

**JOHN LALL -
SIKKIM'S
FIRST DEWAN
IS NO MORE**

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FOR DETAILS**

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WEDNESDAY, 22-28 Jan, 2003

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**SPORTS THE BOWMEN
COMETH**



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**NOW!
extra**

**12 pgs
of different
reading**

**SIKKIM
POLICE PUT
ON "TERROR
ALERT"**

**TURN TO pg2
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DEMOLITION MAN



Mani Kumar Chettri, the truck driver who pulverised two shops and ran-over two people (one of whom, a 12-year-old girl lost her arm) when he lost control of his truck in an inebriated state

**DIKCHU SEETHES OVER
ADMINISTRATIVE
APATHY**

Drunken driving leading to accidents is rare. But the Sunday accident, insist locals, could have been avoided if only the administration had been more forthcoming in addressing the long pending grievances of the locals...

**TURN TO pg 3
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**WHY
SIKKIM?**

A NOW FEATURE on why militants are attracted to Sikkim and what it means for this Himalayan State...

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RECAP SIKKIM



Boro's interrogation continues; Sikkim Police put on "terror alert"

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Dhiren Boro, Vice-President of the banned National Democratic Front of Bodoland is still in police custody and under interrogation. Booked under POTA, Sikkim Police has already remanded him to police custody twice and wants much more information from him before turning him over to judicial custody it appears.

Boro's wife, arrested along with him on January 1, is suspected to have helped Boro during his Sikkim sojourn as his messenger. She, inform sources is also a trained NDFB militant.

While Boro, his wife and his two colleagues will fetch little sympathy in Sikkim, many hearts, even among the men in khaki go out for his two children - a four-year-old daughter and two and a half month old son.

Sikkim Police officials reveal that while the lap-baby has been allowed to stay with the mother, the elder toddler has been placed in the care of a police constable.

The police are not yet revealing

exact details but it has come to light that Boro's organisation was in close contact with the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence agency, which has established a strong base in Bangladesh and together with other extremist organisations of the region has been using the Siliguri corridor for passage of their men and weapons. It has also been revealed that Dhiren Boro was assisting his organisation in trying to establish a dialogue with the government India.

The talks, as it is now known have fallen through without any resolution. The tripartite meeting being held in Delhi between the Assam Government, the Bodo Liberation Tigers and Union Home Ministry fell through on the last day of the talks - Tuesday.

While Home Ministry officials were expecting a resolution an unexpected snag came up when the BLT team wanted a modification to the Assam government's proposal regarding elections to the proposed 40-member Bodoland Territorial Council. The original proposal was to keep 30 of the 40 seats reserved for tribals

in the council and 10 others kept aside for the large population of non-tribals living in Bodo territory.

In the meanwhile, with increased militant movement in the neighbourhood (Siliguri) and in the light of intelligence inputs from security agencies regarding the activities of terrorist groups, Sikkim police has been put on a "terror alert" for the Republic Day celebrations.

This has been urged by the North East's militants' call to boycott the January 26 celebrations. Special measures are being taken along areas bordering Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The likelihood of ISI operatives fomenting trouble in north Bengal in conjunction with ultras like KLO, ULFA and the Maoists, particularly during the Republic Day remains a constant threat.

According to DIG [Crime], SD Negi, "Security arrangements and enhanced precautions are being taken in Sikkim to prevent any possible threat to peace in the State. We should not have anything to worry about."

John Lall - Sikkim's first Dewan dies

NEW DELHI: The Lall Bazaar of Sikkim, which recently lost its earlier look and feel to a project for a multi-storeyed shopping complex has also lost the man after whom it was named. John S Lall, of the erstwhile ICS, who served as the first Dewan to the Chogyal of Sikkim, is no more.

Respected as an eminent administrator, Lall, 88, had held several government posts. He was known for his integrity and intellect and had authored several books.

Lall, who was in New Delhi earlier this month for a medical check-up, had to rush home to Uttaranchal on learning about his wife's death. Lall breathed his last on December 27 at his Jilling Estate in Uttaranchal.

Excerpted below is how his friend and popular columnist Khushwant Singh remembers Lall:

ENGLISH JOHN

There was nothing in the papers about it. John was not a nobody whose departure could have gone completely unnoticed by the media. He was among the few living of the fast diminishing members of the ICS who left his mark in fields other than administrative. I got to know his family in Lahore over 60 years ago. The Lalls were a devout Christian family who had anglicised themselves to the extent of speaking Punjabi or Hindustani with some difficulty.

John's career was somewhat overshadowed by his elder brother who got into the ICS a couple of years before him, attracted the attention of Prime Minister Nehru and under the patronage of Krishna Menon held several important diplomatic assignments. Arthur outshone John in looks, achievements and popularity with women. While in England, both brothers realised that with names like Arthur and John they did not sound Indian enough to

English ears. So Arthur changed his name to Anand and John to Janardhan Shankar.

John abandoned the juvenile attempt to Indianise himself through change of name and happily returned to his original name, John. But the short stay in a British university changed his manner of speech. He began to speak the language with an incredible haw-haw of an English country squire. Behind his back, his Punjabi friends referred to him as a 'Saab da putter'. John never got rid of his accent.

I lost track of John for some years. I knew he had risen to be commissioner of Agra division and then the Diwan of Sikkim. (The chief market in Gangtok still bears his name Lall Bazaar.) After he retired from service a new version of John emerged. The patronising tone was gone. He sought the company of friends, among them myself.

The transition from a small-time snob to a soft-hearted seeker of friends came during the years he became director of the India International Centre. He made the IIC the hub of cultural activity of the capital. It has not regained that status since John retired to his farmhouse somewhere near Nainital. He was beset with domestic problems and his wife's ailments. He had returned to religion for solace. The last time was in December when his voice on the phone sounded very disturbed. He had been told by his doctor that his enlarged prostate gland was cancerous. I tried to cheer him up and told him of the number of friends who had their cancerous prostate glands removed and lived fulfilled lives.

He promised to drop in the next evening for a drink. I did not hear from him; only the rumour that he had hurried back to his farmhouse on hearing of his wife's death. A couple of days later he followed her to the grave.

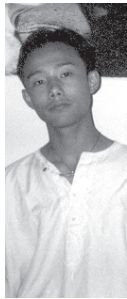
KUTSE SHEGU

The Shegu of late Sonam Wangchuk Sherpa, commonly known as Passang (a student of KLE College, Bangalore) who expired in Bangalore, Karnataka, on 22-12-2002 falls on 26-01-2003 at our residence at Jorethang above the Masjid. The Shegu had to be preponed due to some reasons.

All relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to attend the prayer at the said residence, so that his soul may rest in peace.

Lakpa Dorjee Sherpa (father); Parvati Rai (mother); Pema (brother); Lucky Doma Sherpa (sister); Pawan Rai (uncle)

pb (Jorethang): 257523/ 257881 Gangtok: 281898



New judge has gone 7 yrs without casual leave

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: In a rare achievement of sorts, a High Court judge here has a record of not taking a single casual leave for the past seven years!

Justice N. Surjamani Singh, who was sworn in as a judge of the Sikkim High Court on January 7, told reporters that he was the only judge in the country who had not taken a single casual leave in the past seven years.

"I have surpassed a record of a former judge of Madras High Court who did not take a single casual leave for five years", the 57-year-old judge claimed.

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Sangeet Natak Akademi - the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, New Delhi is organising a **30 day** residential workshop for young theatre artists of Sikkim from **10 February to 9 March 2003** at Gangtok in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Sikkim. Shri J. N. Kaushal will be the Camp Director of the Workshop. The faculty will consist of eminent theatre persons from different parts of the country. The workshop is being organised for the guidance of talented theatre artists of the young generation who are keen to pursue the theatre art seriously. Applications are invited from persons in the age group of 21-35 years, who have participated in at least two plays. Applicants should be residents of Sikkim. Application on plain paper with bio-data including date of birth, educational qualifications, experience, address and telephone number together with two passport sized photographs should reach the **Deputy Secretary (drama), Sangeet Natak Akademi, Rabindra Bhawan, Feroze Shah Road, New Delhi - 110001** by 25 January 2003. Short listed candidates will be interviewed on 8 February 2003 for the final selection.

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by RANJIT SINGH

DIKCHU: This tiny hamlet bordering the east and north districts was the site of a gruesome accident on Sunday, January 19.

Uma Shankar, 18, and a 12 year old girl of Class VIII, Bindu were soaking in the morning sun by the way side at Dikchu Bazaar when a truck (WB-73/A1109) skidded off the road and headed straight for the shop outside which they were sitting. There was absolutely no time or space for them to take shelter and both had to bear the brunt of the driver's indiscretion.

Uma Shankar was badly injured while the younger Bindu's plight was worse. The entire right portion of her body was squashed and her foot was still under the tyres. It was only after the truck was raised with the help of a jack that she could be lifted out and put on an ambulance headed for STNM Hospital in the capital.

