mortality in Gaza, the number of babies who die before four weeks old, rose from 12 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 20.3 in 2013. The statement quoted Akihiro Seita, director of the agency’s health programme, as saying that the sudden upswing was unprecedented in the Middle East. "When the 2013 results from Gaza were first uncovered, UNRWA was alarmed by the apparent increase. So we worked with external independent research groups to examine the data, to ensure the increase could be confirmed," he said. "That is why it took us so long to release these latest figures." He suggested that Israel’s blockade of the coastal strip, where close to 45 percent of the population is under 14 years old, could be a contributing factor. "It is hard to know the exact causes behind the increase in both neonatal and infant mortality rates, but I fear it is part of a wider trend," he said. "We are very concerned about the impact of the long-term blockade; on health facilities, supplies of medicines and bringing equipment in to Gaza.” Israel imposed its blockade on the Gaza Strip in 2006 after the Islamist militant group Hamas captured an Israeli soldier. It further tightened controls a year later when Hamas consolidated its rule there. A 50-day war between Israel and Hamas in July-August 2014 killed about 2,200 Palestinians and 73 on the Israeli side, and destroyed or damaged tens of thousands of homes in the impoverished coastal territory. Among the Gaza dead were more than 500 children. (Zee News 9/8/15)

Assam governor concerned over NRC update process (3)

Guwahati: Assam Governor PB Acharya on Thursday expressed his deep concern about the slow process of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state. In a statement, Acharya appealed to all Indian citizens to expedite and without fail complete the application process for the NRC before the August 31 deadline. The governor said no Indian citizen will be left out of NRC for any reason. The updating of the NRC is being done under the direct supervision of the Supreme Court. "All tea tribes, Bengali Hindu refugees, orphanage inhabitants, jailed prisoners, Indians from neighbouring states, especially from Tripura, Indians from other states of our mainland who have migrated to Assam by marriage, jobs, business etc. are eligible to enter in NRC as per the Supreme Court judgment," Acharya said. The governor met Pratik Hajela, state coordinator of the NRC, and discussed about the progresses and hindrances in the updating process. He strictly ordered that no foreigners should be allowed to get into NRC, either because of corrupt officials giving false birth certificates or by any fraud. Acharya stressed the need for all NRC Seva Kendras in the state to be very careful and not succumb under any pressure or fear. "The integrity and security of not only the northeast, but of India is very important and the patriotic citizens of Assam should take special care in this regard," he said. He appealed to all political parties, student organisations, universities, Sahitya Sabhas, merchant chambers, NGOs, tribal and non-tribal social organisations to be in the forefront to assist and correctly complete the NRC process by August 31. "We have only seventeen days left for the last date for submission of applications," he reminded. "Let all the patriotic Indian citizens take the pledge to safeguard the integrity and security of India. The first and the right step is the correct NRC.” (Zee News 13/8/15)

Illegal immigrants make city their home (13)

HYDERABAD: The arrest of illegal immigrants from Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh in the city has revealed that several such foreign nationals have made Hyderabad their home and even obtained identity proofs. To put an end to this issue, Cyberabad police have begun recording the details of all Rohingya Muslim immigrants from Myanmar staying in Hyderabad. As per the data provided to Cyberabad police by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), till August 6, there are 1,761 refugees of various countries residing in the common capital of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Among the 1,761 refugees, 1,518 are Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, five are
non-Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, one is from Afghanistan, nine are from Greece, two from Iran, 31 from Iraq, three from Palestine, 168 from Somalia, 28 from Sudan and two are from Syria. All these refugees are staying in the city and doing various jobs to eke out their livelihood. But during a routine checking, Cyberabad police realized that there are several Rohingya Muslim families and individuals living in the city illegally, without registering themselves with the UNHCR. "To solve this problem, we have started collecting information about all the immigrants staying in the Cyberabad with the help of NGOs," Cyberabad commissioner CV Anand said. As the population of Rohingyas comprise major share in immigrant population of city, Cyberabad cops began gathering their details with the assistance of NGO COVA, an implementing partner of UNHCR refugee project in the city. "We are preparing a database with all the details of the members of all Rohingya families, both registered with UNHCR and the illegal immigrants residing in city with their photographs and ID proofs. We will then issue an ID cards to them," Shamshabad DCP AR Srinivas said. According to police, there are about 300 illegal Rohingya immigrants in the city and the registration work has started on July 31. Majority of the Rohingya refugees and the illegal immigrants stay in the Old City at Balapur, Babangar, Barkas, Royal Colony, Shaeen Nagar, Jalpally, Kishanbagh and work as daily wage labourers. Police said that the refugees from African countries are mostly those who arrived here on student visas and later sought refuge citing precarious living conditions back home. But unlike with Rohingyas, neither the police, nor the NGOs have much information about these refugees from African countries. As on August 13, there are 318 Pakistani nationals and 18 Bangladeshis staying in city on long term, short term and student visas. The dispute over illegal stay pertaining to three Pakistani nationals is pending in the high court. (Times of India 16/8/15)

‘BJP committed to granting citizenship to Hindus’(13)

Guwahati: BJP MP from Assam Ramen Deka said granting citizenship to Hindus, who have taken shelter in Assam and other parts of the country following religious persecution in Bangladesh, is BJP’s national commitment and the party would fulfill it. Deka, who represents Mangaldoi constituency, said the Centre was seriously pursuing its commitment to give citizenship to Hindus who had suffered religious persecution in the neighbouring country. Several BJP central leaders including national president Amit Shah on April this year has promised that Hindus who had migrated to Assam would be granted citizenship. Shah had also reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s assurance in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls that other states would share the burden of sheltering Hindu refugees who migrated to Assam due to religious persecution in Bangladesh. While BJP has been espousing the cause of citizenship to Hindu refugees in Assam, Congress is also advocating granting citizenship to the community. The Congress executive meeting in June this year had also decided to ask the Centre to grant citizenship to Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and other religious groups who came to Assam following religious persecution. With less than a year left for the assembly polls, Congress and BJP are both pitching their demand for citizenship for Hindu refugees. Deka, however, accused the ruling Congress of using the citizenship issue for Hindus as a tool for getting votes. "Chief minister Tarun Gogoi has made the issue of citizenship for Hindus a tool to get votes. For BJP, it is a national commitment and we will fulfill it," Deka said. Deka, who is former BJP state president, also demanded a CBI probe into the bribery scam in the city’s water supply scheme involving US-based construction management firm Louis Berger Group. "If the government of Goa could promptly hand over the investigation to the CBI, what is preventing the Assam government from engaging the investigation agency for probe the scam in the state?" Deka asked. (Times of India 17/8/15)

Germany expects refugee numbers to increase four times to record 800,000 (13)

Berlin: The number of asylum-seekers and refugees to Germany will quadruple to a record 800,000 this year compared with last, more than twice as many as the 300,000 new arrivals forecast in January, the government said on Wednesday. Germany, which has become a magnet for refugees fleeing war, violence and poverty in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, has criticised European Union partners for not doing more as 218,221 people arrived seeking asylum in the first six months alone. "We’ve got to reckon there will be 800,000 people coming to Germany as refugees or seeking
asylum," said Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere who only three months ago raised the original 300,000 forecast to 450,000. "It will be the largest influx in the country's post-war history," de Maiziere told a news conference in Berlin, adding that Germany should expect high numbers for years to come. "It's a challenge for all of us at the state, federal and local levels," he said. "We can master this challenge. I don't think this will overwhelm Germany. We can handle this." Migrant numbers across the EU have shot up in recent months. Many undertake dangerous sea voyages to reach southern Europe, then make their way across the continent to countries where they hope to make a life for themselves. Germany has a long tradition of welcoming refugees, in part a response to its Nazi past when 500,000 Jews and opponents of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich fled. Many found shelter in 80 countries, including former West German chancellor Willy Brandt. After World War Two, Germany took in some 13 million displaced persons and refugees fleeing west from Eastern Europe when the region came under Soviet domination. United Germany's previous biggest annual intake was 438,191, in 1992, when it received large numbers of refugees fleeing conflicts resulting from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. A year later, the German parliament changed the constitution to impose stricter rules on asylum. Numbers sank to a low of 28,000 in 2008 before they started climbing again. Along with a shortage of lodgings in cities including Berlin, Munich and Hamburg, Germany also struggles to process applications, which can take over a year. After Germany, Sweden takes in the most asylum-seekers in Europe. There have been arson attacks and unruly protests in Germany against the rising numbers of migrants. As well as refugees fleeing war in Syria and Iraq and elsewhere, there has been an influx of asylum-seekers from nations such as Albania and Serbia. Almost half of those who reached Germany in the first half of the year came from the Balkans -- many of whom will be sent back. (DNA 20/8/15)

Refugees guarded in reaction to Sri Lankan poll results (13)

Mandapam (Ramanathapuram district): The Sri Lankan Tamils at the Mandapam camp reacted to the election of United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister with cautious optimism. The refugees heaved a sigh of relief that former President Mahinda Rajapaksa suffered yet another debacle but at the same time were not elated at the victory of Mr. Wickremesinghe. The return of Mr. Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister may not make a substantial difference in addressing the long-pending issues faced by the Tamils in the island nation, the refugees felt. A cross section of the refugees, especially women, felt that the composition of new government would still have a Sinhalese majority and remained sceptical about the new dispensation meeting the genuine demand for devolution of power and equal rights to the Tamils. “He is also a Sinhala but his election has given a ray of hope to the Tamils in the island,” P. Thusha (35), a native of Savacheri in Jaffna, who had arrived here as refugee in 2010 said. She came with her husband, leaving behind her two children with her mother in Savacheri. After her husband went to Switzerland, she has been eking out a living running a fancy store outside the camp. She was worried that she was living alone but happy as she enjoyed freedom. “This is the kind of freedom the Tamils in the island nation are yearning for,” she told The Hindu on Thursday. Even six years after the end of the war, the Tamils were not happy in the island. The much-hyped devolution of powers, resettlement of the displaced Tamils and the dismantlement of army were still a distant dream for the Tamils, she said. (The Hindu 21/8/15)

19 Myanmar refugees moved to Kerala (13)

TUTICORIN: After ten days in asylum here, 19 Myanmar refugees moved to Wayanad, Kerala on Saturday evening. Amidst security, the refugees, who had fled Myanmar in the wake of violent attacks on them, were taken to the railway station from where they boarded the Mysuru Express at 4.40 p.m. A three-member team from Wayanad Muslim Orphanage (WMO), Muttil, came forward to offer asylum to the refugees at Wayanad and based on the assurance members of jamaath attached to Tuticorin Jamia Mosque took care of them since their landing. Iliyas (50), chairman of Maungdaw township, one of the refugees, said that they reached Kolkata from Bangladesh by boat and later went to New Delhi, where identity cards were provided from the office of UNHCR. They later moved to Tuticorin in search of employment in industrial units that offered jobs for migrant workers. Speaking to The Hindu
Mohammed Iliyas (22) thanked the officials and the jamaath members for their hospitality. “The extremists’ relentless attacks drove us to leave our properties and cattle and seek safe asylum”, he said. Abdur Rehman (37) said the WMO team had promised to offer agriculture-based jobs. Among the refugees were six men, six women, five girls and two boys. M. Shahul Hameed, president, Jamia Mosque, said that the jamaath members donated Rs.30,000 to the refugees as humanitarian aid. Superintendent of Police Ashwin M. Kotnis said that all of them were legal refugees and the UNHCR allowed them to stay till October. (The Hindu 24/8/15)

