

>LIGHT RAIN DURING THIS TIME OF THE YEAR WHEN THE LAND IS
PARCHED COULD INSTEAD PROVE BENEFICIAL FOR THE CROPS
Mrinal Saha, West Bengal Fruits and Vegetable Exporters' Welfare Association

Rain brings relief for Kolkatans

SMILE This is the highest rainfall that the city has experienced in a single day in March since 2009

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KOLKATA: An overnight shower that lingered till the late hours on Wednesday forced the maximum temperature to drop by quite a few degrees, a respite which every Kolkatan was looking forward to. The mercury level had been soaring above the 34 degree Celsius mark over the past few days.

The local met department assured that weather in the city would remain 'very comfortable' over the next 48 hours at least.

"The trough of low pressure that triggered the sudden rain has faded. Kolkatans would be able to enjoy a rather charming weather with a lot of sunshine over the next two days," said GC Debnath, director of Indian Meteorological Department's regional office in Kolkata.

The day's temperature which was hovering above 34 degrees Celsius plummeted to 28 degrees on Wednesday afternoon. In fact it would remain around the 30-degree mark till Friday at least.

A cyclonic circulation had developed over Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh a few days ago. The weatherman had predicted that the



■ Your favourite tram ride got cooler. SATYABRATA DAS/HT PHOTO

system could trigger light to moderate rain in some of the districts in the western parts of the state.

Chances of a shower in Kolkata was however remote. But the system faded on Monday.

"Instead a trough of low pressure suddenly

developed over Uttar Pradesh and Chattisgarh on Tuesday and this triggered rain in Kolkata and several parts of the state unexpectedly," said Debnath.

Met officials said the city received around 17.6 mm of rain over the past 24 hours. This is the highest rainfall that the city has

experienced on a single day in the month of March since 2009. On March 12, 2009 the city received around 29 mm of rain.

Agriculture scientists and exporters of fruits and vegetables, however, assured that such light to moderate rain in isolated areas won't inflict any major damage on the crops.

"Such light rain won't cause any damage to the crops. Had it continued for at least two to three days it would have caused severe damage as many of our summer fruits and vegetables are still in the blooming stage," said Chittaranjan Kole, vice-chancellor of Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya in Nadia.

Experts said fruits such as mango and litchi were still in developing stages. They would have withered away had there been a heavy shower accompanied with a storm. But luckily that didn't happen.

"A light rain during this time of the year when the lands are still parched could instead prove beneficial for the crops as it would add some moisture to the soil," said Mrinal Saha, general secretary of West Bengal Fruits and Vegetable Exporters' Welfare Association.

GTA chairman, 10 others held

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According to Verma the piece in question seems to be made up of copper and is round in shape. "East India Company 1818 is engraved on it," said Verma. Kirtania lodged an FIR against Pradhan and others with Pradhan Nagar Police Station and Tuesday night's raids led to the arrest.

The arrest has come as a second major embarrassment for GJM, that runs the

GTA. On November 8, a GJM youth leader was indicted in the Assam arms haul case.

Suraj Pradhan, the younger brother of Pradip alleged that the administration had conspired against his brother. "My brother was asked to come to a hotel at Darjeeling More on Tuesday night and was arrested immediately by the police who were already there at the hotel," said Suraj.

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PRESERVING HISTORY

French team flags off Chandernagore heritage conservation drive

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KOLKATA: A Paris-based heritage conservation agency has decided to launch a website detailing the remnants of French heritage in Chandernagore to let the world know about the former French colony.

The website, to be launched in July this year, will not only feature digital images of the sites but would also offer visitors a peek through journals, periodicals and other publications of the French era.

"Despite having great potential for attracting tourists from abroad, including France and other European countries, Chandernagore is lagging behind as a tourist destination because hardly any effort was given to preserve its heritage sites," Philippe Toussaint, president of Vieilles Maisons Françaises (VMF), one of the biggest heritage conservation agencies in France, told HT on Wednesday.