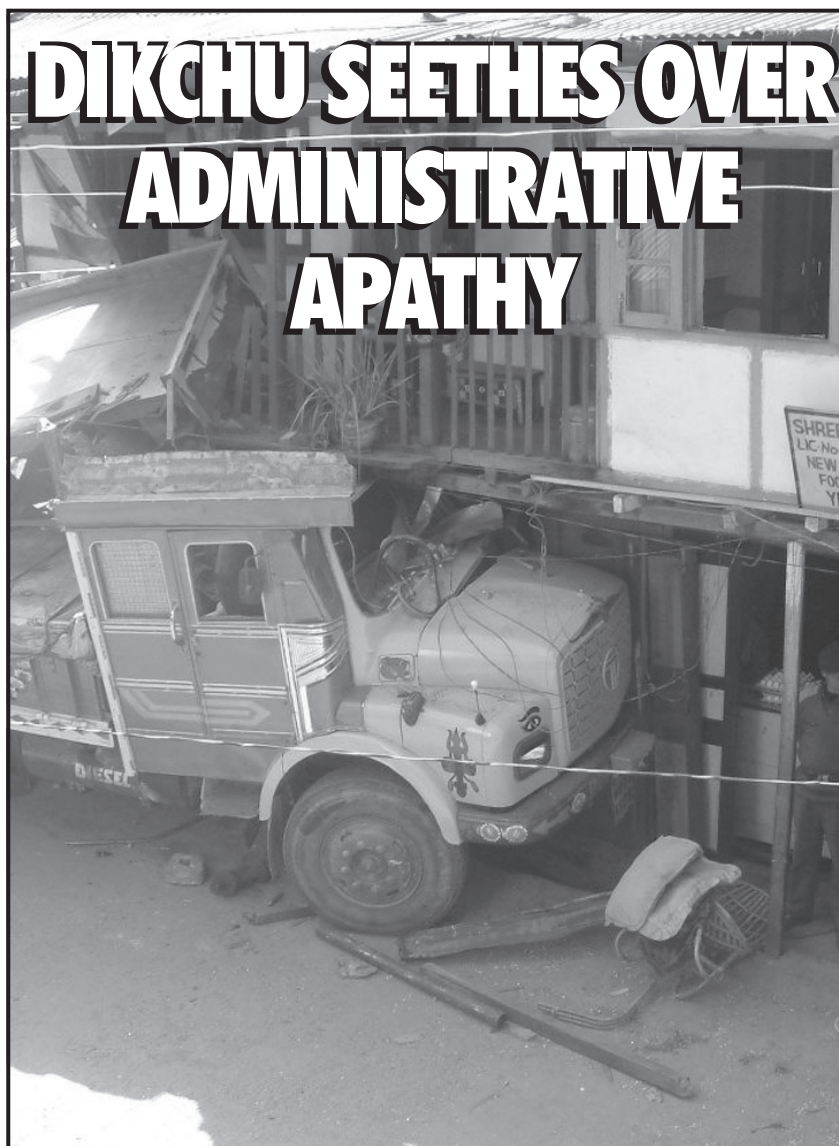
While Uma Shankar has suffered multiple fractures on his leg and received injuries to his head, Bindu is again the worse off - her left arm had to be amputated. Both are still undergoing treatment at the STNM Hospital.

The truck, which was headed for Dikchu from Makha, had three passengers on board besides the driver, Mani Kumar Chettri. According to an eyewitness, Nageshwar Singh, who barely escaped the runaway truck's swathe, the truck sped into Dikchu on neutral gear which was why it could not be heard till it was upon them. Luckily, the truck just grazed him slightly on the shoulder before it pulverised the shops. The entire structure of Hotel Nima was damaged with the balcony peeling off on to the truck. The bonnet of the truck too was completely disengaged from the body.

The building rammed by the truck is in bad shape and local residents have gotten together and propped it up with wooden pillars to prevent it from collapsing. None of the doors shut properly any more.

The residents of Dikchu are an angry lot. First in their line of ire is the owner of the truck, one Jai Prakash of Champasari, Siliguri, who is yet to even arrive at Dikchu. Matters of compensation have thus not even been broached as yet.

Also being blamed for the accident is the lackadaisical approach of the GREF officials posted here. "This is not the first time that a runaway vehicle has caused destruction.



The loaded truck which crashed into a house in Dikchu on January 19, Sunday. The out-of-control truck with a drunk driver at the wheel trapped a 12-year-old girl under the wheels. The girl, Bindu, lost her arm to the accident and another youth, an 18-year-old Uma Shankar suffered multiple fractures on his leg. The house has been damaged beyond repair and the incident has agitated Dikchu residents who have been demanding speed-breakers in town area among other things for a long time now. pic: KARCHOONG DIYALI

In fact, barely a year ago, a jeep had rammed into the same house," informs a resident.

Since it is mostly GREF trucks that ply on the said stretch, the locals, specially the Dikchu Youth Welfare Association, has repeatedly requested them to put up speed-breakers in the town area.

"They turned us away each time with the excuse that the permission to construct speed-breakers would

have to be sought from Delhi," informs an infuriated DYWA member.

In a fit of anger, the residents are reported to have dug up portions of the road to act as speed-breakers. Passionate diggers apparently dug too deep and now the speed-breaker has actually become a nuisance. The locals have since filled the dug up portions with mud and have finally gotten through to GREF officials who have assured that they will con-

struct a speed-breaker immediately.

This is still an immediate problem and has been resolved. The incident has, however, brought to the surface several other ills which the administration has ignored thus far.

According to the passengers who had boarded the truck at Makha, the driver was absolutely sober when they started on the journey. It was barely kilometres short of Dikchu, at Amdara, that the driver alighted

to slip into a "bar" and returned drunk. In fact, when the NOW! team arrived at the accident site hours after the incident, the oppressive smell liquor reeking from the driver screamed out the cause of the accident.

What has irritated the locals further is that no excise permits have been issued in the said area. The driver obviously got drunk (and caused 12-year-old to lose her arm) at an illegal "bar". "The excise people are sleeping. Illegal liquor shops have cropped up everywhere along the highway and they do nothing about it. If they had been more vigilant, maybe this incident would not have happened," the locals fume.

Interestingly, the driver did not only break the law against drunken driving, he was also driving a loaded truck when no trucks are allowed to ply with load on Sundays in Dikchu. Locals believe that if only they had more policemen patrolling the streets such violations would not be as rampant as they are at present. The Police Outpost at Dikchu has a total strength of four, woefully short of what locals want for effective policing.

"They are obviously short-staffed at the OP. It is not just about this incident, but locals have no sense of security nowadays," a senior Dikchu resident said. He cited the recent burglary where a teacher's house was completely ransacked as an example of growing lawlessness in the area. With the project site of the mega Teesta Hydrel Project Stage V within walking distance, Dikchu is flooded with labourers from the dam-site every evening.

"All of us feel insecure and want more police personnel for Dikchu," they maintain.

Even though still furious over the incident, the locals find it in them to spare words of praise for all those who helped in saving the lives of the two injured children. The doctor at the Dikchu PHC and the staff at the Emergency Ward of the STNM Hospital along with the officials of the Gangtok Sadar Thana are singled out for praise and thanks by the locals.

The accident has shaken up the Dikchu residents and angered them, it has also brought to light the social pressures that this town has been subjected to. One only hopes that their complaints get addressed soon, before another untoward incident splashes Dikchu on the front page of this weekly.

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POUDYAL COUNTERS SSP RESURGENCE

a NOW! REPORT

DARJEELING: Somnath Poudyal, Central Committee member of Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) vehemently criticized former Chief Minister of Sikkim, Nar Bahadur Bhandari labeling him a person "without any credibility" and one who used the communal card for his own selfish political benefits.

Speaking to the press on his way to New Delhi here at Darjeeling recently, Mr. Poudyal said: "Bhandari has forgotten to play the role of a constructive opposition, his only job now is to tarnish the present Government's image."

Mr. Poudyal's counter comes in the wake of Bhandari's allegation that the SDF Government regime is riddled with corruption and that the central government has been turning a blind eye because SDF is an ally of the NDA.

Mr. Bhandari had, at a recent

meeting, alleged that the NDA Government at the Centre and SDF were in a partnership of "Sikkim Loot."

"Everyone knows of the CBI charges against Bhandari and no body has forgotten the height of corruption that people witnessed during Bhandari's regime in Sikkim," reminded Mr. Poudyal.

He also said that people including the former CM's own party members had lost faith in his credibility.

"The fact that 6 MLAs of his party joined the SDF after winning the 1999 election and now he is the solitary opposition in a 32 member house, proves this," said Mr. Poudyal.

He further alleged that the SSP supremo could not be considered a leader anymore and alleged that Mr. Bhandari had not visited the people of Rhenock, his own constituency even once in the past 3 years.

"All his attempts to join the Congress and BJP failed and as he has

nothing better to do now he is upto this 'government tarnishing' gimmick," added Mr. Poudyal.

He also stated that the present government had played a big role in the inclusion of Sikkim in North East Council and even in the inclusion of Tamangs and Limbus in the Schedule Tribe List.