UNHCR urges countries to work together to help refugees (13)
Geneva: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Tuesday called for refugees to be treated humanely and for the authorities to work together as thousands of people continued to head into the Western Balkans from Greece. UNHCR officials told a press briefing here on Tuesday that people had been continuing to cross in groups of up to 300-400 at the Greece-Macedonia border and then travelling onwards by train or bus to Serbia, Xinhua reported. Melissa Fleming, an official for the Office of the UNHCR, anticipated arrivals over the next few days would be at a rate of up to 3,000 people per day. The official said that in Serbia the UN refugee agency and the Serb authorities are now working to respond to the humanitarian needs of more than 10,000 refugees. According to UNHCR, many of those migrants were from countries affected by violence and conflict such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and they were often physically exhausted and psychologically traumatized. They were in need of humanitarian and medical assistance, especially the sick, pregnant women and elderly persons. Fleming appealed to the governments involved to implement border management measures with humanity and in accordance with their international obligations, adding that family unity and protection of persons with specific needs must be upheld. (Business Standard 25/8/15)

PoK refugees meet Rahul, seek his help over Rs 25 lakh package (13)
Jammu: Accusing the Modi government of “scuttling” their ‘one-time settlement’ funds, PoK refugees met with Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi, urging him to put pressure on the Centre to release the Rs 25 lakhs per PoK family grant. A delegation of refugees and displaced persons of 1947, 1965 and 1971 from Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) areas met Gandhi during his visit here last night and discussed the issue of ‘one time settlement’ of PoK refugees, a release said here. The delegation apprised about the latest status of the package worked out by the previous Congress-NC government on the intervention of the UPA leadership in 2012. The state government in consultation with representatives of PoK refugees had worked out a package of Rs 25 lakhs to each family as one time settlement, besides recommending reservations and concessions to the wards of these displaced people. The refugees complained that the present BJP led Centre returned the package on lame excuse, just to “scuttle” the same, the release said. The delegation urged the Congress leadership to pressurize the Centre to release the package without any delay, as the people are getting restless. They apprised the Congress leader that any further delay in the matter would force them to come on the streets to get the package implemented. (Zee News 27/8/15)

5 killed in Manipur violence, indefinite curfew in some areas (13)
The fear of losing ancestral land due to migration of “outsiders” from neighbouring countries and north and east Indian States has prompted fresh agitation in the southern district of Manipur. The recent flare-up is triggered by the passage of the Protection of Manipur Peoples Bill, 2015, and two amendments — one on land and land revenue and the other on shops and establishments. While the ethnic population was demanding imposition of an Inner Line Permit (ILP), the government hastily introduced and passed the Bills on Monday. The passage has angered the tribal population and set-off a new round of agitation. The All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) and the All Naga Student’s Association of Manipur (ANSAM) led the protests demanding immediate withdrawal of the Bills. The organisations were supported by the Kuki Students’ Organisation (KSO). The KSO also imposed an indefinite blockade on the legalised border trade at Moreh in Chandel district on south
bordering Myanmar, from Tuesday. Chief spokesperson of the government M. Okendro said the Bills would not hurt the interests of the indigenous community. Noted human rights activist of Manipur Babloo Loitongbam says the Bill and the amendments have "nothing against the security or interest of the tribals" in the State. Rather, the process of buying land by outsiders has been made more stringent by the new laws. "Earlier the permission to buy land had to be sought from a section or subsidiary of the Cabinet, but now the entire Cabinet needs to approve land-buying by an outsider. The tribal areas — being Scheduled areas — remain protected and are not disturbed under the new amendments," Mr. Loitongbam told The Hindu from Imphal. However, the indigenous community got an impression that the cut-off year remains 1951 in the new Bills, when the first post-independence Census was conducted and indigenous people who arrived after 1951 will be deported to respective States or countries. "This was a wrong idea and it was not properly explained by the authorities that tribal interests will not be affected. The government should have explained the content in greater detail as the relationship between the ethnic community and the valley people is always sensitive in Manipur. As a result local MLAs were targeted by the people," Mr Loitongbam said. (The Hindu 2/6/15)

Crisis is bigger than European Union’s refugee problem (13)
The European Union is facing an existential threat. The refugee crisis of today hits not so much at the economic framework of the EU as it does its raison d’être and moral fibre as a civilisation, which are under siege from an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. A large arc of disquiet has been building up over the years in the Middle East, northern Africa and southern Mediterranean, leading to this exodus of hapless humanity fleeing wars and repressive regimes. The only direction they can go is towards western Europe now because there are no safe places for them in the decolonised world around them that dissolved mostly into tinpot dictator regimes. The picture of the Syrian toddler washing up on a Turkish beach went digitally viral to uniquely touch the conscience of the world, but the issue goes far beyond the sealing of borders and the formal calculations of how many refugees each European nation is willing to take. What we are seeing today is a stark failure of the politics of the West. Dragged into one of West Asia’s many versions of the Sunni versus Shia wars by George Bush, the US is to blame the most for poking its nose in other people’s business or civil wars. And the major European powers were standing alongside the Americans as they bombed the daylights out of Saddam Hussain’s Iraq. America’s Syria policy, its arming of the opposition moderates ranged against Bashar al-Assad only to see those weapons go on to the Al Nusra Front, an Al Qaeda associate, and the startling growth of the IS, possibly masterminded by remnants of Saddam’s Army and which fights on the other side of the Syrian civil war now, has led to a boiling point that is challenging the world. The destabilising policies of the West caused this problem whose dire consequences the world is experiencing. To offer sanctuary to a few millions is not beyond Europe’s economic and social capacity, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel has given voice to the call of conscience to invoke the defining ideals of respect for universal human rights. If a percentage of the refugees also comprises people looking for a better life rather than strict sanctuary, their plight also forms part of the larger human experience. While the refugee crisis is for Europe to solve, the bigger issue is a reminder that the United Nations must wake up to the wider meaning. The US cannot remain a silent spectator either. If the world must find some solution, the Russians would have to cooperate too. If Syria is not tackled, the world will pay a bigger price. What we are seeing now in terms of the dispossessed knocking on their neighbours’ doors is only the tip of the iceberg. (Asian Ahe 4/9/15)

Over 3,500 Syrian Refugees Arrive in Munich (13)
MUNICH: Over 3,500 refugees, a majority of them from conflict-ridden Syria, have arrived at Munich from Hungary via Austria, and another 3,000 are expected to arrive on Sunday. According to German police, three special trains with refugees are expected to arrive on Sunday, Xinhua news agency reported. "We prepare ourselves for 5,000 to 7,000 refugees," said Christoph Hillenbrand, head of district government of Upper Bavaria. Hungary decided on Friday night to bring refugees stuck at Budapest by bus to the Austrian border. Austria and Germany then declared their willingness to
Thousands of refugees arrive in Germany after journey from Hungary (13)

Thousands of refugees and migrants streamed into Germany on Sunday, many travelling through Austria from Hungary where they had been stranded against their will for days, while European Union governments argue over how to respond. A convoy of around 140 cars and vans filled with food and water left Vienna to collect exhausted migrants, many from Syria, who had set out to walk the 170 km (110-mile) stretch through the rain from Hungary's capital Budapest to the Austrian border, from where many would continue onto Germany. Onlookers clapped and chanted: "Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here," as volunteers loaded their vehicles with food, water and soft toys. However, the EU is deeply divided over how to cope with the influx of people from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, making the 28-nation bloc look ineffective and heartless as member states blame each other, fuelling political populism and anti-Muslim sentiment. Germany has said it expects 800,000 refugees and migrants this year and urged other EU members to open their doors. But others say the focus should be on tackling the violence in the Middle East that has caused them to flee their homes. (Business Standard 7/9/15)

NHRC notice to TN over plight of Myanmar refugees (13)

CHENNAI: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notice to Tamil Nadu government, responding to reports about refugees from Myanmar left "wandering on the streets" of Chennai, looking for accommodation. Tamil Nadu government and Chennai city police commissioner have been given four weeks to respond to the notices. NHRC member justice D Murugesan, taking notice of a report in media, said refugees including women and children, were made to wander in "utter disregard to their human rights." "The state authorities have the duty to protect the human rights of the refugees and to provide shelter to them...the report, if true, raises a serious issue of violation of human rights," the commission said. The 64 refugees belonging to 14 Rohingya Muslim families had arrived in Chennai three years ago and were staying in a private accommodation at Koman Nagar in Thayiur and were working as daily wage labourers and rag pickers. On September 3, an agent took them to Manali for some work, but when local people there objected to the presence of refugees in large numbers, police shifted them to a place at Kovalam on the East Coast Road. They were subsequently shifted to a community hall at Kelambakkam on September 5 after the district administration intervened. They have been provided food and security, said Chengelpet RDO Paneerselvam. Police have been drafted for duty at the community hall, he said. The refugees including 15 women had to move out of Thayiur because the owner of the place where they were staying wanted them to vacate the place. As they approached some local Muslim leaders, one Kabir Bai took the initiative to take them to Manali, inquiries revealed. Kancheepuram district collector V K Shanmugam said the government had identified a poromboke land at Thayiur where the refugees could be relocated. "We are yet to take a final decision on this," Shanmugam said. Abdul Salam (39), one of the refugees who arrived two months ago with wife and a child, is a driver. He paid Rs 6,000 to a broker in Kolkata, who sent him to Jammu and Kashmir. From there he moved to Chennai. But without a licence, he is unable to work, he said. K Yousuf (35) came to Chennai with his wife and two kids. He paid money to multiple brokers in Bangladesh and Kolkata, he said, and added that he was keen on returning to Myanmar. Rohingyas are Indo-Aryan people from Rakshine state of Myanmar. They speak Rohingya language. Some historians say they had migrated to Myanmar from Bangladesh, some during the British rule, some after the Burmese independence in 1948 and some after the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. They have been seen as one of the most persecuted minorities by the United Nations. More than one lakh Rohingyas live as internally displaced refugees in camps in Myanmar. A sizeable section of the population has moved over to Bangladesh. After the
Rakshine state riots in 2012, many Rohingyas migrated to Southeast Asian countries. (Times of India 8/9/15)

**Germany expects 40,000 refugees over the weekend (13)**

Berlin: Some 40,000 migrants could arrive in Germany over the next two days - double the number who entered the country last weekend, authorities said on Saturday. Most are expected to arrive in the southern city of Munich but there are concerns about whether the region can cope with another large influx, BBC reported. Many migrants received a warm welcome at Munich railway station last weekend, and thousands have continued to arrive in Germany throughout the week. The mayor of Munich, Dieter Reiter, has made an urgent call for other German regions to do more to process and accommodate the new arrivals. He described as "scandalous" the failure of other regions to provide more accommodation. Reports suggest the government is considering new temporary powers to take control of unoccupied rental property so it can accommodate migrants. A large processing hub is planned for northern Germany on the Luneburg Heath in Lower Saxony. Trains would take migrants there directly from Austria. Meanwhile, protests in support of migrants are expected across Europe later on Saturday. (New Kerala 12/9/15)

