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NOW!

SIKKIM MATTERS

VOL 1 NO 49 □ Rs. 5

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**TURN TO pg 12
FOR DETAILS**

THE COMPANY NO AMOUNT OF PATRONAGE COULD SALVAGE

REFINING THE VANASPATI MESS

The ruling SDF Government, in its first Budget session in 1994, released a White Paper on the financial problems it had inherited. Funds sunk into Sikkim Vanaspati Ltd. were widely publicised, as was the fact that the earlier regime had sat guarantor to even bigger loans availed by the company. The company defaulted on the loans and yet another liability has fallen on the shoulders of the present government. The Cabinet's recent decision to allow a CBI enquiry into the entire Vanaspati mess should now bring new facts to light on why a company so obviously in the red, continued to get State patronage...

TURN TO pg 3 FOR DETAILS

**CABINET OKAYS CBI SCANNER ON
SIKKIM VANASPATI LTD. BUNGLE**

BACK FROM THE TOP OF THE WORLD

NADRE SHERPA'S BACK



GANGTOK: Luck, they say, plays a major part in deciding the fate of a bid on the Everest. On May 21, earlier last month, Sikkim's Nadre Sherpa proved that pluck can turn around a spell of bad luck. Winds on the Everest were the most ferocious when Nadre Sherpa and his climbing partner left to the summit on the midnight of May 20. Tents were being torn off their pegs and the duo even lost some equipment to the winds. They, however, persevered even as all other climbers called off their summit bids that day. After 12 hours of struggle against wind and snow, they had conquered Everest. A second time for Nadre Sherpa, but admittedly, the toughest climb ever.

Nadre Sherpa returned to a low-key welcome in Sikkim. Many Sikkimese are perhaps even unaware of his achievement. NOW! caught up with him and had him recount some of his Everest experience...

TURN TO pg 8 FOR DETAILS

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SIKKIM MATTERS

Taking Over From Nepal

The ongoing ceasefire between the Maoists and the government notwithstanding, Nepal's economy is in the doldrums. An economy which had already been hit hard by the reduction in Gurkha compositions of armies around the world [its highest foreign revenue earner], is now grappling with reduced tourist inflow and abandoned foreign investments. The recent hoopla surrounding the golden jubilee of the Everest ascent was forced more from the need for some positive publicity than debating whether Everest had actually become the most expensive guided tour or not. The mandarins of Nepal are in panic mode. Investors are fleeing Nepal everyday and more are looking for options elsewhere. Travel trade giants, carpet manufacturers, educationists, NGOs, everyone is taking the hiatus in violence as a time to take stock and cut their losses. Many have already left the Himalayan kingdom and still more are on the way out. And, everyone is looking for an alternative. While what has happened in Nepal, without getting judgemental about either side, is sad, Sikkim would be foolish not to fill the vacuum it leaves behind.

Let us see what makes Nepal a popular tourist destination. Its unique mix of Buddhist and Hindu ethos and culture attracts as many tourists as its range of trekking routes. Mountaineering is a big draw and so are the casinos and resorts. Accessibility to Tibet makes it an important transit point and for those looking for a more grassroots experience, rural Nepal is never too far away from the towns. Although we could do with some changes in entry regulations, all these factors are present in Sikkim too. The tourists, we know, are interested in Sikkim, but thwarted by the lack of information on the destination. All it will take to divert a major percentage of tourist traffic bound for Nepal to Sikkim will be the right exposure and publicity at places where tourists normally gather before proceeding to Nepal - probably Bangkok, but that is for the bosses at the tourism department to figure out. But it is not just tourists that can be diverted to Sikkim from Nepal. Over the years, the expat community has invested substantial amounts in trade and commerce in Nepal. With incidents of extortion on the rise, this community is hoping to shift its investments. The same reasons which brought tourists to Nepal, also brought in investments and Sikkim fits the bill as a possible alternative and has the added advantage of peace, something that will appeal to those who have suffered through the prolonged hostility in Nepal. Disseminating information on the benefits that investors in Sikkim enjoy should tilt the balance in Sikkim's favour, but for that, the prospective investors have to be sounded off on what Sikkim has to offer. A seminar in Kathmandu presenting Sikkim as an investor-friendly destination would not only help investors, but also the local policy-makers on what need to be put into place to accommodate foreign investments.

These efforts are neither cost-intensive, nor complicated. Should Sikkim fail, at least it would not be for want of initiative. Tourism was still nascent in Sikkim when Kashmir closed down and the industrial policy unformed when investors fled West Bengal; we are better prepared now and although it sounds rather opportunistic we definitely should seize the day.

Should Khaki Induce Fear?