"What did we get during the Bhandari regime; he could not even give the people of Sikkim the basic protection," stressed Mr. Poudyal. He also added that the present Government's policy was protection of all communities of Sikkim.

"The SDF Government will not compromise on this issue at any cost," assured Mr. Poudyal.

Only days prior to Mr. Poudyal's outburst in Darjeeling, three former SDF leaders officially joined SSP. They are Biraj Adhikari, Hem Lall Bhandari and Lhendup Bhutia. They became Sangramis on January 7 earlier this month.

Janata Mela rolls into East Skm

a NOW FEATURE

GANGTOK: South and West districts covered the Janata Mela debuted in east Sikkim on January 20 with Sikkim Government's Sahuliyat Vitran extravaganza rounding up Regu and Rhenock constituencies at a function held at Rongli. The Mela resumed after a 13-day hiatus to accommodate the Losoong-Maghe Sankranti holidays.

The Janata Mela is not yet over for West and South districts with the constituencies of Tashiding (West Sikkim), Temi Tarku and Rateypani getting their share of the "sahuliyat" on January 27 and 28, later this month.

Rural housing schemes, cash incentives, shelter and LPG connections are some of the benefits being distributed at the Mela. Various government departments involved in the development process have also put up stalls at the Mela to educate the rural population on the initiatives undertaken on their behalf by the

State Government.

The Janata Mela's acceptability and performance in the East district could provide a pointer towards the mood of the electorate here. With a year and a half to go before the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front approaches the people again for their support to return to power, the Janata Mela gathers much political relevance.

In fact, some leaders close to the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling, were quoted by a foreign weekly recently as admitting that the CM was already on "campaign mode".

The East district is seen as the bastion of the Opposition Sikkim Sangram Parishad, with most MLAs from the district having joined the ruling party after having won on an SSP ticket.

While Chamling took the benefits to his arch rival, Nar Bahadur Bhandari's constituency, Rhenock on the first day, the second day of the Janata Mela's east Sikkim initiative saw it roll into Pakyong, covering the constituencies of Bara Pathing, Loosing Pacheykhani and Assam Lingzey.

Sonam Dorjee and JK Bhandari, two of the three SSP MLAs who joined the SDF recently hail from the first two constituencies.

The Janata Mela for east Sikkim will round off with a mega mela at Dhaje Dara which will account for the constituencies of Ranka, Gangtok, Rumtek and Rakdong-Tintek constituencies.

The Janata Mela will then proceed to North Sikkim.

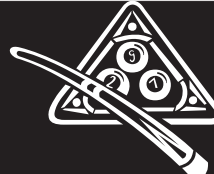
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DESTINATION SIKKIM

AND WE ARE NOT TALKING TOURISM

a NOW FEATURE

The year 2003 brought with it an unexpected gift for Sikkim Police - the arrest of Dhiren Boro, the Vice-President of the banned National Democratic Front for Bodoland. He was nabbed on January 1 in Gangtok - the biggest catch Sikkim Police has ever recorded. Along with back-patting and jubilation, Boro's arrest forces us to pose a few questions such as: how did he manage to live in Sikkim for over a year without raising an eyebrow? Why was Boro in Sikkim and what made him seek Sikkim out, if it was refuge that he sought here?

The questions are pertinent especially because we know that Boro had been living in the jungles of Bangladesh and Bhutan for about eight years since he jumped bail in 1993. What made Boro move away from the secrecy of the jungles and live out in the open in Sikkim?

The answer is not difficult to arrive at. Sikkim's proximity to Assam (Boro's area of operation) makes it a viable option. Since Sikkim has so far been untouched by militant violence, the police here is not expected to be extra vigilant for extremists of any ilk. Boro, who was now growing tired of being on the tired of being on the run also believed that he could blend in with the local population due to his mongoloid looks. Supporting these factors was the accessibility of the Siliguri corridor, which has grown increasingly popular with the ISI of Pakistan to launch infiltrations into India.

It is also an accepted fact that senior leaders of banned outfits rarely meet in India. Earlier, these meetings would take place in Bangladesh where ISI had more control, but now that the Bangladesh border is so intensively patrolled that the only option is the pervious border of Nepal - hence the choice of Sikkim as a base.

Boro had earlier revealed that he had first come to Sikkim as a tourist, scopped the place out and decided in its favour - he had, then, probably seen the advantages.

In Sikkim, he lived a rather reclusive life, keeping himself distant from his neighbours who were unsuspecting of his pseudonym, Bipul Sonowal. To some he claimed he was a fruit wholesaler and to others

Only a couple of years ago, Sikkim Police's main concern was whether to remain with its blue uniform or adopt the khaki. Sometime later, the force dabbled with the idea of a Tourist Police. Sikkim Police, in short, was looking for ways to keep itself busy. 2003 has changed the equations. Dhiren Boro's arrest has opened a new front for the men in khaki. NOW! caught up with the Director General of Sikkim Police to find out how things have changed for him and his force. Excerpts:

NOW: Has Dhiren Boro's interrogation suggested that there are other extremist operatives hiding in Sikkim?

DGP: The interrogation is still going on and we have been checking with the Assam and West Bengal police too but nothing of that sort has come to fore till date.

There have been allegations that some suspected extremists have given Sikkim police the slip in the recent past. Comment.

As far as I know, no such thing has happened till now. This is the first time we received credible information and we saw it to its logical end and arrested the accused.

Since Boro was not involved in any direct action in Sikkim, what kind of information is Sikkim police trying to get from him?

Dhiren Boro was using Sikkim as a base. In April he went to Nepal to attend some meeting with ultra leaders. He possessed a computer and with the help of experts we have been able to download information from it. From this we hope to get some incriminating evidence. What we are really interested in is what he did while in Sikkim, whom he met and whether there were others with similar ideas. Our interrogation will also seek to understand the workings of organisations such as NDFB. This could help since our force is relatively inexperienced in handling such

he posed as a stockbroker. He also owned a taxi which he had sold only days before he was arrested. He had a computer at home and lived a relatively affluent life and yet no one suspected anything amiss.

Boro did not seem harmful to anyone who knew him. Maybe he was not harmful for Sikkim either, but there is no telling how much harm he planned for Assam while operating out of Sikkim. Boro might claim now that he had given up his extremist leanings, but we know that he was in Nepal in April last to attend a meeting with other NDFB leaders. We also know that one of the persons arrested along with Boro from his Tadong apartment had arrived only a day earlier. These are pointers that prove Boro's active involvement as a leader of the NDFB. In fact, he maintained a fluid "courier service" with his

NDFB counterparts and was also in communications with fellow extremists spread all over India and in neighbouring Bangladesh through the internet.

From the workings of Boro, one may understand that Sikkim serves a useful purpose to militants - its a Safe Haven, their planning ground where they can regroup and recuperate. In the comparative peace of Sikkim, a militant can chalk out his strategies and targets. It is indeed ironic that Sikkim's relative peace attracts such violent people to it. It is the same comparative peace which allowed Boro to remain undetected for over a year in Sikkim due to our lack of "security consciousness". The locals are unaware and even opposed to the stricter monitoring.

Sikkim can no longer ignore the issue of security by claiming that mili-

INTERVIEW: Director General of Police TN TENZING

Sikkimese need to become more security conscious



outfits and has now been forced to guard against them.

Who do you perceive as a more plausible threat to Sikkim - Indian extremists or Maoists from Nepal hiding here?

Theoretically speaking, both kinds are a threat to Sikkim. Access for extremists from India is easy and with Nepal we share a long hitherto unmanned border. But in the case of on-the-run Maoist from Nepal, it would be even more difficult to identify them since they can blend very easily with the local populace.

There are reports that many Maoist func-

tionaries are on the run from Nepal. How easy do you think it would be for them to find a safe haven in Sikkim?

Yes, many of them are on the run. Take the example of Dhiren Boro himself, he was also on the run from the Assam Police and sought shelter here. But we also have to also consider our relatively small size which will definitely expose such fugitives soon enough.

How can Sikkim guard against such infiltration?

We cannot bring about a change overnight and even though this case is very serious we must not panic and start recruiting more men into the police force to patrol the borders. I am happy with the present strength of Sikkim Police. Police personnel have already been sensitised to the latest scenario and soon we will be sending them for counter terrorism training. We have alerted the district police especially along the border areas like Rangpo, Melli and Reshi. Further, our officers would be visiting these areas to check upon them. While checking we shall see that the tourists receive no harassment. Then the government of India is soon going to form a Indo Nepal border force and they will man the border areas, this would also help check infiltration. We are also considering the setting up of a counter-intelligence wing to monitor any suspicious activity. See, since tourism is such a big industry for Sikkim, we do not want to project Sikkim as a rude host by having policemen screen every visitor thoroughly. We have to look for other options to guard against infiltrations. Like I said, these measures will take time. What we also require is for the people to become more "security conscious".

brought insurgency to northeastern India, but what worries observers is the possibility of the violent Maoist ideology spilling into the State from Nepal. The radical left ideology with its romantic notions of equality is likely to appeal to our hordes of semi-literate unemployed youth and explode in our faces some day.