**Myanmar refugees eke out a living in Chennai (13)**

CHENNAI: While crossing the India-Bangladesh border in 2012, Dil Muhammad's first wife and three children were arrested. Muhammad was not in that group of Rohingyas that tried to cross the border after reaching Dhaka from Myanmar. With the help of a broker, Muhammad later managed to flee to Chennai, where he has been living with his second wife and daughter since. What he last heard was that his first wife and children are serving a sentence in a Kolkata jail. He wants to see them, but how? "It's difficult to move around as a refugee. I am stuck," he said. Last week, a group of 64 Rohingyas, including children, were shifted to a community hall in suburban Kelambakkam from an adjacent makeshift camp where they had been living for two years. Police said a few Rohingyas fought with some Bangladeshi nationals living in the same area and were shifted temporarily to the community hall. As rag pickers, the livelihood of these refugees depend on the amount of scrap they collect every day. They are not allowed to move around or do any work. So the men work as rag pickers but it is not at their will. "A scrap-dealer paid 14,000 to a broker for my family. Now I collect waste for him," said Muhammad Yusuf, a Rohingya refugee who has been living in Chennai with his wife and two children since 2012. Rohingyas are Indo-Aryan people from Rakhine state of Myanmar. They speak Rohingya language. They have been identified as one the most persecuted minorities by the UN. More than one lakh Rohingyas live as internally displaced refugees in camps in Myanmar. A sizeable section of the population has moved to Bangladesh. After the Rakshine state riots in 2012, many Rohingyas migrated to south east Asian countries. The Rohingyas living in the community hall at Kelambakkam comprise 15 men, 16 women, 24 boys and nine girls. As the men work as rag pickers and daily wagers, women take care of making food in the camp. Dil Muhammed says the group was small in the beginning and subsequently grew to 64 as refugees from various places joined. "We were only some 14 people when we first came to Chennai. But soon our people from other states of India and countries like Bangladesh joined us. We all live in an open hall with our wives and children. There is no privacy and life is becoming hectic," he said. The problems being faced by the Rohingyas came to light after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued notice to the TN government, responding to reports about refugees from Myanmar left "wandering on the streets" of Chennai in search of accommodation. Even though all in the group have registered with the refugee office of the UN high commission, they are not allowed to lead a free life. "I was working as a part-time driver at a private firm in Jammu and Kashmir. I don't have a valid Indian licence, but I have one issued by the Myanmar government. I don't have any other option but to work as a ragpicker here," said Abdul Salam, who joined the group in Chennai a couple of months ago. … (Times of India 14/9/15)

**Grant citizenship to Chakma refugees within 3 months: Supreme Court (13)**
NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Centre and Arunachal Pradesh government to grant citizenship within three months to Chakmas and Hajongs refugees who migrated to India from Bangladesh in 1964-69 and settled in the state. A bench of Justices A R Dave and A K Goel said Chakmas have a right to be granted citizenship subject to the procedure being followed and they cannot be discriminated in any manner. It directed the government to take all necessary steps to protect them as they are facing hostility from the local population. “It is well known that the Chakmas and Hajongs were displaced from the area which became part of East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh) on construction of Kaptai Dam and were allowed to be rehabilitated under the decision of the Government of India...They could not be discriminated against in any manner pending formal conferment of rights of citizenship,” it said. The court passed the order on a petition filed by Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas (CCRC) alleging that they were still being treated as foreigners despite living for more than 50 years in the state and being deprived the benefits of various social welfare schemes including Public Distribution System. “We direct the Centre and Arunachal Pradesh to finalise the conferment of citizenship rights on eligible Chakmas and Hajongs and also to ensure compliance of directions in judicial decisions for protection of their life and liberty and against their discrimination in any manner. The exercise may be completed at the earliest preferably within three months from today,” it said. (Times of India 18/9/15)

10,000 migrants pour into Austria as crisis deepens (13)
Vienna: Austria was bracing for an influx of 10,000 migrants as Europe's increasingly divided countries stepped up efforts to push the wave of desperate humanity on to their neighbours. In the latest chapter in the EU's escalating refugee crisis, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia tussled over how to cope with the massive inflow of people passing through on their way to new lives in northern and western Europe. The European Union, meanwhile, sketched out plans to boost aid to encourage Syrians in Turkey to stay put rather than join the exodus. Hungary's right-wing government, which has faced international criticism over violent clashes with migrants and a hastily erected fence along its frontier with Serbia, has vowed to “defend its borders” against the flood of new arrivals, most of whom are from the Middle East and Africa. But in a shift in tactics late Friday, Hungarian authorities began transporting thousands of migrants straight to the border with Austria, an apparent bid to move them through and out of their territory as quickly as possible. Austrian police said Hungary had bussed at least 6,700 people to the border, with a total of 10,000 arrivals expected in the Burgenland border region by yesterday. There was no let-up in the stream of people making the gruelling journey across the Balkans into western Europe, with Croatia saying 20,700 had entered the country since Wednesday. Croatia, which initially said it would allow migrants to pass through freely, announced it was swamped on Friday and began transporting hundreds to the Hungarian border -- sparking a furious reaction from Budapest. Migrants were being transported on Friday to two border crossings with Hungary and two with Slovenia, Interior Minister Ranko Ostojic said. Both countries belong to Europe's borderless Schengen zone. In a new hurdle aimed at stemming the influx, Hungary said it had completed a 41-kilometre barbed-wire barrier along part of its frontier with Croatia. It "was finished overnight Friday," defence spokesman Attila Kovacs told AFP in Budapest. The remaining 330 km of the border runs roughly along the Drava river, which is difficult to cross. The new barrier adds to a barbed-wire fence that Hungary completed along its frontier with Serbia earlier this week, backed with laws threatening illegal migrants with jail, which forced the migrant flow towards neighbouring Croatia. The first migrants to have taken this diverted new route - through Croatia and Slovenia - arrived in Austria yesterday, from where many hope to travel on to elsewhere in the European Union. (Deccan Herald 20/9/15)

Refugees from conflict ridden areas of Pakistan also heading to Europe (13)
ISLAMABAD: Just like the people from the war ravaged regions of the Middle East fleeing their homes, heading for Europe to save their lives, people from the conflict-hit areas of Pakistan also have been fleeing and heading for Europe, Australia, America and Canada. In fact the people starting migrating from Pakistan much before the unrest started in the Middle East after the emergence of
Dai'sh or the IS (Islamic State). People migrating from Pakistan fall in two different categories. First, who were initially affected by the war on terror spearheaded by the US against Al-Qaida in Afghanistan and later they got sandwiched between the militants of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Pakistan Army, when the large-scale military operation ‘Zarb-e-Azb’ was launched against the militants, particularly focused on the Tribal Areas of Pakistan and in general all over the country. And, the second are the religious minorities like Shia Hazara community of Baluchistan and the third is a small number of Ahmadis, a community declared non-Muslims by Pakistan constitutionally. "Both the Shias, especially the Hazara community in Baluchistan and the Ahmadis are victims of religious persecution. Though these Pakistanis are not migrating in hoards like we have been seeing from Iraq and Syria but there has been a steady trickle for many a years now," said Mubarik Ahmed Virk, a veteran Pakistani journalist. Unable to fulfill legal requirements, very few Pakistanis believe to follow the legal process for immigration. Majority of them adopt a course, which is not only illegal but full of hazards, to reach the shores of Europe. They spend hefty amounts to smugglers and traffickers of criminal syndicates to take them to Europe. They sell them false dreams of green pastures through death-defying road to Europe. The amount they pay to their agents ranges between $8,000 and $13,000. "I spent Rs1.3 million ($13,000) to reach here after journeying for nine months. Now, I am waiting for an opportunity to cross into England. In last five months, I was caught three times while hiding in a lorry. I hope to succeed this time," said Shoaib Afridi, a resident of Jamrud town of Khyber tribal region. "I've now stopped interaction with my family which sent me here with high expectations. I've not sent a single penny in last nine months and they ask for paying off the debt they had borrowed for sending me here," he said. Afridi lives with six Pashto-speaking Afghan nationals in a tent in a forest in Calais, France. About 600 Pashtuns, most of them from Afghanistan, live under tarpaulins and tents in densely forested area of Calais along with about 2600 immigrants from other countries waiting for their chances to enter England, their dream world. …… (Times of India 22/9/15)

NGOs for deleting Brus from voters’ list (13)

AIZAWL, Sept 24 - Mizoram’s NGO Coordination Committee, comprising five major civil societies, today urged the Election Commission to take steps to ensure that those Brus who refused to return to the State from their camps in Tripura are disfranchised in Mizoram voters lists. A statement by the Committee said the people of Mizoram had repeatedly pleaded with the Brus, who were bona-fide residents of the State, to return and the government had also made a plethora of arrangements for their repatriation. However, the Brus were not willing to return to Mizoram and wished to remain in Tripura, the statement said and demanded that their names be deleted immediately from voters’ lists of Mizoram. The EC recently decided to conduct hearing in the six Bru relief camps in Tripura for special revision of electoral rolls. The NGO Coordination Committee consists of Young Mizo Association, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl or Mizo Women Association, Mizoram Upa Pawl or Elders Association, Mizo Zirlai Pawl or Mizo Students Federation and Mizo Students Union. – PTI (The Assam Tribune 25/9/15)

From Assam to Hassan in search of work (13)

Hassan: Assam may be famous for its tea gardens, but a good number of Assamese workers have found employment in the coffee estates of Chikkamagaluru and Kodagu. More than 5,000 people from Darang and neighbouring districts of Assam have come to work in plantations of Belur and Sakleshpur taluks. Many more work in estates spread over Chikkamagaluru and Kodagu districts. “We hardly find jobs in our hometown. If we get work for a week, we remain jobless for next few weeks,” said Habizur Rahman (25), who has been working in Hasurugudda Estate of IBC company near Arehalli in Belur taluk for the last four years. Both men and women are enrolled as contract workers in estates for a daily wage of Rs. 228. In Assam, women hardly get the opportunity to earn in fields, he said. The wave of migration started five years ago, when a manager of an estate in Belur taluk came in contact with planters in Kodagu, where workers from Assam had begun to arrive. “Those days we were struggling to get local people to work. We were looking for people who could work. The first batch of 25 people came from Assam five years ago. As they got work for the entire
year and wages were better than what they got in their homeland, they brought more people from their State," said Fazlur Rahman, manager with IBC estate. The manager pointed out that many planters have employed Assamese as they are hard workers, though they are not well-versed in the skill of maintaining coffee. These workers have brought their family and all of them make a trip to their homeland during elections. “Voting is significant as there is a serious issue of illegal migrant voters from Bangladesh," said Shwahidul Islam, who always keeps his voter's identity card in his pocket. However, the workers are unhappy with the poor facilities provided in the estates. Around two or three families are forced to settle in one house with plastic sheets to separate them. For over 80 families there is only one toilet, in one of the estates visited by The Hindu . “We repeatedly demand for proper facilities, but our cry does not reach the people concerned. If anyone falls sick, we neither get paid holiday nor medical expenses reimbursed,” said Habibur Rahman. The district administration has set up a tent school for children of migrant workers, but they find this of no use. “We need a proper school where our children can get education from teachers who know Hindi,” said Marina Khatun, one among the women workers in the estate. (The Hindu 27/9/15)

Arunachal CM convenes all-party meeting on Chakma-Hajong issue (13)
Itanagar: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Nabam Tuki today convened an all-party meet here to discuss the Chakma-Hajong refugee issue in the backdrop of the recent Supreme Court judgment with regard to grant of Indian citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs and their permanent settlement in the state. The state government, with advice and help from legal experts, would make preparations to file a review petition objecting to the permanent settlement of Chakma and Hajongs in the state and their exclusion from the provisions of the Inner Line Permit, a press release issued by the Chief Minister's office said. The state government would wait for a correspondence from the Union Home Ministry with regard to the Supreme Court judgment of September 17 and take necessary action as deemed fit in interest of the state and its people, the meeting resolved. The all-party meet unanimously authorised the state government to take legal and necessary steps with regard to the apex court judgment to safeguard the welfare and interest of the indigenous tribes of the state. The release said the state government and all political parties of the state are not against the grant of Indian citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs but objects to their permanent settlement in Arunachal Pradesh and their exclusion from the ILP provisions, the meeting observed. The meeting said this would be in contradiction to in-force Acts and Regulations like the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, the Scheduled District Act, 1874, the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation, 1880, the Assam Frontier Forest Regulation, 1891, the Chin Hills Regulations, 1896 and the Assam Frontier (Administration & Justice) Regulation, 1945 (1 of 1945). All the parties appealed to the people not to spread hatred and misconception or target any individual or community particularly through social media. (Zee News 28/9/15)