"We have been instructed by the UNESCO to undertake this project. It is part of conserving French heritage all over the world," said Toussaint, who visited Chandernagore



■ Members of a French heritage conservation team at the French Institute in Chandernagore. HT PHOTO

along with two other members from VMF on Wednesday to discuss with the authorities of the French Institute in Chandernagore on this project.

While digital archiving of the existing heritage structures is on its way digitisations of various French-era documents are yet to be done. The town has five sites declared as heritage by the West Bengal Heritage Commission - Thistle Hostel, Nitya Gopal Smriti Mandir, Main Building of Chandernagore Govt. College, Liberty Gate and Prefecture of Police.

However, there are plenty

other sites and private residential places bearing the legacy of the French era and its architectural marvels. The town's French connections date back to 1673 and, between the fall of Saptagram and rise of Kolkata in the eighteenth century was the premiere European trading hub in Bengal.

It also served as a hideout for Bengal's extremist freedom fighters who were on the run from the police. Chandernagore got Independence from France in 1950, three years after the rest of India. The VMF team plans to raise awareness about the town's heritage to engage

locals in heritage conservation.

"We carried out a survey in 2011 during which we identified 99 heritage sites in Chandernagore. Sadly, the state government has not been able to conserve any one and some of those buildings have already disappeared. If we don't digitally document these sites even now, an important part of history would be lost forever," said Aishwariya Tipnis, a New Delhi-based architect who is collaborating with VMF

Chandernagore's added advantage as a potential tourist destination, the experts said, lies in its proximity with other European settlements like the Dutch Chinsurah, Portuguese Bandel and Danish Serampore.

According to members of VMF, a packaged tour of the European settlements along the Hooghly would draw the attention of many a foreign tourist.

"This mini Europe on the Ganges can definitely attract tourists from abroad should there be a minimum level of heritage conservation and minimum tourism infrastructure. But if the heritage is lost, why should people come here?" Toussaint asked.

METRO SERVICES HIT FOR 90 MINUTES

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KOLKATA: Metro rail services were disrupted for 90 minutes on Wednesday morning after an air-conditioned rake developed a snag at Gitanjali station. Around 8.57 am a Noyapara-bound train reached Gitanjali station and got stalled.

"The AC rake suddenly stopped and refused to move. Investigations revealed the third rail connect converter (TRCC) of the train developed a snag. TRCC helps to extract current from the third rail and transfer it to the wheels of the coaches that help the train to move," said a Metro official.

Finally it was decided to evacuate the commuters and restore the snag. "Metro services got disrupted till 10.25 am when Metro engineers sorted the problem out. Till then, there were truncated services between Noyapara to Mahanayak Uttam Kumar," a railway official said.

Commuters from the southern fringes of the city to the city's business places had a tough time reaching office. Buses from Garia were jam-packed and there were hardly any seats available on auto rickshaws.

21 new swine flu cases on Wednesday

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KOLKATA: On Wednesday, the highest number of new swine flu cases was reported on a single day in the state this year. Twenty-one H1N1 positive cases were reported in the city and the districts on the day, taking the total number of swine flu patients to 167. Eight persons, including three children, have died across the state.

"Twenty-one more persons are down with the H1N1 virus according to the reports of their throat swab samples that were tested at the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) in Kolkata. Eighty-nine people have been discharged while 70 others are undergoing treatment at different government and private hospitals in the city," the director of health services, Dr BR Satpathi, said.

"Eight out of the 21 new cases tested positive at the NICD laboratory on Tuesday. The remaining 13 tested positive on Wednesday. Apart from the NICD, Peerless hospital has been given permission to conduct swine flu tests at its laboratory. No private laboratory will be allowed to conduct swine flu tests without the government's approval," Satpathi said. The health department has already directed a private hospital laboratory in Dhakuria in this regard because it was conducting swine flu tests without taking approval from the government.

"Following our directive, the private lab has stopped the tests. The NICD experts have visited the laboratory to verify the infrastructure required for testing throat swab samples of suspected swine flu patients to find the presence of H1N1 virus," he added.

A team of officers of the director general of health services under the Union health ministry and the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health here visited the state-run Infectious Diseases (ID) Hospital, BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children in Beliaghata, private hospitals and NICD lab on Monday.

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