It is also true that so far there has been no noticeable infiltration by Nepal Maoists. Some alleged Maoists are known to have been in Sikkim in the recent past, but as Sikkim Police officials point out, Nepal government has not yet sent any notices for arrest of wanted Maoists in India. There may have been cases of on-the-run Maoists hiding in Sikkim, but since the Nepalese authorities offer no directives, the Sikkim Police can do little except guard its borders.

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Moreover, it is also a fact that terrorists, these days, are working in close collaboration with the underworld. What this means is that terrorists operating from Sikkim will subsequently attract criminals. Thus, it may not be militancy alone that we will be fighting, but also organised crime - hence the need to be on the guard.

Sikkim, at present, is far removed from the causes and issues which

NOW!

SIKKIM MATTERS

A Civil Service

Many years have passed since a Sikkimese cleared the IAS examination. Frankly speaking, we are not too sure whether any took the examination either ever since the young Sangay Laden, who later met an untimely death, did Sikkim proud by becoming the third Sikkimese to successfully take the civil services examination. Three - that's the number of Indian Civil Servants that the Sikkimese educational system has created in twenty-seven years. There have been none who have enrolled in the Indian Police Service so far (we are talking examination and not promotion here). Compare this with a Bihar, ranked much lower than Sikkim as far literacy and quality of life goes, which has accounted for 26 per cent of the IPS officers in the country in the last decade. While it is an accepted fact that the services are losing their charm with the best brains in the country who are increasingly opting for higher studies or seeking out careers in the private sector, the same does not apply to Sikkim. The number of Sikkimese students pursuing higher education or employed with topnotch private companies is embarrassingly low if not nonexistent. This is not an attempt to make a case on the virtues of a career in the services, but the example is cited to illustrate Sikkim's dismal track record in education as well as the people's mindset.

It's obvious that the quality of education in most schools in the state is woefully mediocre. At best, the schools churn out semiliterates who enrol in colleges along with a chip on their shoulder. Laloo's Bihar cannot possibly be handling education better either - what with all the political mayhem. His State still accounts for 26 per cent of the IPS officers in the past decade. So, it is not just schools that matter, parents in particular and society at large, too, are responsible. The Sikkimese ethos does not promote the spirit of either individuality or competitiveness, both of which are necessary tools for survival in our performance-oriented job market.

It is specially alarming now because Sikkim's largest employer - the State - is gradually shutting its doors on job seekers. Take the number of unemployed engineers and doctors in Sikkim at present, as a case in point. Moreover, this also proves that jobs, such as mentioned above, which were considered safe bets and easy options are no longer so.

So, what can be done now? Much, actually. For starters, the Education Department has to decide to move beyond figures. The quality of education has to improve. In fact, even before the Department decides to start monitoring the private schools, it should start fixing accountability in government schools. Sikkim's teachers are perhaps one of the best paid in the country. The Department should now demand that they start producing the best student's too. Government teachers, popular in the tuition circuit should be taking even better classes in schools where they have the support of better infrastructure. This initiative should be backed with motivational drives to instil a sense of competition among the students. Interaction with professional career counsellors could also help. All these initiatives will of course fall flat on the face if the attitude at home does not change. Admittedly, a generation groomed on handouts would find it difficult to prepare the next for the cutthroat job-market of the new economy. But at least we can try.

In Search of A Story

Work is not easy for journalists wanting to reach beyond the carefully worded information provided in Press releases. A government issued Press release will for example give exact details of funds released for various projects. They, however, remain silent on details on how and where exactly the funds will be spent. Attempts to get these details are frustrating. Officials in-charge of the project at times want a written application and then a sanction from the HoD before they start searching for the relevant files. One wonders what "official secret" they would be leaking if they, say for example, give details on how the crores sanctioned for rural water supply will be spent?

Sex in the Closet

Most of the enlightened world has decriminalised and legalised homosexuality. The debate there has moved on to more sophisticated legal problems involving marriage, adoption and property rights. But India remains committed to its Victorian prudery, now mocked at by its very begetters, and acquired sense of sexual ethics.

The law regarding homosexuality, till date, was a grimly discriminatory penal code formed by imperialist prudes in the mid-19 century, which not only reduced homosexuality to sodomy (carnal intercourse against the order of nature) but also kept up a combination of extortion and brutality in the name of maintaining law and order.

There's nothing more damaging than letting a law remain ambiguous. Justice then comes to depend on the whims and fancies of its distributor. Which is why, with a number of petitions pending, the Delhi High Court has asked the central government to clarify its position on the law against homosexuality.

Under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" can lead to imprisonment of up to ten years and is liable to a fine. Moral revulsion and bigoted embarrassment could use evasion as well as violence as modes of discrimination. The Centre has looked away for years de-

DEEP FOCUS

RANJIT SINGH

spite the issue having been raised by NGOs. But the frightening HIV/Aids scenario has given the matter a new dimension.

Section 377 of the IPC was enacted as part of the Victorian legacy.

Interestingly, there is no law against lesbianism as Queen Victoria denied its very existence! Section 377 violates Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees personal liberty and privacy. It also goes against the spirit of Article 14, which assures equality before the law - a fundamental right. What is most damning about Section 377 is that it does not distinguish between homosexual rape and sex between consenting adults.

The country that handed down the archaic law to India junked it in 1967, while the government here keeps brushing the issue under the carpet. The truth of the matter is that in this time and age, sexual relations between people of the same sex can no longer be seen through the lens of moral ethics or within the purviews of religious dogma.

India will certainly be a happier,

safer and generally more civilized country to live in if it stopped treating homosexuals as criminals and let them get on with their lives as ordinary human beings. What is at stake here is a human being's right to happiness and freedom, to enjoy adulthood without being forced into fear and falsehood by an oppressive social system. Legal reform can only be the beginning of a process of change, which needs to be nothing short of a social revolution.

Homosexual men and women in India need to fight for their legal rights on the basis of something far more positive and fundamental than the fear of disease and death. While the association with HIV/AIDS does afford them some recognition, it also bestows on homosexual activism a joyless quality. It is a fact that homosexuals are a high-risk group when it comes HIV/AIDS. And while 90% of those - homosexual or not - with the dreaded disease have been infected through sexual intercourse our Information and Broadcasting Minister, Ms. Sushma Swaraj has vetoed a number of television ads and campaigns promoting condom use. So, prudishness and bigotry aside, a dogged 'Hindutva' consciousness assure that Indians live and will continue to live in a talibanised ghetto within the contours of a democratic society.

Seven years, 7,000 dead and counting

More than 7,000 people have been killed since the Maoist insurgency began in Nepal in February 1996. A report by the human rights group, INSEC says 5,431 people have been killed by the state while 1,952 people have been killed by the Maoists. These include police, army, security personnel, farmers, teachers, civilians, political workers, civil servants, businessmen, social workers, lawyers, health workers and journalists. Among those listed killed between 13 February 1996 and 13 January 2003, 118 were children. The report, compiled from government and human rights organisations' statistics says 2,514 people have been displaced during the insurgency - the majority from Lalitpur district. However, displaced populations have not been registered in Rolpa and Rukum, two of the worst-hit districts by the Maoist movement. Human rights organisations say the actual number is much higher.

This is how human rights activists comment on the impact of the conflict, ways to minimise the suffering of the innocents, and steps to find a peaceful resolution.

Sudip Pathak, President, Human Rights Organisation of Nepal, and Convenor of the Committee for Facilitation of Peace Dialogue.

On the impact of the conflict: An increasing number of people are trapped by the conflict. We have been campaigning to restore peace, and have been getting the parties involved to give up violence. We don't even have the exact data on the number of people killed, rendered disabled or displaced due to the conflict. Over the last few months, thousands of people have been flee-

ing their homes in the mid-western hills in search of safety and employment. We don't know where they are living and under which conditions, or where they have gone. It is the responsibility of the government to provide them security and create an environment where its citizens can lead a life with dignity.

Krishna Pahadi, Chairman, Human Rights and Peace Society.