UNHCR plans for 1.4 million Mediterranean refugees in 2015-16 (13)
GENEVA: The UN refugee agency expects at least 1.4 million refugees to flee to Europe across the Mediterranean this year and next, according to a document seen by Reuters on Thursday, a sharp rise from initial estimates of 850,000. "UNHCR is planning for up to 700,000 people seeking safety and international protection in Europe in 2015," reads the document, a revision to the agency's existing appeal for funds. "... It is possible that there could be even greater numbers of arrivals in 2016, however, planning is based for the moment on similar figures to 2015." UNHCR launched the appeal on Sept. 8 with preliminary plans for 400,000 refugee arrivals in 2015 and 450,000 in 2016. But the 2015 figure was surpassed with days of its publication, and by Sept. 28, 520,957 had arrived. The revised appeal totals $128 million, a sharp increase from the initial appeal for $30.5 million, and UNHCR asked donors to allow their funds to be allocated flexibly because of the "very volatile operational context".The appeal is also broadened to include transit countries in the Middle East and North Africa, to enable refugees to get help from UNHCR at an earlier stage of their journey. Although the vast majority of recent arrivals have traveled from Turkey through Greece, Macedonia
and Serbia, possible alternative routes mapped out by UNHCR include the sea route from Turkey to Italy, from Greece through Albania to Montenegro or Italy, and from Montenegro by boat to Croatia. Most are fleeing the Syrian civil war, with many others seeking to escape conflict or poverty in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa or elsewhere. The revised appeal covers plans to scale up the emergency response to protect and give aid to the higher numbers of refugees, but a further revision may be published later in the year to reflect additional needs for European contingency planning, the document said. (Times of India 1/10/15)

***Burmeses refugees demand dues from govt (13)***

VISAKHAPATNAM: Members of the Burma AP Repatriates Association have demanded that they be given their dues as promised by the state and central governments ever since they came to India way back in 1962. Speaking to mediapersons here on Monday, the association members said that the state government had promised much but delivered little. They pointed out that post 1964, both the governments passed several GOs, which were yet to be implemented. The members said that 7,522 families had settled down in Visakhapatnam after fleeing Burma and till date they had not even been provided with proper housing facilities. Association president D Satyanarayana said, "On paper, the governments promised to provide us with more than 27,000 sq yd land in Pedagantyada, the value of which runs into crores of rupees. But only 50% of the land is with the refugees as the rest has been illegally occupied by those with political influence." President of the Pedagantyada Burma Colony, B Venugopala Goutam, said, "We have approached every official and public representative, but they do not seem to be moved by our plight." (Times of India 5/10/15)

***3 million more refugees could leave Syria, Turkey warns (13)***

BRUSSELS: Turkey has warned the European Union that 3 million more refugees could flee fighting in Syria as the EU struggles to manage its biggest migration emergency in decades. Around 2 million refugees from Syria are currently in Turkey, and tens of thousands of others have entered the EU via Greece this year, overwhelming coast guards and reception facilities. EU Council President Donald Tusk told lawmakers Tuesday that "according to Turkish estimates, another 3 million potential refugees may come from Aleppo and its neighborhood." "Today millions of potential refugees and migrants are dreaming about Europe," Tusk said at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. He warned that "the world around us does not intend to help Europe" and that some of the EU's neighbors "look with satisfaction at our troubles." Tusk also lashed out at countries for failing to fully respect EU asylum and border rules, naming Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Greece. "We have to respect commonly agreed rules," he said, adding that when countries say they intend to flout the laws "they undermine the essence of solidarity and our community." Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held talks with senior officials in Brussels on Monday, and the EU's executive Commission was due to unveil later Tuesday a memorandum detailing the way the bloc and Turkey plan to cooperate on migration. Erdogan has sought European backing for the creation of a safe haven and no-fly zone in northern Syria, saying that such moves are key to ending the refugee crisis. Meanwhile, Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann is heading to the eastern Aegean island of Lesbos with Greece's prime minister to view the impact of the refugee crisis and tour the facilities set up to handle the new arrivals. Faymann and Greece's Alexis Tsipras are due on Lesbos around mid-day Monday and are to tour the reception center set up to register and process refugees and migrants. About 400,000 people have arrived in Greece so far this year, most in small overcrowded boats from the nearby Turkish coast. The vast majority don't want to stay in the financially troubled country and head north through the Balkans to more prosperous EU states. (Times of India 6/10/15)

***73 Sri Lankan refugees return home (13)***

CHENNAI: Nine-year-old Arunraj and his younger sister Rakshana are excited about their journey on Thursday. For the first time in their lives, they would be travelling by an airplane and both want to have a window seat. The children, born to a Sri Lankan refugee couple in a special camp at Adiyankuthu in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, are among the 73 who left the special camps for Sri
Lanka with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Thursday, to start a new life on the island. “We fled Vavuniya in 1990 fearing for our lives. I was nine years old when we came to Mandapam by boat. We want to go back because all our relatives are there,” says the children’s mother S. Theresamma. Her husband returned to Lanka five months ago to see whether the situation in Mannar was conducive to them to resettle there. “He said jobs in Ceylon are a problem. But we are confident of finding some livelihood as I have learnt tailoring. We will send our children to school there.” For 26-year old M. Prakash of Mandapam camp in Rameswaram, who came to Arichamunai by boat in 2007, concern over his future prompted him to decide to return. “I have studied only till Class 10. Though there are schools here, my situation did not allow me to study and so I worked in a fishing company for a daily wage. I have saved some money but I can’t buy any land here as I will be a refugee as long as I live here,” the native of Jaffna points out. He intends to look for jobs in Malaysia or Singapore, once he returns to Sri Lanka. Though the conflict between the government and the rebel forces ended on the island in May 2009, about 1.02 lakh refugees from Sri Lanka still remain in special camps across Tamil Nadu. “We assist Sri Lankan refugees, who voluntarily decide to return to their home country. We help them in their documentation and facilitate and financially support their travel. On their arrival, UNHCR Sri Lanka provides some support to assist them in settling down,” UNHCR India’s spokesperson Shuchita Mehta said. Between 2002 and 2014, UNHCR India has assisted about 12,500 Lankan refugees in voluntary repatriation. Since January, a total of 315 refugees returned home. (The Hindu 9/10/15)

Europe sees record surge of child refugees (13)
KENT, England: The bags are packed, the goodbye hugs done. The Afghan, Eritrean and Sudanese boys are on the move again, but this time it's a happy occasion: After months of hardship traversing continents, the teenage refugees are finally on the way to English homes where they can settle down for a long dreamed-of life in Europe. The dozens of boys are unaccompanied child refugees who have come to the end of a long, risky journey by boat, foot, truck and train. Upon reaching the shores of Dover they were brought to a reception center in Kent, southern England, where they were given temporary shelter. As the teenagers leave for more permanent social housing or foster homes, they are seen off by another group of boys who are eagerly awaiting their turn. Europe's migrant crisis has seen a record surge of unaccompanied child asylum seekers fleeing civil war, conscription and poverty at home to countries including Britain and Sweden, which have scrambled to provide care for thousands of newly arrived minors. Most are boys aged between 14 to 18 hailing from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan. "I'm happy to leave today," said Sadiq, a shy 17-year-old Sudanese, who said he wanted to become an engineer. Like all the refugees interviewed at the center, his full name cannot be reported because they are minors under government care. Like the other youngsters, Sadiq had made it to Europe alone after leaving behind his family, and may never see his loved ones again. He lowered his head when asked about his homeland, where a years-long conflict has killed thousands and driven millions from their homes…. (Times of India 11/10/15)

Hundreds of refugees rescued by MSF in Mediterranean (13)
New York: The Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres) have rescued hundreds of refugees in the Mediterranean travelling to Europe in two different rescue operations. The MSF run boat, the Argos, first rescued 242 people and later 460 others who were travelling in two different wooden boats to Europe. Media Relations Manager for MSF Sandra Murillo told the ABC News that the rescuers were provided with basic necessary amenities including food blankets, clothes and medical care by the MSF. They have been taken to Italy to undergo Italian entry procedures, she added. Thousands of people have died by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea while travelling to Europe to escape the hostile situation in their countries. (New Kerala 12/10/15)

Communal violence leads to migration, ghettos: Panel (13)
Mumbai: This was emphasised by panelists who had gathered at the Phirozesha Mehta Bhavan of University of Mumbai during the launch of the book Communal Violence, Forced Migration and the
State: Gujarat since 2002 by Sanjeevani Lokhande on Wednesday. The panelists further said that the current government rather than addressing the issue was only encouraging it by not taking punitive action against trouble-makers who incite people into communal violence in the country. Ms Lokhande said during her doctoral research she found that human displacement was an insightful lens to view the inherent bias and disparity in society. “In a democracy, the migration of large swathes of population isn’t just an aberration. Apparently it has larger implications.” With reference to the Gujarat riots, she said that due to the way the tragedy was reported and viewed by the state, victims of the riots decided to migrate, which resulted in the rise of ghettos in Ahmedabad. “Such a phenomenon could have been avoided if the state played a proactive role in rehabilitating the riot-affected,” said Ms Lokhande who is also a professor in the civics and politics department of the MU. Senior journalist Kumar Ketkar, while speaking about the current scenario wherein communal violence was on the rise unabated, said, “We are sitting on the edge of a volcano. The migration crisis can erupt in violent outbreaks any moment in this country.” Dr Howard Spodeck, a professor at Temple University in United States, said, “The migrants often refuse to return to their homes, as they are afraid of their neighbours. Instead, they choose to live in ghettos and as a result, develop a very different world view.” (Asian Age 15/10/15)

Germany, Turkey hail progress in handling refugee crisis (13)

ISTANBUL: German chancellor Angela Merkel and Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Sunday hailed a better understanding between Ankara and the European Union in dealing with the refugee crisis, as thousands more migrants poured into Slovenia headed for western Europe. Merkel held talks in Istanbul with Davutoglu and was meeting president Recep Tayyip Erdogan on a critical one-day visit which came as Germany was shaken by a bloody knife attack on a pro-refugee politician. The European Union wants Turkey to do more to tighten its border security and help contain the historic influx of people from Syria, Iraq and other conflict zones seeking shelter in the 28-nation bloc. In return, Ankara wants greater recognition for its role in hosting over two million Syrian refugees, an increase in financial help and an acceleration of its long-stalled bid for EU membership. After the talks, Davutoglu praised a “better approach” from the European Union lamenting that “unfortunately Turkey was left alone by the international community in terms of burden sharing.” “We are very pleased there is a better approach now. The issue of sharing going forwards is very important,” said Davutoglu. Germany has been Europe’s top destination for refugees, most of whom travel through Turkey and the Balkans, and is expecting to register up to a million asylum requests this year. Davutoglu hailed Merkel for “not turning a blind eye” to the refugee crisis. “Many others said refugees should be sent back (from the EU). She displayed a humanitarian position,” he added. Merkel said that the fact Turkey had accomplished the immense task of looking after over two million Syrian refugees on relatively little funding had led to a “migration pressure” which resulted in the influx of migrants into Europe. “Turkey had little international help until now for the huge contribution it has made,” said Merkel. … (Times of India 18/10/15)

Refugee crisis: EU leaders to hold meeting to find solution (13)

