

THE CITY
DIARY

US consul
general



Craig L. Hall

■ Craig L. Hall took over as the US consul general in Calcutta on Wednesday. I am excited to be in this historic and lively city of Calcutta. I am eagerly looking forward to visit different states in eastern India and meet with its wonderful people in the coming months," Craig said. Before coming to the city, Hall served as the deputy political counsellor at the US embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. He has also served in Seoul, Korea, Mosul, Iraq, Canberra, Australia, and Surabaya, Indonesia. Hall, who is from Florida, holds a bachelor's degree from Palm Beach Atlantic University in Florida and a PhD in religious studies from Baylor University Texas. He has come to the city with wife Meeryung and daughter Ana, 19. Hall's 15-year-old son, Tyler, will continue his studies in the US.

Met forecasts rainy weekend

ASTAFF REPORTER

Wednesday morning was hot but a smart shower in the afternoon brought the temperature down. The Met office has forecast more rain over the weekend in Calcutta.

A Met official said the wet spell was likely to continue till Sunday, ending a comparatively seven-day dry spell in the city. The rainfall was triggered by a trough of low pressure stretching from Bihar to Odisha, via Jharkhand and adjoining south Bengal. The trough formed on Wednesday and is likely to intensify.

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On Wednesday, radar pictures showed that the cloud initially passed over the northern part of the city, where it largely spent itself in the form of a very heavy downpour, before blowing towards the southern parts. So, it rained more in north Calcutta.

While areas like Ulitadanga and Maniktila received between 40 and 50mm rain, places like Ballygunge and Kalighat in south got up to 3mm.

The Alipore Met office received just 1.5mm rain during the day. "The cloud mass was small, slanted from the south-west to the north-east, but tall. That's why it resulted in a lot of rain in such a small area," said Gokul Chandra Das, director, India Meteorological Department, Calcutta.



A rain-soaked central Calcutta road on Wednesday afternoon. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

ment, Calcutta. Because of the height of the cloud — around 6km — light was not able to pass through it, darkening the sky around 2pm and making it appear as if dusk had descended on the city.

The rain thereafter intensified into a heavy downpour in the northern parts, accompanied by thunder and lightning.

Debnath said the high temperatures in the morning played a role in the formation of the thundercloud.

Met records showed the mercury had climbed to 33.2 degrees Celsius at 11.30am on Wednesday. The relative humidity was very high at 69 per cent at the time, courtesy the low-pressure trough,

which was drawing water from the Bay of Bengal. The temperature went up to 34.1 degrees Celsius later in the afternoon — the day's maximum temperature, 2.3 degrees more than Tuesday's maximum — making Wednesday the warmest day in the city in over a week.

"When wet air heats up, it rises and suddenly cools down as it gains altitude. Then it condenses to form thunderclouds. When there is surplus water vapour in the air, these clouds gain in height quickly and blot out the sun," a weather scientist said.

The trough of low pressure that has been supplying this moisture from the Bay of Bengal is likely to intensify. Under its effect, heavy rainfall is expected in isolated places in south Bengal, including Calcutta. The trough of low pressure is an imaginary line joining various low pressure points across the breadth of the country. A low-pressure zone draws air towards itself as its atmospheric pressure is lower than its surroundings.

A Met official said the trough of low pressure had moved to the Himalayan foothills on Monday and rainfall had started ebbing in the city and adjoining areas. Which is why Calcutta experienced a dry spell.

But a "secondary trough" has cropped up, changing the city's rain fortunes, he said.

Tracks okayed, station uncertain
Signals green and red
for Joka Metro

SANJAY MANDAL

The Union finance ministry has given permission to build tracks along the mint in Taratala for the Joka-BBD Bag Metro.

But the defence ministry is yet to allow the construction of a station on its land in Mominpur, which remains the last big hurdle for the project. "We have received the no-objection certificate from the finance ministry and are now waiting for a clearance for physical handover of the mint land," a railway official said on Wednesday.

A portion of the mint's wall needs to be pushed back for the Joka-BBD Bag viaduct for which the railways would need 3,100sq m, an official said.

Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL), the implementing agency of the project, has written to the finance ministry, seeking permission for the physical possession of the land so work can start.

"RVNL will have to build a new boundary wall and then demolish a portion of the existing one," the official said.

But another hurdle still remains in the project that has been riddled with land-related problems.

The railways had sought 2,500sq m land adjacent to the army's Command Hospital to build the Mominpur station.

But the army has raised objections. A source said the army's Bengal headquarters has sent its report to the defence ministry, which will take the final call on the matter.

State chief secretary Sanjay Mitra has written to defence secretary G. Mohan Kumar requesting for "appropriate instructions" for fast issuance of an NoC for the Mominpur-BBD Bag stretch.