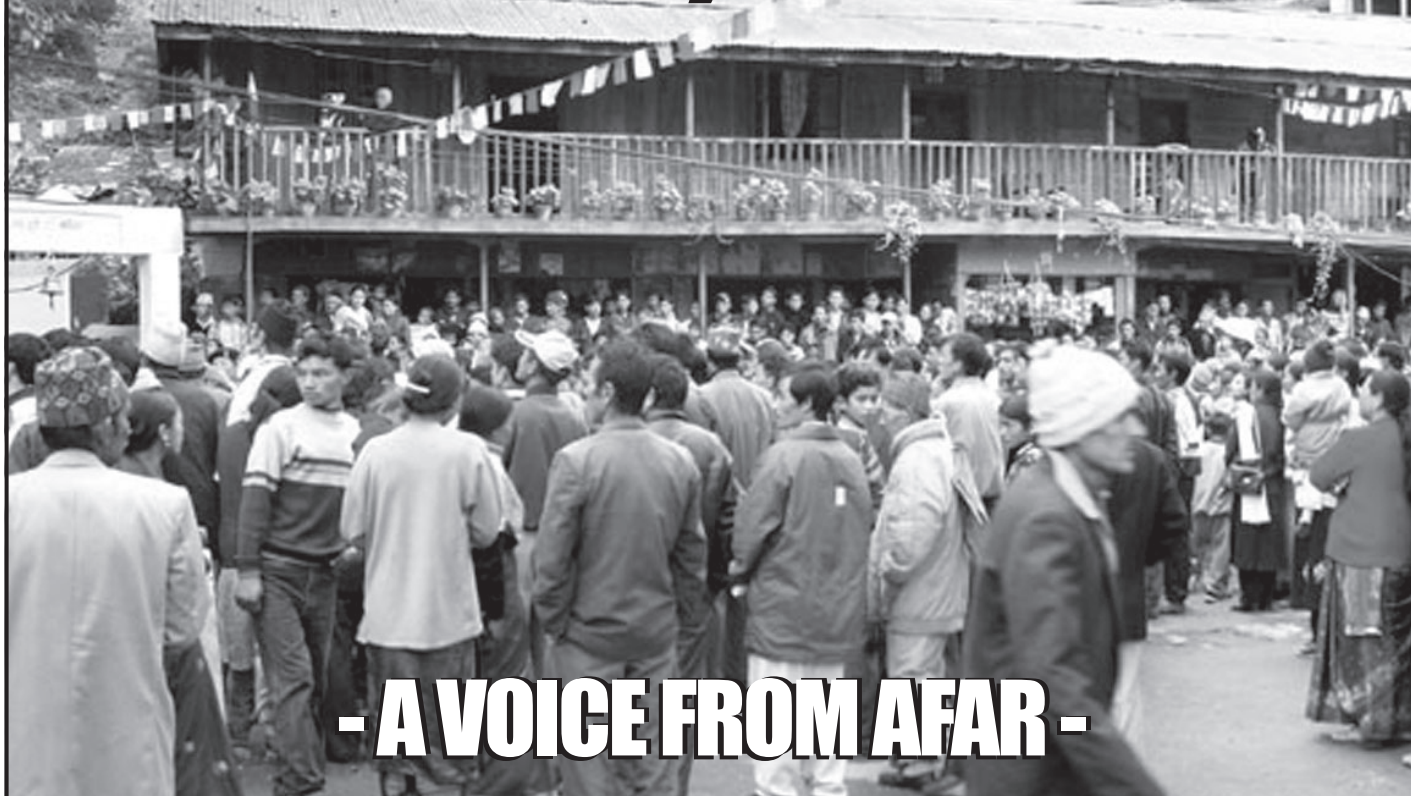
On broader democratic agenda: People's fundamental human rights can't be protected in the absence of democracy. We have been launching peace campaigns in different parts of the country calling for the protection of people's democratic rights. We have also organised sit-ins and "upava" (fasting) to press for this cause. We denounce the government's intervention even in the peaceful demonstrations in the capital and elsewhere.

Kundan Aryal, journalist affiliated to the human rights group, Informal Sector Service Center.

On the Geneva Convention: The Geneva Convention stipulates that civilians should not be targeted during the conflict and that humanitarian assistance should be made available to the injured and sick. But there have been numerous instances of violation of the provisions of this convention by both the parties in Nepal over the last seven years. We have the widespread culture of impunity which needs to be changed. Moreover, the human rights community must warn the parties in conflict that they will one day have to face the International Criminal Court for their gross human rights violations and abuses.

□

ON SIKKIM, OF SIKKIM



- A VOICE FROM AFAR -

KUNDA DIXIT, the editor of *Nepali Times*, the leading paper of Nepal posed the question: Why does Sikkim Work? - in his article in the recent edition of his Kathmandu-based weekly. Then he went on to analyse and study

the reasons why Sikkim worked? He is, of course, studying Sikkim in relation to his own Nepal.

Sikkim that lagged behind Nepal during monarchical days; Sikkim, which is one tenth the size of Nepal; Sikkim, with a population one fourth of Nepal; Sikkim,

which shares topography, culture, traditions as well as ethnic diversity with Nepal; and yet, Dixit wonders how, Sikkim manages to govern itself ten times better!

"Appropriate planning, good governance, true devolution of power and decision making to

elected grassroots councils and an idealistic and accountable leadership," is how he explains it in his article titled "Why Sikkim Works". In other words it is the fruits of democracy along with farsighted leadership that makes Sikkim work, is Dixit's

answer.

Given below are excerpts from Dixit's article. The cynic might scoff and pronounce it psychopancy, but because we rarely appreciate what we have, Dixit's article might offer us an outsiders objectivity.

On Sikkim:

The erstwhile Himalayan kingdom that once lagged behind Nepal in every development parameter is now surging ahead in literacy, child survival, health services and infrastructure. And not just Nepal, Sikkim is overtaking other Indian states as well.

Sikkim is one-tenth the size of Nepal and has one-fortieth our population, and that makes it easier to get results. In terms of ethnic diversity, topography, culture and traditions there is no other place more similar to Nepal. So, theoretically, what works in Sikkim should work in Nepal. But it doesn't. Sikkim's formula is good governance, grassroots democracy, and a strong, visionary leadership. The can-do state secretariat in Gangtok couldn't be more different from the officialdom one encounters in Singha Darbar.

On Chamling:

Chamling exudes the down-to-earth charm of a self-made grassroots leader. He never went to college, and a conversation with him does not go into high-flying political theory or nebulous concepts of democracy. It is about what is do-able, how long it will take to do it, and how much it will cost.

"What the man has is a lot of common

sense," says PD Rai, an engineer-turned-politician whom Chamling convinced to head SIDICO, a one-stop shop to entice investors to Sikkim so new jobs could be created. "He has a group of managers who implement his vision, and he has deliberately staked his political career on the promises he made to the people."

Chamling has no illusions that development is linked to security, and says to his visitors: "Just look at Nepal. The security problem is actually a result of a failure of development, the lack of jobs and opportunities." Chamling's instruction to the bureaucracy is to implement development goals on a war footing.

On the bottlenecks:

Admits one senior government official: "Our biggest bottleneck is the delivery mechanism for development. The bureaucracy is still too laid back, and motivation levels are not as high as we want them to be."

Sikkim's development has always been driven by populist-minded politicians with pork-barrel funds, and Chamling came from that tradition. But he has tried to change course and do it systematically by commissioning economists and sociologists to write the Sikkim Human Development Report released in

2002. JNU professor Mahendra P Lama helped write the report, which is now the state's development blueprint. "There was very poor understanding about the needs of mountain people, and a belief that the same development model will work everywhere" recalls Lama. "This report is completely indigenous and looks at baseline local parameters for the first time and makes recommendations."

Lama concluded that past subsidies were used as government handouts and had spoiled the people by killing local initiative and traditional self-help.

Chamling in the relationship between democracy and democracy:

"I can speak for Sikkim, I think we are developing because of democracy... Sikkim will never develop if we depend on money from the central government. We have to invest in our own human resources, develop their capacity and knowledge. We've just had the panchayat elections. Now, it will be much easier for us to implement our development programs from the grassroots up. We want to turn the Sikkimese people away from being a part of the consumer culture, to become productive citizens. Once we become more productive, there will be more jobs for our unemployed youth.

Chamling on the criticism that his measures are populist:

"You may call it populist, but just because some measures are populist doesn't mean they are not needed. Look, my priority is to meet the basic needs of the Sikkimese people. Call me people-oriented, not populist. And we may be a small state in India, but we are the only state that is carrying out such an effective pro-poor program."

CM on how the insurgency in Nepal is affecting Sikkim and whether there Maoists seeking refuge here:

"There is talk of that, but so far we haven't come across any. We are vigilant about this, and what happens in Nepal has an indirect effect on us. We look at what is happening in Nepal and feel sorry. But we have to ask ourselves, why did the Maoist problem come up? Why aren't there any Maoists in Sikkim? That is because this is not very fertile territory for them. There is little economic disparity, people have opportunities, they don't have to lead a hand-to-mouth existence, there is democracy and enough political space for every citizen. So I am learning from the Maoist problems in Nepal and India. We want to create conditions so they'll never come here. To do that I practice what I preach and we implement our brand of radical democracy.



THE PUBLIC SPACE

VOICE OF A DEVOTEE

VISITORS GALLERY
SONAM ONGMU DENZONGPA

In October last year, two of my close friends traveled all the way from Sydney to India to visit and receive blessings from His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. I met them in Gangtok, visited Rumtek Monastery and then along with my husband slowly made the trip across to Dharamsala. The trip from Delhi to Dharamsala by the overnight bus was uncomfortable for them. It was quite a challenge for us all. We arrived in McLeod Ganj at early dawn and despite the bumpy, sleepless, exhausting bus journey we were overflowing with excitement and joy.