Berlin: The European Union (EU) will hold an emergency summit of the leaders of the nations affected by the current refugee crisis to find a solution, to the plight of thousands of migrants stranded in the western Balkans in their desperate attempt to reach western Europe. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has convened the meeting for Sunday in Brussels in view of the “unfolding emergency” in the nations along the western Balkans route of the migrants, which required “much greater cooperation, more extensive consultation and immediate operational action,” a commission’s statement said yesterday. Besides German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Austrian counterpart Werner Faymann, the leaders of Greece, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Rumania and Bulgaria as well as non-EU nations Serbia and Macedonia have been invited to attend the meeting, the statement said. The situation of the refugees heading to western Europe through the Balkans route has been deteriorating since Hungary last Friday closed its border with Serbia and Croatia, leaving them a journey through Croatia and Slovenia as the only alternative to reach Austria and
Germany. Thousands of refugees have been stuck in Croatia and Slovenia in increasingly cold and rainy weather without proper shelter and short of food and water, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR and other aid organisations. Croatia had limited the number of people it has been taking from Serbia and diverted many of them to Slovenia. Until last week, Croatia has been transporting the refugees entering the country from Serbia to the Hungarian border and from there they were taken to the Austrian border. Overwhelmed by the influx of refugees, Slovenia set a limit of 2,500 refugees it can take from Croatia per day in order to be in a position to register them and to transport them to the Austrian border. The situation in an overcrowded Slovenian registration centre for refugees in Brezice escalated on Tuesday after some refugees set on fire their tents in protest against the conditions there, media reports said. Meanwhile, several thousand refugees are waiting on the Serbian side to enter Croatia while many more are on their way along the route from Greece to Macedonia and Serbia. Germany’s newly-appointed coordinator for refugees Peter Altmeier, who took the initiative to organise next Sunday's summit, said it was intended to reach an understanding on joint initiatives and sharing of responsibilities to restore order in the movement of migrants and to ensure that every nation involved treated them with human dignity. The refugee crisis can be tackled only through joint efforts and therefore "our goal is to reach a common understanding on joint initiatives and sharing of responsibilities. Every country must make its contribution instead of passing on responsibilities to another," Altmeier said. (Business Standard 22/10/15)

West Bengal has the highest No. of foreign prisoners (13)
KOLKATA: Almost half of the foreign prisoners in the country are lodged in different jails of Bengal. According to recent data released by the National Crime Records Bureau, nearly 47% of the foreign prisoners are lodged in Bengal jails and most of them are Bangladeshis and Rohingya Muslims. The Rohingya Muslims were arrested while trying to cross over to India through Bangladesh. Sources said since there’s no repatriation treaty with Bangladesh, several prisoners from the neighbouring country are still languishing in jails even after their terms are over. According the NCRB data, of the 6000-plus foreign prisoners lodged in different jails in the country, 2935 are in West Bengal. Among them, 1113 are convicts and the rest are undertrials. "There are several foreign prisoners, including those from Bangladesh and Myanmar (read Rohingyas)," said Madhurima Dhanuka, consultant with Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), an NGO which works in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and fights for the release of the Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. Take the case of Yousuf, a resident of Panoor gram panchayat in Kerala's Kannur district. He was arrested from Bongaon on January 18, 2012 while trying to cross the border. He was sentenced to prison for 650 days. Yousuf was convicted on the ground that he, being a Pakistani national, intruded on India. He has been languishing at Dum Dum Central Jail despite a release order in November 2013. Reason: Pakistan refused to recognize him as its own citizen. If this is the situation with an Indian national, think about the foreign nationals. Nearly 100 Rohingya Muslims lodged in various prisons across Bengal are staring at an uncertain future as their plea to get refugee status is yet to be heard by the Indian authorities. The Rohingyas, originally residents of Myanmar, were arrested when they were trying to cross over to India through Bangladesh. According to sources, there are 320 prisoners in Bengal jails who have completed their terms. Most of them are Bangladeshis, but two are from Nigeria, two from Myanmar, one from Ukraine and one from Lesotho. (Times of India 25/10/15)

At least 120,000 displaced in Syria in past month: UN (13)
At least 120,000 people have been displaced in Syria this month because of fighting, according to UN humanitarian officials. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said the people fled their homes in the Aleppo, Hama and Idlib governorates between October 5 and October 22. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday that most remain in the three governorates but some have fled to camps near the Turkish border. He said most people in Aleppo moved toward villages and towns in the countryside west of the city. Dujarric said the displaced Syrians need tents, basic household items, food, water and sanitation services. He said the UN's humanitarian partners are
scaling up their response, and distribution of cooked and ready-to-eat food has started to those displaced in the three governorates but needs to be stepped up. The UN report largely matches up with a similar report yesterday by the Norwegian Refugee Council, which estimated that 100,000 Syrians have been displaced in the last three weeks by the recent surge in fighting following the start of an airstrike campaign by the Russian military. The council said that this new exodus is pressuring already overcrowded and overstretched camps in the country. In a statement, the group said that the new wave of displacement is mostly from the province of Aleppo, where Syrian government and allied troops, emboldened by Russian airstrikes, began a ground offensive on October 16. The militant Islamic State group has also seized new territories in Aleppo, pushing out rival rebels and fighting with government troops. Others were displaced by the airstrikes and fighting in Hama and Homs. "This is a cry for help," said Karl Schembri, the Refugee Council's media adviser. He said the newly displaced are heading toward already crowded facilities along the border with Turkey. "There are already people moving day-to-day to find places" to lay their tents, while rainy season has begun, he said. Last week, a UN official in Geneva said that around 35,000 people are reported to have been displaced from just two villages on the southwestern outskirts of Aleppo city. The civil war, in its fifth year, has killed more than 250,000 people and displaced half of Syria's prewar population of 23 million. (DNA 27/10/15)

11 dead as refugee boats sink in Aegean (13)
Athens: Four boats carrying refugees from Turkey to Greece sank in the past few hours, leaving at least 11 people dead and more than 40 others missing, Greek authorities said on Thursday. Greece's Coast Guard retrieved 11 bodies, including eight children, and a rescue operation was underway in the Aegean Sea to search for the missing, the authorities said, Xinhua news agency reported. The sinkings occurred from Wednesday to early Thursday off the Greek islands of Lesvos, Samos and Agathonissi. From Tuesday to Thursday, the Greek Coast Guard rescued almost 1,000 people attempting to cross over from the Turkish shores in wooden vessels. Adverse weather conditions did not curb the influx of refugees from war-torn Syria. Latest data from the Greek shipping ministry, the UN High Commission for Refugees and the International Office for Migration show that since January 2015, about 500,000 refugees and migrants have reached Greece to seek a better and secure life in central and northern European countries. More than 3,000 people have died this year while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Greek Shipping Minister Theodoros Dritsas reiterated in a statement Athens' plea to the European Union and the neighbouring countries to step up coordination to avoid such tragedies at sea. (Business Standard 29/10/15)

Election brings hope, fear for Myanmar refugees stuck in limbo (13)
MaeSot, Thailand: For refugees from Myanmar living in camps just across the border in Thailand, a landmark election in their homeland triggers mixed emotions - hope that a hated government will be defeated, and fear of the uncertain future such an upheaval might bring. Ko Chit, 45, who lives in Mae La refugee camp, the largest of the nine camps that are home to around 110,000 people, is typical of those who spoke to Reuters. He wants opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) to win the Nov. 8 poll, the country's first free and fair election in a generation, but worries that could result in being sent back to Myanmar when it remains unsafe. "The situation is not yet stable and we cannot go back because of fighting and persecution," Ko Chit said. "If there is no non-governmental organisation to support us there, it would be better to stay in the camp." For many who spoke to Reuters, the looming fear is that an NLD win will prompt Thailand to declare it is now safe for them to go back and shutter the camps. Some residents have been living in the camps for 30 years. Nearly 80 percent are ethnic Karen from eastern Myanmar who fled armed conflict and often persecution at the hands of the Myanmar army during decades of military rule. (Zee News 3/11/15)

US has the largest number of refugees settled (13)
NEW YORK: With European countries struggling to come to terms with refugees from middle-eastern countries like Syria and accepting them, the US has come out as the country which has settled the largest number of refugees. In the fiscal year 2015, the nearly 70,000 refugees arrived to the US and have settled, said the director of Refugee Admissions Office of the US Department of State's Bureau
of Population, Refugees and Migration Lawrence Barlett on Tuesday. This is more than all other countries combined, he said. Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres criticized the European Union for being slow in accepting refugees on Tuesday. "The number of arrivals currently stands at between 6,000 and 8,000 a day on Greek islands alone. The European Union has the capacity to manage this crisis, but for that to happen, a united and comprehensive regional approach is essential," he said. "The decision to relocate 160,000 within the EU was a step in the right direction, but the implementation has been far too slow," he added. Explaining the difference between refugee programs in the US and other countries like Turkey, Barlett said that refugee had the choice of becoming permanent residents or even citizens with voting rights. "Turkey would be a good example, Jordan, great example - where you've got a couple million, I think, refugees now in Turkey. So they're a hosting country, but they have not agreed to resettle refugees. They've not agreed that Syrians can become Turkish citizens or agreed that they can have full access to services of that government," he said. "So clearly, the international community owes Turkey a lot in terms of gratitude for what they are doing on a temporary basis for people, but that is not a permanent solution for a refugee. Many countries simply do not have the infrastructure to absorb large numbers of people; we know that," he added. .... (Times of India 4/11/15)

M.K. Narayanan for ‘across the border’ citizenship for Tamil refugees (13)

Chennai: Advocating ‘across the border’ citizenship for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees presently living in India, the former National Security Adviser, M.K. Narayanan, on Wednesday said, “it was not easy, but it should be possible.” Speaking at a colloquium ‘The Future of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in India’ organised by The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, he endorsed the argument that providing financial support to refugees who intend to return should help them. “By and large the Government of India can meet its obligations on returning the refugees back to their homeland with a certain amount of backup and support,” he said. “What they want is, give us a little more support, in helping those who want to go back to do so. I think this is easy,” the former NSA said. Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation treasurer S.C. Chandrasahasan also emphasised the need to facilitate the return of these refugees who had spent over 30 years in India. Unlike other countries in the West, Afro-Asian nations, especially India, did not make the refugees wait in a queue and instead, accepted them as they came. The opinion of the vast majority of refugees living in India was to go back home and safeguard their lands, he said. The Chairman of Kasturi and Sons Limited, N. Ram, said the conditions in the Island had improved “significantly, if not radically” and it was the best time for the safe return of Tamil refugees to their homeland. With a new government in the island, there was a conducive atmosphere for those who were willing to return, he added. R.K. Radhakrishnan, Senior Deputy Editor, Frontline, said the conditions in the refugee camps in Tamil Nadu were bad and the accommodation provided to them had not been repaired in several years. He made a presentation on the future of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India. (The Hindu 6/11/15)