The Indian Police is of colonial make. The British masters required a force to keep the natives in check. Solving crimes was only incidental to this aim since it helped the rulers keep the troublemakers [and potential challengers of their rule] locked up. Khaki, the cop colour, was engineered to induce fear. It has been fifty-four years since colonial rule ended for India, but the policing mindset is yet to change. The situation becomes even more grave when the police force believes that it is the only salvager of the society's morality. A crack-down on certain social ills might be mandated by law, but civil rights of a human being cannot be trampled upon. The recent beating up of a truck driver in Gangtok by inebriated cops was a rare case, but reports of custodial thrashing and public arrests and parades are common. Cops should realise that democracy is not just about electing representatives of our choice, but also about living with self-respect. Each time someone in khaki treats a person like a criminal even during something as routine as a mobile check, they trample on the person's right to dignity.

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE

"Water - Two Billion People are Dying for it," this is the theme the United Nation Environment Programme has set for the World Environment Day this year. Dr. GOPAL PRADHAN, Senior Environmental Scientist, Department of Forest Environment and Wildlife, points out how each and every one of us can help safeguard our most precious natural resource...

The invocation of water in religious rituals is common all over the country. A person takes a handful of water and calls upon the Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Narmada, Krishna, Sindhu and Kaveri to manifest themselves in that handful. The simple message is of reverence to water as being precious, the basis of sustenance of life and as a symbol of purity.

Water is a natural resource and the fundamental basis of life. Clean water is an essential component of a healthy environment. 97 per cent of global water resources are locked up in oceans and estuaries and marshes making it unusable due to salinity and alkalinity, yet the balance 3 per cent available to us in the form of rivers, lakes and glaciers is ample to meet the requirements of terrestrial and aquatic life-forms. There are still instances when there too much water at one place and a drought elsewhere.

In our country, water is sourced from rivers, glaciers and the ground. All these sources, however, depend particularly on the amount of precipitation through the monsoonal cycle, hence, when monsoons are late or weak water shortage causes serious problems and disruptions of all productive activities. Denudation of forest, loss of top soil due to excessive erosion and severe environmental pollution further aggravate the normal glaciological and monsoonal pattern of the sub-continent. Thus, India despite of her vast network of rivers, faces perennial problems of drought, floods and grossly polluted water resources.

In the context of national scenario, there are large number of rivers in the country which run to a total length of over 45,000 kms. These rivers fall under the following three categories of river basins having a total catchment area of 3.12 million square kms.

MAJOR BASINS: 12, with a catchment area of over 20,000 sqkm each.

MEDIUM BASINS: 46, with catchment area between 2,000 to 20,000 sqkm each.

MINOR BASINS: 55, with catchment area below 2,000 sqkms.

In addition there are a number



of lakes and reservoirs. They account for about 2,125 million md. utilisable water resource. The 12 major river basins, along with their tributaries, account for 85 per cent of the total surface flow and about 80 per cent of the total population depends on them.

The importance water needs no reiteration and for this reason, sufficient Constitutional safeguards of this important resource have been guaranteed by Article 38,39 (b) (c) and Article 48 (a), Article 51 (a) and (g). Furthermore policy documents such as National Water Policy 1987, National River Action Plan, 1994 have already been framed for best utilization of this resource in priority areas such as drinking water, irrigation and hydel power.

Water resource development was also a priority area in the five years plans. In the 4th and 5th plan integrated approach of water and land resources and long term development plans for irrigation were granted prime importance. In the 6th plan, the thrust area under water resource development was towards integrated approach to command area development. Then in the 7th plan, programmes were envisaged towards long term irrigation planning, flood control, prevention of environmental deterioration in flood prone areas and towards water supply and sanitation.

Furthermore, sufficient emphasis has been laid on land and water resources conservation in the National Conservation Strategy and policy statement on Envi-

ronmental and Development under Article 5.2. It is to be noted that an integrated land and water management approach is extremely important to sustain various other activities. The importance of water as a finite, though a renewable, resource must be clearly recognised. Land and water use must be considered together.

Under National Conservation of Natural Resources of Land and Water statement the strategies have been clearly defined for their sustainable use vide Article 1.4 of 5.2.

A majority of the villages in India depend on ground water for domestic consumption.

The vast potential of ground water has either been over-exploited or under-utilised. For centuries people have dug wells for irrigation, agricultural and human consumption. But due to the advent of tube wells and the spread of irrigation and growth of cities, the level of ground water is dropping fast. Irrigation and rural need account for 90 per cent of country's water use. It has now become essential to recharge the ground water artificially. The need for small dams and ground water projects can be built up quickly without causing serious damage to the environment while the larger projects are costly to execute and usually have long gestation periods.