The first thing we did on arrival was to schedule an appointment to see His Holiness. Luckily for us, His Holiness could meet us the same day. We were all taken by surprise – we didn't expect to be given an appointment so quickly. Perhaps it was our reward for enduring the arduous bus ride up the mountains! We dressed up in traditional attire and caught a taxi to Gyuto Monastery, a bundle of nerves and anticipation. Finally, after two days of train travel and one night of bus travel we were about to meet His Holiness.

When we reached the Gyuto Monastery, my friends and husband had to present their passport details. The verifications completed, the men and woman were separated and a body search conducted by Indian security personnel posted there. It saddened me that such a procedure was necessary, but of course we were prepared to do anything to ensure the safety of our precious Karmapa.

After the body search we were all asked to stand in queue and once the signal was given we marched up stairs like soldiers to meet His Holiness.

Once we reached the top of the building, just outside Karmapa's room we took off our shoes and were escorted into His Holiness' tiny room two at a time. My husband and I were last. We felt very nervous waiting outside, our stomachs full of butterflies. It was touching to watch the other devotees leave the room of His Holiness. Some had tears in their eyes and all looked content and happy, it was very moving. Finally, it was our turn. I started to tremble and my eyes were filled with tears. As we entered there stood my Guru in the middle of the room surrounded by Indian security guards and a few attendant monks. As hard as I tried and as much as I wanted to I could hardly utter a word. I'd rehearsed for this moment on countless occasions and had a list of questions a mile long but the words would not come, I was dumb-struck. My tears kept falling – nothing could have prepared me for this moment. His Holiness offered us his blessing along with a protection cord and a photograph. I was the happiest person on earth. Thirteen years ago, I received the oral transmission for my daily practice and since that time have been chanting Karmapa Khanno, calling out to him. At long last I had met my guru. It was like a beautiful dream.

As we departed, although happy, I found myself saddened by the kind of accommodation that His Holiness has been provided with. He has been provided a tiny room in a Monastery which isn't even of the Kagyu lineage and His every move is scrutinized, observed by Indian security. It is heart breaking to see such a powerful spiritual being suffering this kind of treatment and being prevented from undertaking the activity he arrived here to do.

More than three years ago His Holiness the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje left his family behind and risked his precious life to escape Tibet for India. He made this enormous sacrifice so that he could come to this land of the Buddha to be free to practice His religion, continue His studies, and assume His main seat in Sikkim at Rumtek Monastery. Through the cold snowy Himalayan Mountains, along with four devoted attendants His Holiness arrived in India safely on January 5, 2000. On that particular day I was at Rumtek Monastery with my four-year-old nephew attending the forty-day initiation bestowed by His Eminence Gyaltsab Rinpoche. When we were told the news of His Holiness having arrived in India my heart burst with joy. The tears of joy of all His devotees sitting around me sparkled in the sun. The atmosphere was unique, unforgettable. The Monks dressed in special robes, performed a Mandala offering and we were given special sweet rice "Daycee" and Butter tea. I remember thinking to myself, now that His Holiness was in India surely His visit to Sikkim was just around the corner.

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Everyone has an opinion. All of us have a take on things. We all have something that's worth sharing. NOW! offers you the platform to do the sharing. "Visitors Gallery" is space on the opinion/essays page reserved for original essays by NOW! readers. Use it as you please. The essays may however, be edited for length and content. Send all entries to NOW!, Gairi Gaon, Tadong, Gangtok. Or email: sikkimnow@rediffmail.com. The views expressed in this column are the writer's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial opinion of the weekly.

THE NEC DEBATE

This is regarding Sikkim's formal inclusion as a member of the North East Council.

This is also with reference to the debate between Mr. KN Upreti, a former Minister and Mr. BB Goorong, political adviser to the SDF Government. I also clarify here that the following views are not led by my leaning to a particular party in Sikkim, but I am a true believer in preserving the right of the Sikkimese people.

Prior to reacting to the issue discussed by above named politicians, I would like to heartily congratulate our Chief Minister for having doggedly pursued

with the GoI for getting well deserved tribal status for our Limboo and Tamang brethren not only residing in Sikkim but outside the State as well. Much water has run down the Teesta and Rangit rivers since Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union and we have been closely watching the developments taking place in Sikkim economically, socially and politically in the past couple of decades. I tend to agree with the views expressed by Mr. Upreti to say that Sikkim's Special identity as assured to be upheld by the Govt. of India vide the Tripartite Agreement of 8th May 1973 cannot be allowed to be undermined at any cost. It is for the educated youths in Sikkim and the elders alike to realise this aspect and pressurise the politicians at the helms of affairs not to compromise our rights in lieu of the money being poured into the State by the Centre. I am amused by the manner in which our leaders are being taken for a ride by the cunning and smart individuals just to achieve their vested interests. Just because huge amounts of funds are being poured into the State by way of central assistance, soft loans or whatever on the basis of the various projects initiated by the State government agencies whether or not they are viable, for instance a number of SSIs set up during Bhandari's regime (Dalda factory) to name one, we cannot start surrendering our rights.

We know pressure is being slowly applied by the Centre upon Sikkim to accept the enforcement of the IT Act of 1961 in toto. No wonder in his recent speeches, the Chief Minister has started saying that Sikkim will enjoy Tax holiday for another ten years, meaning thereby that after the expiry of ten years from now Central Direct Taxes will be imposed. This would amount to going back against the promise made by the Govt. of India that all the old laws of the former regime would be retained and safeguards provided. There is substance in the point made by Mr. Upreti that by being formally made a member of North Eastern Council our Special identity as provided under sec 371F of the Indian Constitution gets diluted. This is a very alarming situation of which all the like minded people of Sikkim should be aware of the consequences to follow. The Chief Minister must seriously ponder over the entire issue and should not get carried away by the thought of getting economic benefits only on being a member of NEC.

Another area of importance which should attract the attention of the Chief Minister is to convince the Govt. of India about the need to maintain 50:50 ratio in the induction of AIS officers for the State of Sikkim if not go for drastic reduction of cadre posts in IAS/IPS and IFS. The State is today overwhelmed by the AIS officers when there is hardly any work.

A concerned Citizen

NAYUMA'S NOT THE VILLAIN

This is to bring to your notice that a couple of weekly magazines of Gangtok, barring yours, have been circulating information aimed at maligning Nayuma Cable TV operating since 6th June '02.

All such information as feedback for public consumption, however, are false, fabricated and utterly baseless. There is sectarian interest of some vested parties who have aligned themselves with the Sikkim Cable Television (SCTV), which, till advent of Nayuma Cables in Gangtok, had a field day monopolizing the show to the hilt.

We, at Nayuma Cable, are in the fray all right, but we believe in healthy competition. We also believe there is enough feed to satisfy two cables operating in Gangtok without making undue fuss like the chickens do.

To begin with, the uncalled for confrontation had its origin at the rival camp that brooked no opposition. It was unthinkable for the lone cable at Gangtok that a rank outsider from the backwaters of Namchi should so much as make a dent to the domain the rival cable had till then ruled like the monarch of all it surveyed.

The SCTV went to the other extreme to make things utterly difficult, nay impossible, for us to acquire a number of channels, of which Star TV stands out in bold relief. We, at Nayuma Cable, had a tough time running

from pillar to post with the bigwigs of the Star TV. The woes and travails we had to go through with the said channel, if described in detail, would cover several pages to make a booklet.

In spite of all this, we have entered the fray and we are here to stay, come what may. Our job is to entertain our patrons and viewers and to do this end we leave no stone unturned.

The kind of competition we have launched against our fellow competitor, i.e., we believe, more than healthy in that the viewers preferring Nayuma Cables are having a near-free ride paying a hundred bucks a month. This apart, we have also started News bulletins morning and evening as added interest and attraction. Many more items of interest are on the anvil for future programming.

Allegations as printed in one national daily that cable piracy is being indulged in from this end is utterly baseless. We have no means or expertise to indulge in such activity.

We, at Nayuma Cable, believe in winning the hearts of our would be viewers and clientele. We live in an enlightened age and we hold democratic values as our guide. If the Star channels remained blacked out for the duration they did, we had nothing to do with the unfortunate episode. Rather, the episode had been an uncalled for headache for us as well, since our own viewers stood denied the pleasure like those of the other cable providers! But it was no big deal, as the Americans would say. So why blame us?

An act of confrontation has always characterized the approach of the rival camp since the day Nayuma Cables made its maiden start in Gangtok. This has unfortunately culminated into rampant acts of vandalism as on New Year eve between Deorali, Tadong and 6th Mile, where Nayuma Cable has opened a branch office only a few days ago.

On the night of the 31st, the entire fibre-optic cable line from Deorali-Tadong to 6th Mile was lifted and vandalized by goons employed by the opposition camp, rendering a total blackout of channels in the affected area.

To add insult to injury, the patrolling policemen, without any rhyme or reason, apprehended the Cable-line boys on their way to investigate the cause of the blackout. Due to which our services couldn't be restored to the viewers from Tadong to 6th Mile till next day evening.