4 Myanmar refugees among 6 held in Hyderabad (13)

HYDERABAD: Police have arrested six persons, including four refugees from Myanmar, for illegally obtaining Indian passports and other identity cards (ID) cards under false names. They also arrested a home guard posted at RTA office, Khararabad, for helping the refugees in securing the Indian passport illegally. In a joint operation conducted by the Bahadurpura police along with Special Branch cops at Kishanbagh and MM Pahadi in Rajendranagar, four Rohingyas from Myanmar, Md Rafaeq, 24, Md Aziz, 35, of Kishanbagh, Abdul Kareem, 35, and Md Saleem, 22, of MM Pahadi have been arrested. Cops seized two Indian passports containing photographs of Md Rafaeq and Md Aziz with false names and local addresses. Police also seized Indian passport applications of Kareem and Saleem with fake details of their identity. Cops also seized four voter ID and Aadhaar cards containing their photographs, but fake particulars. On interrogation, the four refugees, who have United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-issued identify cards, confessed that they wanted to go to North American, Middle East or West European countries for employment and decided to obtain Indian passports for that purpose. The four refugees have told police that home guard Nazir Khan, 40,
of Kishanbagh, currently posted at RTA office in Khairatabad, had helped them to contact Md Ghouse, 32, of Hussainialam, to obtain voter ID cards with fake particulars. With the help of Ghouse, the four refugees obtained voter ID cards and then Aadhaar cards with fake particulars and then opened bank accounts. Using all the supporting documents with fake particulars, the refugees applied for Indian passports. Rafeeq and Aziz managed to obtain Indian passports, but during the antecedent verification Kareem and Saleem's passport applications were rejected. After a detailed scrutiny of the applications, the Special Branch cops along with Bahadurpura police nabbed all the four on Sunday. Based on their confession, police also arrested Ghouse and Nazir. A case was registered against the accused by the Bahadurpura police under sections, 370, 466, 468, 474, 473, 474 r/w 109 of the IPC, sections 12(1)(b)(d) of the Indian Passport Act 1967, section 14(a)(b)(c) of the Foreigners Act 1946, sections 10 & 24 of the Immigration Act, 1983, section 3 of the Passport Re-entry Act, 1920. The arrested persons would be produced in court and remanded in judicial custody on Monday. (Times of India 9/11/15)

**Cause of PoK refugees high on Modi govt's agenda: Jitendra (13)**

Jammu, Nov 12: Union minister Jitendra Singh today met a delegation of PoK refugees here and said that the redressal of their grievances is "very high" on Modi Government's agenda. Singh, a Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), also urged the Jammu and Kashmir government to utilize Rs 80,000 Crore package "discreetly" and maintain an account of it. "Cause of PoK refugees on Modi's agenda" "We hope that, as desired by the Prime Minister, the state government will utilize the package discreetly and maintain an account of it," Singh told reporters here today. He assured the PoK refugees that their cause is "very high" on the agenda of the Modi government and the Prime Minister is very clear about providing whatever help and assistance required for a fair redressal of their grievances. A delegation of PoK refugees led by Jammu Kashmir Sharnarthi Action Committee President, Gurdev Singh and Advocate Amrik Singh today met Singh and conveyed their gratitude to Narendra Modi for having announced the biggest ever financial package for J&K and also having earmarked fund for PoJK refugees. They also lauded the efforts of Singh and said this package was possible because of his untiring efforts to project their cause in the true perspective. "If there is need for more money, the (state government) should formulate and send the report to Centre so that Centre also considers it," he said. "It has been stated by the Prime Minister that there is no dearth of money," he said. The delegation has urged that the state government that his package should be distributed immediately, he said. The delegation has thanked the Prime Minister for the package for PoK refugees that such a decision has been taken after long time, he added. In a meeting that lasted for over 45 minutes, the members of delegation discussed the various modalities of the package with Jitendra Singh and offered their suggestions about the mode of utilization of the funds. A three-page memorandum presented to Jitendra Singh stated that all the Central and state governments in the past had left the issue of refugees unresolved, but Prime Minister Modi's announcement during his visit to the state on November 7 has kindled a ray of hope for all the displaced persons. (OneIndia 12/11/15)

**Paris attacks provoke fresh migrant fears in Europe (13)**

Berlin: The news that one of the assailants in the Paris attacks may have crossed into Europe with refugees fleeing Syria is raising the fierce debate over Europe's immigration policy to a new pitch. Chancellor Angela Merkel, already under pressure from political foes and allies, seemed yesterday to hold onto her stance of placing no limits on the number of people Germany is willing to give refuge to a stance that is increasingly being called into question. In a somber statement hours after the attacks, she urged her countrymen to uphold European values of humanity and compassion in the face of terror. "We believe," she said, "in the right of every person to seek happiness and to enjoy it, in the respect for others and in tolerance." But her optimism, reflected in Merkel's signature phrase that "we will manage it," is being met with growing skepticism in Germany and abroad, and not just by those on the far right who have long opposed immigration. Even before Friday's attacks in Paris, Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble, a close Merkel ally, likened the more than 750,000 migrants who have
come to Germany this year to an avalanche. His words reflect fears not just about how long the country of 80 million can keep up its open-door policy, but also about a possible violent backlash. The country has already seen a surge in attacks against migrants and refugee shelters. So far this year authorities have recorded 689 such incidents more than three times the number for all of 2014. The violence has been accompanied by a sharp shift in tone. Just a few months ago, newspapers were full of reports about refugees being warmly received at German train stations, according to Joachim Trebbe, a communications researcher at Berlin's Free University. Now reports about migrants are automatically linked to the word "crisis" as authorities struggle to cope with tens of thousands of arrivals each month. In the meanwhile, politicians, journalists and refugee activists in Germany have been deluged with hate mail. Merkel and members of her government have been branded "race traitors," and death threats in the form of gallows bearing her name were paraded during anti-immigrant demonstrations. (Zee News 15/11/15)

Kashmiri migrants to get government jobs, transit accommodation (13)

New Delhi, Nov 18 : The cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also approved a proposal to provide relief to the migrants of the hilly areas of Jammu division at par with the relief being provided to the Kashmiri migrants -- worth Rs.13.45 crore -- annually. "Terrorist violence, militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in its early phases, had led to large scale forced migration of the Kashmiri Pandit community along with some Sikh and Muslim families from the Kashmir Valley," the statement said. At present, there are about 62,000 registered migrant Kashmiri families residing in Jammu, Delhi and neighbouring areas as well as other parts of the country, it said. The new proposal provides for additional 3,000 state government jobs to the Kashmiri migrants with financial assistance from the central government and construction of transit accommodations in the Kashmir Valley for the Kashmiri migrants to whom state government jobs are given. The statement said the central government would carry the financial burden for the whole programme. In another decision, the cabinet approved a proposal for providing relief to the migrants of the hilly areas of Jammu division at par with the relief being provided to the Kashmiri migrants involving a total estimated expenditure of Rs.13.45 crore per annum. "Besides the families who migrated from the valley, many families migrated from different hilly areas of Jammu division to safer places of nearby towns due to security reasons. At present, there are about 1,054 registered Jammu migrant families," it said. At present, the Jammu and Kashmir government was providing cash relief of Rs.400 per head per month (maximum Rs.1,600 per family per month), cash assistance of Rs.300 per cattle per month for purchase of fodder, plus dry ration (9 kg atta, 2 kg rice per person per month and 10 liter kerosene per family per month) to the migrants of the hilly areas of Jammu division. The new proposal would enhance the relief being provided to the migrants of the hilly areas of Jammu division at par with the Kashmiri migrants i.e. a cash relief of Rs.2,500 per head per month (maximum Rs.10,000 per family per month) plus relief for ration and fodder. The expenditure incurred by the state government in this regard would now be reimbursed by the central government. Earlier in 2008, a package of Rs.1,618.40 crore was announced to facilitate the return of the migrants to the Kashmir Valley. Under this package, 3,000 state government jobs were to be provided to the Kashmiri migrant with central funding, of whom 1,963 jobs have already been provided and process for remaining is underway. A total of 469 transit accommodations have been constructed in the Kashmir valley which have been allotted to the newly appointed migrant employees on sharing basis. (New Kerala 18/11/15)

100,000 Bhutan refugees move to West from Nepal: UN (13)

KATHMANDU: Some 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled in Western countries from camps in Nepal where they have been living for two decades after being forced out of their homeland, the UN said on Thursday. The refugees have been offered new lives in the United States and other nations after the failure of years of negotiations to secure their return to Bhutan, which says they are illegal immigrants. Less than 18,000 refugees remain in the camps, according to a joint statement from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration. All are ethnic Nepalese who fled across the border in the early 1990s, claiming persecution after Bhutan
made national dress compulsory and banned the Nepalese language. "This is one of the largest and most successful programmes of its kind and the resettlement of nearly nine out of 10 Bhutanese refugees is an extraordinary achievement," said Craig Sanders, the UNHCR's representative in Nepal. The programme began in 2007 following the failure of years of high-level negotiations to secure their return to Bhutan. This is amazing that 100000 Bhutanese Refugees have restarted their life afresh. Refugee Devi Maya Thapa Thapa will head to the US with her family next month, becoming the 100,000th Bhutanese to be resettled. "I am leaving the refugee camp forever after spending more than two decades in Nepal. I am happy that our family will be together in our new country and that my children will have a better future," the 55-year-old said in the statement. (Times of India 20/11/15)

**Capital's Migrant Slum Population to Get a Dose of Family Planning (13)**

NEW DELHI: Focusing on the migrant population in 212 slums in Delhi who are not part of family planning schemes, health workers will stage short plays, and magic and puppet shows to make them aware of and adopt population control measures through 220 family planning camps and 440 awareness programmes. The campaign will sensitise migrant slum dwellers about the population debate and provide them with family planning amenities like contraceptives pills and condoms, as well as the option of surgery. The initiative will be a joint one by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Delhi government and the song and drama division of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. According to officials in National Population Stabilisation Fund under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare’s department of population control, the urban migrant slum population is growing as a direct offshoot of urban development. The 2001 Census stated that the population of Delhi increased by 285,000 (39.82 per cent) due to migrants. "Migrant populations are either deprived of facilities for family planning being provided in their home states or cannot avail the facilities due to the nature of their jobs," said Mehtab Alam, an official in the department. The growth in migrant population has resulted in an increasing demand for transport, creating excessive pressure on the city’s infrastructure. The jury is also out on whether the migrant population has led to an increase in crime in the national capital. While she was chief minister, Sheila Dikshit had said that rising crime in Delhi was due to the migrant population. She later retracted the statement amid a controversy over it. Slums are home to 17.85 lakh people in Delhi, which has a population of 1.6 crore. All over India, 17 per cent of the population lives in conditions wherein they do not have the opportunity to avail better health facilities, potable water, basic amenities and family planning. The majority of migrants in Delhi’s slums are from Uttar Pradesh, followed by those from Bihar and Rajasthan. More than 90 per cent of them are Scheduled Castes. While Hindus are a majority in slums in west, south and central Delhi, half of the residents in east and north Delhi are Muslims. (The Sunday Standard 22/11/15)

**Arunachal to file petition on refugees (13)**

ITANAGAR: The Arunachal Pradesh government will file a curative petition in the Supreme Court in respect to permanent settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in the state. An all-party meeting held here on Wednesday under the chairmanship of chief minister Nabam Tuki unanimously endorsed the state government's decision to file the curative petition, an official communique said. The participants of the meeting raised serious concern over the 'one sided' ruling of the apex court on September 17, directing the state government to grant permanent citizenship to Chakma-Hajong refugees and subsequently rejecting the review petition for hearing in open court. The meeting also endorsed that the state government take up with the Union ministry of home affairs for filing a separate curative petition as it was respondent number one in the judgement. The meeting was attended by representatives of BJP, Peoples’ Party of Arunachal (PPA), NCP and Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), the communique added. Tuki had earlier said the state government was not against the granting of citizenship to the Chakma-Hajong refugees but was opposed to their permanent residence in Arunachal Pradesh and the exemption of inner line permit. (Times of India 26/11/15)