Following the army's objections, the state government has, however, proposed that the railways build the stretch without Mominpur station, the source said.

If the Mominpur station were to be omitted from the plan, 1,800sq m of land would be needed to build a ramp from where the tracks would go underground.

"But we are insisting on the station. Not having a station between Majerhat and Kidderpore, almost 2.5km apart, would defeat the purpose of a mass transit system like the Metro," a railway official said.

The thumb rule for Metro routes is to have stations 1.5km apart. The existing

north-south Metro has stations within a kilometre of each other.

"The railway ministry will deprecate the defence ministry too," another official said.

The army has, however, agreed to allow a tunnel under the Maidan.

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent video-conference, the defence ministry agreed to end a four-year stalemate and allow the construction of tracks for the Joka-BBD Bag Metro under the Maidan.

Railway minister Suresh Prabhu is scheduled to meet chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday during his visit to Calcutta. He is likely to raise the issue of land-locked Metro projects.

A state government official said the process to shift several buildings from the Metro route had already started. "Now it's the turn of the Centre to resolve the land issue," he said.

Mamata Banerjee had announced the 16.72km Joka-BBD Bag Metro when she was the railway minister in 2010-11. Work started in July 2011 but it ran into a host of problems, mostly related to objections from various quarters, including the army.

3 more held for
Tangra clash

ASTAFF REPORTER

A Calcutta Municipal Corporation employee and two other men have been arrested for the clash between two armed groups of the Trinamul Congress and the attack on police in Tangra on Tuesday. The leaders of the warring groups, however, are still at large.

Manoj Hazra, who is attached to the civic conservancy department, allegedly belongs to the local Pradip Guha faction of the ruling party. The faction is apparently backed by a Trinamul councillor.

The other faction involved in the clash, led by Alok Khattua, is allegedly supported by a ruling party MLA. The other two men arrested during the day — Rakhal Hajra and Arjun Mallick — apparently belong to the Khattua group.

Guha and Khattua, who live within a kilometre of Tangra police station, are yet to be arrested. The police said on Wednesday they were not at home.

Of the nine persons arrested on Tuesday night, three were named in the FIR registered under the IPC sections related to attempt to murder,

rioting and deterring a public servant from discharging his duty, as well as under various sections of the arms act.

Manoj, whose police said was "actively involved" in the violence, was among the 11 people named in the FIR.

The clash among the Trinamul supporters — armed with single-shots and 9mm pistols — broke out at the busy Vaishali crossing, 50 yards from Tangra police station on Golbindo Khattik Road, on Tuesday morning. As cops rushed to the spot to control the situation, shots were fired at them.

The bullets missed their targets but shrapnel from bombs and a brick hurled from the mob left three cops injured. The tussle — allegedly over distribution of the spoils of the syndicate business and earnings from a slaughterhouse on GC Dey Road — had been continuing for months.

The nine who were arrested late on Tuesday were produced in court on Wednesday and remanded in police custody till August 28. Manoj and the two others rounded up on Wednesday will be produced in court on Thursday.

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Tracks
blocked
over right to
board train

ASTAFF REPORTER

Women passengers prevented men from boarding the "general" coaches of a Matribhumi local plying between Bonang and Sealdah and blocked tracks at five stations in the Sealdah North section for as many hours on Wednesday.

The incident came a day after the railways decided to revert to the practice of running the Matribhumi locals between Ranaghat and Sealdah only for women.

The railways' move followed a fight between men and women on the issue at Kharid station on Monday. On Wednesday, trouble started around 8.30am when a group of women got off a Bonang-Sealdah Matribhumi local at Bamangachhi station and sat on the tracks.

They demanded that three extra coaches be added to the nine-bogie train if men were to be allowed to board it. "This train remains crowded. If the number of coaches for women is reduced by mar-

king some as 'general', we will be in trouble," said Kalyani Dutta, a protester.

The passengers blocked the tracks from 8.25am to 10.15am. Sources said some male passengers got off the train and, joined by others at the station, forcibly removed the women from the tracks. Both groups hurled stones at each other, resulting in a police lathi-charge.

The women passengers boarded the train when it resumed journey but kept preventing men from boarding the "general" coaches at every station.

Whenever men managed to push their way in, women got off the train and sat on the tracks.

As many as 30 local trains were cancelled and 14 delayed. The railways had run 10 special trains in the section to clear the rush of stranded passengers.

Normal service resumed at 1.15pm.

The railways had decided to mark three compartments of the Sealdah-Ranaghat-Sealdah Matribhumi local as "general" from Monday.

But when men tried to board the coaches on Monday, women passengers protested, leading to a fight between men and women. Train services were disrupted for four hours.

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দুই প্রজন্মের সেরাদের স্বীকৃতি সম্মান

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