The cable lines in Burtuk met with the same fate so did the cable line at Nam Nang, Development, Chandmari. All such nasty incidents carried out by the rival camp beyond a shadow of doubt that the rival establishment carries a clout that goes far beyond the pale of authority that runs on democratic line.

Finally make no mistake that we are Sikkimese, born and brought up in the soil of Sikkim; we too have a right to make a living as everyone else, even if we hail from the backwater of Chiya Dara and Namchi. Besides, let us not make an issue of this simply because this Cable enjoys certain privilege that seems, as it were, to trigger a babble of talking points or call it a spate of controversy out of trivialities to make a mountain out of a mole hill. Sikkim is and has always been an oasis of peace and tranquillity. Let us preserve it. There is no place for vandalism, least of the past, so we believed.... (Let us live and let live).

Indra Rai, MD, Nayuma Television

Readers are invited to share their views, opinions and reactions to news-items carried in NOW! The letters may be edited for language and content and the name of the writer withheld on request. Personal attacks will not be carried, but letters raising pertinent issues will be shared with readers. Please mail all feedback to NOW, Gairi Gaon, Tadong, Gangtok East Sikkim; email: sikkimnow@rediffmail.com

Project Clean Up Singhalila

VOICE OF A DEVOTEE

from AMITAVA BANERJEE

DARJEELING: The Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection (FOSEP) have decided that irregular spring cleaning of the Singhalila National Park is not of much use. The only way to do something substantial would require a continuous cleaning project.

The Singhalila National Park is one of the highest National Parks in the world. The highest point of the park is Sandakphu, 12000 ft, one of the best trekking destination in this region which is a major crowd puller, every year.

Sandakphu means "the poisonous hill" because of the poisonous plant Aconite ferox found abundantly growing in this region. The Singhalila National Park is a bio-diversity hotspot with a total area of 78.9 sq kms. It is the natural habitat for rare flora and fauna. More than 20 species of rhododendrons can be found here and it is also the habitat of the famous Himalayan Black Bear.

Frequented by trekkers and even casual tourists, the Park is facing an immense problem of garbage accumulation. FOSEP has decided to rope in the Forest Department and the

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) Tourism Department to work out a permanent solution to this.

Bharat Prakash Rai, Secretary, FOSEP informed that cleaning would be an ongoing process. The garbage would be brought back to Darjeeling, as dumping is not allowed in a National Park. FOSEP has also asked the Darjeeling Municipality's help for the garbage disposal in Darjeeling.

FOSEP will be assisted in this task by local ecological clubs of the region like Singhalila Pariyavaran Suraksha Samity and Sandakphu

Phalut Pariyavaran Suraksha Samity.

"All this needs a lot of money and we have worked out certain schemes to solve this problem" said Rai. DGHC Tourism has already promised FOSEP the use of its huts for office space at the Park.

FOSEP will also sell souvenirs and trekking maps and is also expected to raise a toll fee to generate funds for this project. The entire project will be coordinated by FOSEP, informed Rai. He also added that the frequency of garbage collection will depend on amount of garbage being generated.

Cont from pg 8

How wrong I was. There are still many people waiting, praying that His Holiness will be able to visit Sikkim sooner rather than later. Many of the people who were prevented from visiting His Holiness in Tibet due to health problems and financial constraints are unable to visit His Holiness in Dharamsala for exactly the same reason. I recall my devoted Grand Mother who held on to life for as long as she could, waiting for that special day when she could receive blessings from His Holiness. If only her wishes were answered, she died long before H.H could make it to Sikkim. There are many elderly people in Sikkim who are holding on to life for exactly the same reason.

To date the Government of India has not granted His Holiness permission to visit Sikkim. There is no convincing reason why H.H. shouldn't be allowed to assume his rightful seat at Rumtek. The Chief Minister of Sikkim has made numerous requests to the Prime Minister of India that His Holiness be allowed to enter Sikkim, all of which have been denied. Why? The people of Sikkim have demonstrated their overwhelming desire for His Holiness to enter Sikkim on numerous occasions.

Three precious years have slipped through our fingers and still no one knows when His Holiness the 17th Karmapa will be allowed to assume his seat at the Rumtek Monastery. The charter of the Central Government of India is to serve the people of this land and in this matter the people of Sikkim have clearly spoken. His Holiness is not a political figure; He is our Guru, our spiritual guide and we have waited long enough!

Ex-servicemen wants guns to scuttle Paki plans

from OUR CORRESPONDENT

DARJEELING: The ex-servicemen of the Darjeeling hills have expressed their concern regarding the threat perception that faces India.

SP Pradhan, one of the General Secretary's of All India Ex-Servicemen Action Committee (AIESAC), has stated that the AIESAC has always expressed the view that the pan-Islamic Confederation from Morocco to Indonesia is now beginning to take shape. The major obstacles in the chain are Israel, India and Burma and therefore they are likely terrorist targets.

AIESAC states that in order to look "clean," Pakistan will increasingly direct its subversive operations against India through Nepal, Bangladesh and possibly China.

"We have to take more concrete actions to defeat Pakistani mechanization to destroy India, as Pakistan is increasingly using all its guile to sidle up to the West so that its determined anti-Indian agenda is not challenged or impeded," said Pradhan.

In a AIESAC meeting on the 26th December 2002 at Mussoorie, the importance of giving free license

for arms to officers (1 pistol and 2 guns) Junior Commissioned Officer's (1 pistol and 1 gun) and one gun for Other Ranks was emphasized.

"With increasing threat perceptions to the security of our Nation we think that immediate steps are necessary so that the disciplined ex-servicemen can be grouped together quickly to counter threats in local areas," AIESAC maintains.

These former soldiers have also demanded that the gun licenses be issued for life to obviate the need for renewal. Other issues that were discussed were medical coverage for Ex-servicemen. A new scheme called the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Scheme (ECHS) has been introduced which will be used for augmenting the existing Military Hospitals and for providing OPD centres where 2,500 or more ex-Servicemen can be accommodated. AIESAC has also requested the Central Government to take immediate steps to allot land and provide full compensation to Kargil widows who have not yet received them. AIESAC has also demanded for Indianisation of education but without a religious tag. Incidentally the AIESAC will be holding all India level conference at Darjeeling in March 2003.

Doctor disowns pamphlet

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Pamphlets by their very nature are inflammatory and at any given time there are several in circulation in Sikkim. Rarely do these pamphlets carry the real name of the people behind its printing. One such pamphlet in circulation at present demands that the publisher of a local Nepali daily leave Sikkim.

The pamphlet purports to be printed by "Sikkim Sadhvarana Manch". This pamphlet gives the name of Dr. IL Sharma, MD, Neuropsychiatrist, STNM, as its publisher. In a letter denying his involvement in the publication of the pamphlet, Dr. Sharma has alleged that the pamphlet is the handiwork of "some antisocial persons" who have misused his name.

"I am an overworked doctor and am not interested in such activities. I sincerely urge the people of Sikkim not to get carried away by such pamphlets. I urge my well-wishers, people at large and intelligentsia to find out the real culprits," the Doctor writes while calling upon the Sikkimese people to "save" him from such "defaming" activities.

Sikkim grower bags Spices Board excellence award

a NOW REPORT

Sikkim's Tularam Dhakal of Tumin Namrang Busty was awarded the first prize for excellence in large cardamom production by the Spices Board at a function held at Ernakulum in Kerala earlier this month. The prize, a cash award of Rs. 25,000, was handed over by the Secretary, Commerce, Union Ministry of Commerce & Industry. Two second prizes of Rs. 15,000 each were shared by Madan Kumar Rai, Gitkolbong Busty, Lava, Kalimpong, and Rinjee Sherpa of Lower Gitkolbong Busty.

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STATE BANK OF SIKKIM H.O. 31-A, National Highway, Gangtok, Sikkim CLARIFICATION

In a news item appearing in Column 2, Page 2, 10-16 January, 2003 edition of Weekend Review newspaper, it has been inter alia attributed that State Bank of Sikkim is going to last only till 17 January, 2003.

The State Bank of Sikkim will like to inform it's valued and esteemed clients/customers that this insinuation is totally false, baseless and misleading.

(a) The State Bank of Sikkim is the creation of a Gazetted Proclamation dated 24.06.1968 of the Government of Sikkim protected under the Article 371-F of the Indian Constitution. The State Bank of Sikkim will continue to provide it's services to the Government and the people of Sikkim as it has been doing in the past.

(b) It is for the explicit information of the general public that the State Government of Sikkim has not taken any decision to close the bank as alleged in the above mentioned news item.

There has been a marked improvement in the performance of the State Bank of Sikkim over the last three years and the Bank is in the process of implementing a modernization / computerisation and restructuring programme which will further improve the profitability of the bank and also the quality of services offered to it's clients / customers. The State Bank of Sikkim also takes this opportunity to wish a very Happy and Prosperous New Year to it's clients / customers.