**Arunachal students rap rights centre (13)**
Itanagar, Nov. 28: The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) has slammed the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) for saying that the indigenous population of the state faces a possible threat from non-tribal migrants from other parts of the country and not from the Chakma and Hajong refugees settled in Arunachal Pradesh. On November 26, the centre had issued a release quoting its director Suhas Chakma, who said, "If the population growth was to pose a threat to indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh, Chakma/Hajong surely do not pose a threat to the local indigenous people of Arunachal. It is the non-Chakma/Hajong general population, which has been increasing rapidly. A total of 47,471 Chakmas and Hajongs cannot pose a threat to 13,83,727 people of the state as per 2011 census." The issue grabbed headlines in the state recently after a Supreme Court order on September 18 directed the state and Union governments to grant citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees, who had been rehabilitated by the Centre in Arunachal Pradesh from 1964 to 1969 after they fled their homes in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts. The court has already turned down two review petitions filed separately by the state government and the AAPSU, who will now file curative petitions against the order. The students' union has opposed the permanent settlement of the Chakma-Hajong population in the state for 40 years. It even staged a dharna against the Supreme Court order last month. In a release issued today by the students' union "strongly" warned the Asian Centre for Human Rights "not to try and create a rift between the people of Arunachal Pradesh and the non-tribals (sic)". The ACHR had said the population of Adivasis, Assamese, Nepalese, Muslims, Marwaris, Biharis in the state had increased by 955 per cent in 47 years while the Chakma-Hajong population had increased by 218 per cent according to the 2011 census. AAPSU has reacted by stating that the centre "doesn't need to tell us who is a threat and who is not". It said "no matter what the analysis and census say but we know the fact that the population of Chakmas and Hajongs today is more than a lakh". The students' union also claimed that the exact figures are difficult to ascertain as most Chakmas and Hajongs have moved out of their designated camps and encroached thousands of hectares of forest land. It also alleged that the Chakmas and Hajongs "have made a direct claim over our land". Arunachal Pradesh falls under the purview of Article 371 (H) and is protected by Eastern Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873, whereby non-tribal and non-Arunachal Indian citizens are required to acquire an inner-line permit to visit the state. While both AAPSU and the state government have said they are not opposed to granting citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajongs, they are opposing the court order exempting them from acquiring inner-line permits. AAPSU also alleged that the ACHR director's statements are "another ploy to destroy the peaceful atmosphere of Arunachal Pradesh". When contacted, Suhas Chakma said, "There is no doubt that growth of the Chakmas or any other population can threaten indigenous people not only in Arunachal Pradesh but everywhere else in the world." (The Telegraph 29/11/15)

Drive to free land occupied by migrants (13)
Guwahati, Dec. 3: Three indigenous people’s organisations in Assam will launch a campaign on Saturday against the state government’s alleged inaction to free land "encroached" upon by illegal migrants from Bangladesh. The message is - if illegal migrants from Bangladesh have been a vote bank for politicians in Assam, the indigenous people are strong enough to put pressure on politicians to drive the migrants out and free the lands illegally occupied by them in the state. Leaders of three organisations, Prabrajan Virodhi Mancha, Sangrami Satirtha Sanmilan and Dakshin Paschim Goal Xantha, said here today that the campaign would begin in Sipajhar Assembly constituency in Darrang district and would be extended to all the 126 constituencies. "The campaign will have three parts - a bike rally, a signature campaign and a rally at Mangaldoi, the district headquarters. We will collect 50,000 to one lakh signatures of indigenous people in the state and submit a memorandum to President Pranab Mukherjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Rajnath Singh through the Darrang deputy commissioner," said Upamanyu Hazarika, a senior advocate of the Supreme Court and a member of Prabrajan Virodhi Mancha. "We are launching the campaign in Sipajhar constituency as the indigenous people there have been directly affected due to encroachment of government land by Bangladeshi migrants. According to information accessed
through an RTI application in 2013, 77,420 bighas of land are illegally occupied in the district. A large chunk of the land is used for grazing and to pitch tents for displaced people, particularly during floods. There can be no construction there," Hazarika said. Hazarika was appointed a commissioner by the Supreme Court during hearing of petitions, seeking the apex court's intervention in solving the state's long-standing problem of illegal migration from neighbouring Bangladesh. After an on-the-spot assessment of the India-Bangladesh border, challenges in fencing and illegal migration from across the border, Hazarika had informed the apex court that the illegal migrants pose as flood and erosion victims from other districts to establish that they are local people and thus occupy new land. This, Hazarika said, is done with the aid and assistance of "complicit and corrupt" administration. He recommended restriction on transfer of land - whether by sale, purchase or gift - to those failing to prove their Indian citizenship till 1951. "The politicians have always used Bangladeshi migrants as vote banks to win elections. The indigenous people must now prove that we are a strong political force that can put pressure on our politicians to act and take measures to safeguard the indigenous people," Hazarika said. "We had filed cases in 2012 against illegal occupation of land in Darrang but no significant action has been taken," Tilak Chandra Choudhury of Sangrami Satirtha Sammilan said. (The Telegraph 4/12/15)

No tomorrow for this six-year old Rohingya refugee girl (13)

Jammu: Six-year-old Tasleema is nobody's `laadli beti` (beloved daughter). She has no idea of the horrors her parents have been through. Worse still, she has no future as she belongs to one of the nearly 650 families of Rohingya Muslim refugees from Myanmar living in this Jammu and Kashmir winter capital since 2008. Molvi Yunus, 39, is a Rohingya Muslim refugee living with his family in Jammu's Narwal area where a stinking slum sans any civic facilities has come up. The `jhuggies` (structures made of bamboo sticks wrapped on the sides and the top by a polythene cover) are what these refugee families call their homes. There is no drinking water, no electricity, no toilets and no healthcare facilities for them and yet the refugees thank God because they believe their lives are `safe`."I crossed into Bangladesh from Burma (Myanmar) when persecution of Muslims became unbearable. From Calcutta I shifted with my family to Delhi where I begged for food to keep myself and my family alive," Yunus told IANS as he narrated his story. "It was in Delhi that I met a Kashmiri who told me J&K was a state in India where Muslims lived in majority. I came here in 2008. Buddhists and Muslims fought together for Burma's independence. Just two years after 1948, one of our senior community leaders, Abdul Razak was murdered, under a conspiracy. "Thereafter, the process of Muslim persecution started in Burma. In 1972 our religious rights were usurped. No Muslim could build a new mosque nor could an old mosque be repaired." "Taxes were imposed on Muslims. For burying a Muslim we had to pay a huge tax to the government. Muslims had to give one-fourth of their agricultural produce to the government without any compensation," Yunus claimed. "My relatives who ran out of Burma to India after 2012 told me that a group of Muslim preachers had come to our native Moungdow district in 2012. On their way back from Moungdow where they had held religious congregations, all the nine preachers were kidnapped and brutally murdered", Yunus said. When voices were raised against Muslim persecution, the government authorities, he alleged, gave weapons and army uniforms to members of the other community who went on a rampage to kill Muslim men, women and children. Ali Ahmed, 66, is another Rohingya refugee living in Narwal. He says after settling as refugees in Jammu, the community has no future except that their lives are safe. "Yes, we will not be killed here, but we can always die of hunger. We cannot get government employment. Our children were not admitted in any government school till two years back. Now, we are allowed to send our children to a government school", Ali Ahmed said. The youths of the community like Usman Gani, 22, Mehmood-ul-Haq, 25, and others work as scrap gatherers, starting their day before sunrise. "We collect scrap and sell it to scrap dealers in the city. We also do jobs like laying underground cables for the telecommunication companies or laying of railway tracks. But that is not earning a living. We are just surviving", said Usman Gani. Yunus said he has called on almost every minister and senior bureaucrat in the previous and the present government to narrate the problems of his community. "They say `kareingay` (Will do), but nobody does anything for us," he
said. As the elders of her refugee community narrated their heart-rending stories to IANS, Tasleema looked on with hope. A faint, half-smile on her face shows she thinks somebody has come to address her problems and assure her a better future. The girl has no idea that hers is going to be another ‘human interest’ story for the readers. Nobody can assure her a better tomorrow, for all members of this refugee community are living ‘illegally’ in Jammu and Kashmir. (Zee News 5/12/15)

**Minority refugees from Pak, Bangladesh can stay without valid documents (13)**

New Delhi: Refugees of minority communities from Pakistan and Bangladesh, who have entered India on or before December 31, 2014, can stay in the country on humanitarian grounds, even without valid travel documents, Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday. In response to a written question, Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju said the government vide its notification dated September 7, 2015, has granted exemption to persons belonging to minority communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, who entered into India on or before December 31, 2014, from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the orders made there under in respect of their stay in India without valid documents, including passport or other travel document; or with valid documents including passport or other travel document and the validity of any such documents has expired. “The immigrants from Bangladesh can obtain Indian citizenship under the provisions of Citizenship Act, 1955 and the rules made there under. Persons residing in Indian enclaves on Bangladesh side of the border are already Indian citizens. “However, 14,864 persons residing in erstwhile Bangladeshi enclaves on Indian side of the border have been granted Indian citizenship with effect from August 1, 2015, the date of transfer of enclaves, as per the provisions of section 7 of Citizenship Act, 1955,” he said. (The Hindu 9/12/15)

**UN urges Jordan to let 12,000 stranded Syrian refugees enter (13)**

GENEVA/AMMAN: The United Nations urged Jordan on Tuesday to allow in 12,000 Syrian refugees stranded at the border in deteriorating humanitarian conditions and offered to help reinforce security at registration points. The Syrians are fleeing escalating air strikes on their battered homeland as well as punishments imposed on civilians by Islamic State militants in the north, including forced marriages, beheadings and floggings, it said. The number of refugees at Syria's remote northeastern border with Jordan, where many are gathering near an earthen wall or berm, has jumped to 12,000 from 4,000 in recent weeks, the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. Human Rights Watch said Jordan was putting many lives at risk by blocking 12,000 refugees, most of whom it said were women and children. "Jordan should stop stranding people in remote border areas for months on end and swiftly screen them in the country's well-established transit centres," Nadim Houry, deputy Middle East and North Africa director of HRW, said in the statement. Aid workers and two Jordanian relief officials attributed the sudden rise in refugees at the border to Russian bombing of IS-controlled areas in eastern Homs, such as Palmyra, as well as in Raqqa province and city. "It includes elderly people, it includes people who are sick and wounded, it includes children, women and others who are vulnerable and really need help," UNHCR spokeswoman Melissa Fleming told a briefing. "We're concerned that women have had to give birth at the berm in very unsanitary and unhygienic conditions," she said. Respiratory tract infections, gastroenteritis and skin diseases such as scabies have been reported. There are signs of acute malnutrition among children and outbreaks of diarrhoea. The UNHCR is appealing to Jordan to allow in the most vulnerable cases, Fleming said. Diplomats say refugee numbers in Jordan have fallen sharply in the last 18 months as tens of thousands have returned to Syria or emigrated while only a trickle are now allowed in. (Times of India 9/12/15)

**Christian slums in Pakistan targeted (13)**

Islamabad : Human rights activists slammed Islamabad authorities on Thursday after court documents showed the Pakistani capital’s development body had cracked down on illegal slums because it feared their growing Christian population would threaten the city’s Muslim majority. In 2014 the capital development authority declared a war against illegal slums in leafy, affluent Islamabad,
saying the areas — largely populated by Christians and Afghan refugees — are illegal and havens for militants. The drive rendered hundreds homeless and stirred anger with demonstrations held to try to stop the bulldozers. The left-wing Awami Workers Party (AWP) launched a Supreme Court bid against the drive, with the court ordering written justification from the CDA for its actions. In the reply submitted this week - which has also been criticised for its poor English - the CDA states: “It seems this pace of occupation of land by Christian community may increase... Removal of katchi abadies is very urgent to provide better environment to the citizen of Islamabad and to protect the beauty of Islam”. The report sparked a swift backlash, with rights activists holding a rally in the capital against what they call the “discriminatory” stance. Ammar Rashid of the AWP told AFP the move was “old-fashioned bigotry against minorities and working classes”. “The administrative body has no right to be making decisions about the religious demography of Islamabad,” he said. (Asian Age 11/12/15)

Plight of persecuted Myanmar Muslims (13)
GUWAHATI, Dec 13 - Two violence-hit teenage girls of the Rohingya Muslim community of Myanmar, who were arrested earlier this year for illegally entering India and later sent to an observation home in Guwahati, had a heart-rending story of human tragedy to tell. After undergoing a series of counselling sessions, the minor girls from Myanmar finally submitted before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), Assam (Guwahati), that it was after their respective parents were killed in front of their eyes during the violence in Myanmar this year that they decided to flee the neighbouring country fearing for their lives. “The girls told the Court that they had no other choice after their families were killed during the ethnic clashes in Myanmar. They somehow managed to escape and a few days later sneaked in to the Indian side through Tripura,” said sources closely monitoring the developments of the Rohingya refugees in India. “Our parents were killed and we would have been killed as well had we not fled the country. India seemed to be the only safe choice,” the girls, who are cousins, told the JJB on Friday. The case is now in the argument stage, sources told The Assam Tribune. One of the girls even deposed before the Board that apart from killing her parents mercilessly, the miscreants also killed her brother and there was nobody left in their family. Classified by many as the most persecuted community in Myanmar, thousands of Rohingya Muslims have fled their country fearing for their lives and sought refuge in different countries, including India. Sources at Dispur informed that at present there 28 Myanmar nationals lodged in the detention camps in the State. The episode involving the girls has witnessed twists and turns from day one, when they were detained from the Guwahati Railway Station by the Government Railway Police (under Foreigners’ Act and Passport Act) in June this year when they were about to board a train to Jammu and Kashmir. Although a claim for guardianship was put forward by a person from Jammu and Kashmir, the Board rejected the plea as the person in question could not produce any valid or admissible documents. The Rohingya cousins were kept under the supervision at an observation home and nobody was allowed to meet them without prior permission from the Board, keeping their safety in mind. Sources at Dispur told this reporter that if need be the matter would be taken up with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other agencies concerned. The minor girls probably tried to go to Jammu and Kashmir as many Rohingya families are already there, sources further said. (The Assam Tribune 13/12/15)

12 Sri Lankan refugees return home (13)
TRICHY: Twelve Sri Lankan refugees from five camps across the state returned to their home country on Tuesday morning. They left on a Sri Lankan Air lines flight to Colombo from the Trichy International Airport with the assistance of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. At least 150 people who fled their homes during the civil war in Sri Lanka and took asylum in the state have returned so far, as things begin to return to normalcy in island nation. According to police, refugees have been leaving in the recent months as Sri Lanka has been witnessing a positive change after the new government took over. The refugees who left on Tuesday had been lodged in camps in Erode, Dharmapuri, Cuddalore, Namakkal and Salem. (Times of India 16/12/15)
PoK Refugees Hail PM for Sanctioning Rs 2000 Crore Package (13)

JAMMU: Hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sanctioning Rs 2,000 crore package for people displaced in 1947, refugees of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) today said the package amount should not be seen as the final figures as a total of Rs 9,200 crore was required to settle all of them. Members of Jammu and Kashmir Sharnarthi Action Committee (JKSAC), an organisation representing the displaced members of the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), expressed their gratitude toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sanctioning a package of Rs 2,000 crore for the displaced people. "We express our gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sanctioning a package of Rs 2,000 crore for the displaced people from the Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) of 1947," JKSAC vice president Amrik Singh said. He said the package of Rs 2,000 crore should not be seen as the final settlement as the total amount required to settle the displaced people of PoK was Rs 9,200 crore. "The Prime Minister while sanctioning Rs 2,000 crore had himself said that this was just a beginning and not the final settlement," Singh said, adding that displaced people had to wait for more than six decades to get this relief package announced. Singh urged the state government to disburse the sanctioned relief package amongst the displaced people at an earliest so that the demand for remaining money could be made to the central government. He also demanded that the state government should constitute a committee in which representatives from JKSAC be also included for the disbursement of the package. (New Indian Express 17/12/15)

70 years on, West Pakistan refugees denied basic rights in J&K (13)

NEW DELHI: Braving the bloodbath of partition, they migrated from Pakistan's Sialkot to villages in Jammu hoping for a better future but after 70 years, they are knocking at the Supreme Court's door protesting denial of permanent resident status, right to education, employment and voting in Jammu and Kashmir. The nomenclature -- West Pakistan Refugees Action Committee, 1947 -- may sound archaic but their grievances are grave as they find themselves living like second class citizens in J&K despite a Supreme Court decision in 1987 in Bachan Lal Kalgotra case. The SC had said it was for the governments, the Centre and state, to realize the genuine grievances of these refugees and grant them permanent resident status in the state to enable them vote for the state assembly and panchayat elections. Interestingly, these refugees and their progeny have been allowed to vote in Lok Sabha elections. But what the refugees alleged is unthinkable in a modern democracy which treats an individual's rights as cardinal. The committee, through advocate Anirudh Sharma, said, "The state government granted permanent resident status to some of these West Pakistan refugees subject to the condition that they could be employed only as sweepers. "They and their children are not allowed to hold any positions higher than these. Further, their children are not entitled to gain education in government universities or avail any scholarships to gain education." In contrast, these refugees' children and grandchildren can vote for parliamentary elections and compete for All India Civil Services examination conducted by the Union Public Services Commission. This is downright apathy from the governments side. Now that the new government is in place they should ensure that the ... Read More Hrishi Desai. This means if the progeny of a refugee is successful in the All India Civil Services examination, he/she could become the chief secretary or the head of the police force in J&K, but he/she can only become a constable or a clerk in the state government if he/she decides to take employment in the state. "The petitioner is filing the instant petition for conferring the status of permanent resident status to around 300,000 West Pakistani refugees who have been denied basic human rights like the right to employment, education, ownership of property and political participation," the committee said. "Nearly 80% of the refugees who migrated from West Pakistan to the state of Jammu and Kashmir were from the Scheduled Caste community. A large number of refugees from West Pakistan took shelter in Kathua and Samba, though no land was allotted to them. "It is a pity that their situation has not changed at all for the past 30 years and their children and grandchildren are facing same agonies despite Bachan Lal Kalgotra judgment in 1987," the committee said. (Times of India 22/12/15)

At least 18 refugees drown off Turkey in latest refugee tragedy (13)
Ankara: At least 18 migrants drowned when their overcrowded boat sank in the Aegean Sea on Thursday on the way to the Greek island of Lesbos in the latest tragedy involving refugees seeking to enter Europe. The wooden boat capsized in high waves two miles off the Bademli coast in the Aegean, the private Dogan news agency reported. The Turkish coastguard recovered the bodies including several children from the sea, and were hunting for another two who were missing. A one-year-old baby was among those rescued. Divers from the nearby Turkish coastal city of Izmir were rushed to the scene after a tip-off that more refugees could be stuck in the hold, Dogan said. The UN refugee agency and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said this week more than one million migrants and refugees reached Europe this year, most of them by sea. The vast majority of people -- over 800,000 -- landed in Greece, according to the figures. Greek police said on Wednesday that at least 13 people including seven children, drowned when their boat sank in the Aegean. Turkey, which is currently hosting at least 2.2 million Syrian refugees, is a major launch-pad for migrants who are seeking better lives in European Union nations. The EU is grappling for solutions to the mass arrival of migrants, most of them Syrian refugees from Turkey. Ankara reached an agreement with the EU in November to stem the flow of refugees heading to Europe, in return for financial assistance. Brussels vowed to provide three billion euros (USD 3.2 billion) in cash as well as political concessions to Ankara in return for its cooperation in tackling Europe's worst migrant crisis since World War II. After the landmark deal, Turkish coastguard and police have stepped up their presence along the coasts where smugglers operate the refugee business. EU ambassador to Turkey, Hansjorg Haber, told AFP last week that the goal was to put smugglers "out of business" and deter migrants from going to the coastline. "We are already seeing enhanced effort on the part of the gendarmerie and the police but basically we want to stop this," he said. The Turkish government however criticises the EU's "security-oriented" approach to the refugee crisis, saying that the issue should be dealt with in a comprehensive manner. "The refugee issue is not a matter of political bribery," a Turkish government official said, while adding that there was no other country as experienced as Turkey in meeting refugee demands. Meanwhile, because of the winter conditions, there has been a decrease in the numbers of people seeking to reach Europe in risky sea journeys. (DNA 24/12/15)

UN refugee agency seeks to protect displaced gays, lesbians (13)
New York, Dec 26 (Just Earth News/IBNS): With lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons in forced displacement facing discrimination, prejudice, violence and other hurdles as they seek asylum, the United Nations refugee agency has rolled out the most comprehensive training package of its kind globally to enhance their protection. The need to ensure that the rights of LGBTI people are respected has recently received increased attention and support from UN agencies, States, and the broader humanitarian and human rights community, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Turk says of the measures which focus on practical guidance for staff and partner organizations. However, despite significant progress in this effort, discrimination against LGBTI persons persists, and their international protection needs often go unmet, he added in a news release. UNHCR [High Commissioner for Refugees] is committed to protecting the rights of LGBTI persons of concern, and will continue to take targeted actions to build the capacity of staff and partners to this end. The training package we have developed is a significant step in that direction. The programme, developed jointly with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and funded by the United States Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration, covers relevant terminology, international law, communication, operational protection, conducting interviews, durable solutions, health, and refugee status determination. It encompasses sexual orientation and gender identity, the particular protection risks affecting displaced LGBTI people, specific means to address them and will result in better delivery of protection to LGBTI persons of concern by UNHCR and its partners, the agency said. (New Kerala 26/12/15)

Persecuted Myanmarese in Assam to seek refugee status (13)
GUWAHATI, Dec 26 - As many as 28 persecuted Myanmarese nationals (Rohingya Muslims), who are presently in Assam, including those languishing in detention camps, have decided to formally seek asylum in India through the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These persecuted Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, who were apprehended in the State in the last few years for illegally entering the country following persecution, include women and children, official sources confirmed. The UNHCR is now working on the legal nitty-gritty so that the ‘victims’ are interviewed and granted refugee status. Sources at Dispur informed this newspaper that the UNHCR has already engaged its legal partner, Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), to study the merits of the case and act accordingly. As per the information gathered by the HRLN, they have come across 28 such nationals from Myanmar, including 22 of those languishing in detention camps in Golapara, Kokrajhar, Jorhat, Silchar, Dibrugarh and Tezpur. “The other six are at different stages of legal process,” sources divulged. “Once the matter is taken up by the UNHCR, the 28 Myanmarese nationals would be given refugee status, subject to the approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs. As India is signatory to various UN treaties, granting of refugee status to them should not be a problem,” sources stated. A team of HRLN is also working on the case of two Rohingya Muslim minor girls, which is presently being fought in the Juvenile Justice Board, Guwahati. “Like other persecuted Rohingyas, the minor girls do not want to go back to Myanmar fearing threat to their lives. They want to be in Jammu and Kashmir to join thousands of Rohingyas that have already settled there following tensions in the neighbouring country in recent years. By way of granting refugee status, we can facilitate their legal stay in India,” sources pointed out. “If there are no legal complications, I do not think the State Government will be averse to the idea. The process has just started,” a senior official at the Assam Accord implementation department said. While confirming that the UNHCR is taking a keen interest in the Rohingya Muslims presently in Assam, he said the State Government, too, is studying the probable legal implications. An official of the UNHCR told this reporter that its legal partners have been asked to find out more about the issue before it can go ahead with the necessary documentation and other related matters. “If the court allows them to travel to New Delhi, we would register and interview them for refugee status,” sources added. (The Assam Tribune 27/12/15)