DESTINATION SIKKIM

Contd from pg 5

Paranoia about Maoist infiltrations might only lead us to incidents such as the one in which a Nepal national working as a road labourer in Sikkim was hauled up as a suspected Maoist. It was later discovered that the person was actually a Nepalese cop who had deserted his outpost in Eastern Nepal.

We, in Sikkim, have to be care-

ful against launching a witch-hunt. Severe policing at the check-posts could go against the attempts to promote tourism. The counterintelligence wing being proposed for Sikkim Police, coupled with enhanced "security consciousness" among the people should do the job for Sikkim. Moreover, given the fact that the State needs to provide protection through identification to a mere 5 lakh population, we really have no need for paranoia. At

least not yet.

To reiterate the argument against launching a witch-hunt, Sikkim must always bear in mind its democratic credentials and not prosecute a person just for his/ her political leanings. A person with Maoist inclinations need not necessarily be a Maoist activist. Also, a political activist is not necessarily a terrorist. We have to be able to make out these subtle differences.



DEVELOPMENT

Centre releases Rs. 3 crores for rural water supply

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The Ministry of Rural Development has allocated Rs. 298.50 lakh to Sikkim as second installment under Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) of Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM) during the current financial year.

The total allocation of Rs. 597

lakh stands released with this release to Sikkim during 2002-03. The funds will be utilized for execution and completion of schemes to provide safe drinking water facilities to rural habitations and schools, informs an official Press release.

The Ministry has also released Rs. 2,817.50 lakh for rural drinking water as second installment to Himachal Pradesh under ARWSP of during 2002-03.

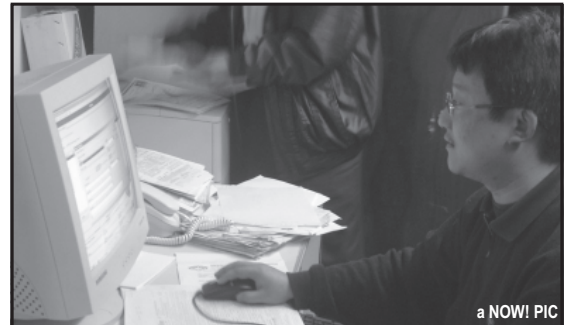
BSNL TARGETS 12K MOBILE USERS BY MARCH A MARKET LEADER WITHIN MONTHS

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited is already the biggest mobile service provider in Sikkim. It reached the top spot within months of its entry into the mobile phone services.

It has at present 3,000 prepaid and another 3,000 post paid mobile users. It hopes to double the total of 6000 in each category by the end of February. This is truly an amazing task as the older player in the market, Reliance Mobile, inform officials at the telecom office has in its five years of operation only managed a total of 3,000 users in Sikkim. Following the February binge, BSNL plans to issue no new connections till December.

The focus on mobile telephony has apparently not distracted BSNL from its commitment towards landlines. It has initiated a couple of novel features for its customers. Among them are access to recorded



a NOW! PIC

Arun Rai, the only employee at Cherry Building authorised to access and update Sikkim's BSNL mobile users database. Arun has had to work round the clock at times when the rush of people signing up for BSNL services was at its peak.

adventure sports details for which one needs dial 1901 (add any two more digits after for outstation calls) and Internet information which can be obtained by dialling 1903. This facility for adventure sports information was inaugurated by DD Bhutia, Minister Health, while that of internet access was inaugurated by

PS Golay, Minister Industries at the Maghe Mela festivities at Jorethang.

Another feature of BSNL services is that it plans to start a door to door delivery of cash cards. Soon prospective customers of BSNL Mobile will be solicited at their homes itself.

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On the Wings of Professionalism

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: On January 20, Minister, Tourism and Land Revenue, KT Gyaltsen inaugurated the Authorised Centre of the Trade Wings Institute of Management at the Seasons Hotel, Nam Nang. Secretary Tourism, Karma Gyatso, Principal, SGC, Dr. Sunuwar, SHRA and TAAS office bearers and other guests attended the function organized by Sikkim Institute of Management and Services. Rajan Dani, Director, TIM flew in from Mumbai especially for the inauguration while Ms. Mangla Tamang, Branch Manager, TIM, Calcutta was also present.

Rajan Dani in his address said he was "privileged to be here" and stressed on the professionalism and career orientation of the courses on travel, tourism and hotel management that Trade Wings offers.

Mrs. Rosiela Gurung, MD, SIMS, in her welcome address, said that TIM was aiming at providing unemployed youth career-oriented courses and creating trained manpower.

After inaugurating the Trade Wings centre here, the Tourism Minister congratulated the Sikkim Institute of Management and Services on their new venture, stating, "Excellent leaders are made as well as born. To be the best one must learn the essential skills of leadership through formal training courses or on-the-job experience. This is where management courses and institutes like this play a big role."

He noted that the biggest resource we have is our human resource and it institutions like

the TIM which provide the training, skills and knowledge, which help in developing the HR by way of trained manpower.

Mr. Gyaltsen said that merely going to school and college did not constitute complete education. Education should include other attributes like the ASK (Attitude, Skills and Knowledge-triangle, adding to it - discipline. "Education to adjust to new technology is a must. One should change with the time or risk becoming extinct," he added.

He noted further that there is need for larger infrastructure for tourism as a service industry, specially that of professionally trained HR.

Mr. Dani, in a one-to-one interaction after the inauguration, said that Trade Wings was essentially making tourism education and newer career options available in Sikkim.

"TIM grooms students to become competent enough to start their own businesses or get into the industry wherever TIM has offices," he said.

TIM has a modular structure with eight modules that students can pick and choose from covering aspects like tourism, travel, hotel management, cargo services and other related aspects. Students can also avail of a transfer facility to any other TIM institute in India. In all, TIM offers 20 courses and boasts of having trained over 25,000 students making it the largest institute of its kind

At 3 PM, Mr. Dani and Ms. Tamang also interacted with members of the TAAS and SHRA. Trade Wings courses will start from February 1, 2003.



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SIKKIM PUGILISTS AIM FOR SUB-JUNIOR GLORY



a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The Sikkim Amateur Boxing Association (SABA) is sending a team of eight boxers accompanied by three officials to participate in the 18th Sub-Junior National Boxing Championship to be held at Kolkata from January 24 onwards. Sikkim's pugilist's have been performing rather well at national level tournaments of late. Last December, eight men and four women boxers of SABA led by Sikkim Olympic Association had participated in the 32nd National Games held at Hyderabad. Of these boxers, four women and six men made it to the quarterfinals and Vivek Ramu Damu had made SABA proud by winning the bronze.

The sub-junior boxers are practising rigorously [pic] at their training facility at White Memorial Hall complex here.

THE BOWMEN COMETH

SIKKIM GEARS UP FOR THE IVTH CHIEF MINISTER'S GOLD CUP ARCHERY TOURNAMENT

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The Sikkim Archery Association (SAA) has invited Gangtokians to witness the IVth Chief Minister's Gold Cup Archery Tournament to be held at Tathangchen grounds from January 22 onwards. The tourney is reputed to be the most prestigious archery tournament in the whole of Sikkim and West Bengal. The winning team stands to take home a cash prize of Rs. 25,000 with the runners up and second runners up being awarded Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 5,000 respectively.

Dr. Ongden Gyatso, member of the SAA informed NOW! that 18 teams have already confirmed their participation. Prominent among the participating teams are those from Bhutan, Darjeeling, Pedong and Todhay. Besides these, teams from all four districts of Sikkim would also be participating.

Last year the archers from Ranka lifted the trophy.

Dr. Gyatso further informed NOW! that the tourney will be played by the traditional rule with players from two teams shooting turn by turn at two targets kept at a distance of about 120 to 130 feet. In modern archery, archers have to shoot at a single target kept at fixed



Sikkimese archers practise at Tathangchen ground in preparation for the IVth Chief Minister's Gold Cup Archery Tournament

distances at 30, 70 and 90 metres.

Players dressed in bakhus shouting to distract their opponents and rejoicing with a merry dance when they hit the target - this is the picture of that one gets to see during a traditional archery match.

"Of course traditional archery is much more fun with all the partici-

pants dressed in traditional bakhus. We are also allowed to sing and dance and make a hell lot of noise and this really raises our spirits," the Doctor added.

It was further learnt that SAA has now started promoting modern archery and is eagerly hoping for good results.

"We have good archers and they are practising modern archery and by watching their earnest efforts and the enthusiasm with which they play has given us much hope. We now expect good news on performance of Sikkimese archers in a couple of years," added another member.

f r o m t h e p u b l i s h e r

Dear readers,

We return now after a break of two weeks. During the interim, we tried to work on incorporating some changes we had promised you earlier.

In case you haven't already noticed, we have clubbed the supplements into a magazine format with NOW! Extra. This section is still a work-in-progress and will come into its own in a couple of issues. We also plan a stronger "Focus" page where immediate concerns will be addressed in a more elaborate manner as is possible only with a weekly.

However, Change is an ongoing process. We will continue to evolve. We hope you will continue to appreciate our efforts.

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