The country, it is estimated, has a total of 1,142 cubic kms utilisable ground water resources and 452 cubic km could be replenished. Our subcontinent is blessed by presence of the Himalayan range which plays a major role in the country's hydrological cycle and guarantees a perpetual water source thereby making the most populated river basin of the country, the Ganges basin as the most fertile zone in the world. There is a need for formulation of master plan for management of water resources based on the extent and nature of Himalayan glaciers; their melt rates and consequent seasonal and diurnal flow of water by melting of glaciers in the state of Sikkim.

In Sikkim, land and water conservation measures have been receiving a fair amount of importance and demands greater importance under both plan and non-plan as the state is completely mountainous with very poor soil fertility and high run off. Out of 7,096 sq km geographical area of Sikkim, 25 per cent is a barren mass covered with perpetual snow and hence all the soil and water conservation is taken up in the rest 75 per cent of total geographical area.

Although different treatment methodologies are adopted by dif-

turn to pg 6



RECAP SIKKIM

CABINET APPROVES CBI SCANNER FOR VANASPATI BUNGLE

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The State Cabinet has decided to "contest the case" and "seek" a CBI "enquiry" into the financial bungling at Sikkim Vanaspati Limited (SVL).

The Cabinet, which met on Saturday evening, took the decision after the Industries Department sought its opinion on the One Time Settlement offered on the loans availed by SVL from financial and banking institutions like IDBI, IFCI, ICICI and SBI.

The SVL debt-burden is some-

thing the present State Government inherited from past regimes when it first came into power in 1994.

A "White Paper on Current Financial Position of the Government of Sikkim," tabled by the SDF Government in its first Budget Session in 1994, revealed that SVL had incurred an accumulated loss of Rs. 10.12 crores against its share capital of Rs. 1.81 crores. The earlier government had even sat guarantor against SVL's Rs. 400 lakh loan from IDBI as part of a revival package which had failed. In 1994, IDBI was already threatening to invoke the guarantee.

The White Paper also mentions a Rs. 2 crore working capital loan to SVL from SIDICO in 1989. Unconfirmed sources contend this to have been an interest-free loan which never got utilised properly.

The SVL was allegedly favoured by the then ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad government paving the way for the huge loans that were sanctioned for it.

Informed sources reveal that a legal case is still pending at the Debts Recovery Tribunal in Guwahati for non payment of the loans by the now closed company. Rough estimates by top offi-

cial sources put the repayment amount in the vicinity of Rs. 30 crores. Sources further reveal that the State Government owned a 49 per cent stake in the company, the rest of which was controlled by private individuals.

Despite the more than hand-some financial package, SVL could never rise above the debt trap and eventually sunk. The State Government, playing the dual role of major shareholder and guarantor on loans is left facing the line

of creditors who are demanding a tidy packet, now that the interest component of the loan has shot astronomically high. Rather than wriggle out of a suit in Debts Recovery Tribunal by opting for the one-time settlement offer, the present government appears to have decided to not crumble under the debt burden inherited by it. At least, not without a fight. The CBI "enquiry," when it comes about, should offer some startling revelations.

From recognition to trade, can Sikkim make the journey?

GANGTOK: The only issue holding back the resumption of trade over Nathula and Jelep-la - China's persistent refusal to "recognise" the 1975 merger - appears headed for a resolution. The right sounds are emanating with officials in Beijing claiming that they had the "political will" to solve the Sikkim dispute if India reciprocates with a better understanding of China's security concerns.

China's linking of Sikkim with its own security concerns is a hint to New Delhi to come up with a reciprocal re-clarification on Tibet and Taiwan. India recognises Tibet as an "autonomous part of China" and follows a "one-China policy," resulting in zero-diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Interactions between Taipei and Delhi have been restricted to trade and economic cooperation. China on its part does not recognise Sikkim as an integral part of India.

More than India, it will be China that benefits with the opening of the old trade route which will bring the Kolkata and Dhaka docks much closer to Lhasa than the present nearest port of Hong Kong. Sikkim will obviously benefit too as the State sitting over the pass, as would tourists and pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar who can now travel to the holy site over land.

These overtures are more than just symbolic and might actually get announced during the PM's June visit to China.

A week of transfers

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The sleepy corridors of the State bureaucracy saw some hectic activity with the administration affecting more than 80 transfers within a week.

Coming in the wake of 25 weekend transfers, were 55 more transfer orders on June 2, Monday for mid and senior level bureaucrats. Among the fresh lot of transfers, 31 are technocrats handling the engineering departments.

The first round of transfers also put officers on newly created posts in the districts and subdivisions, that of the District Planning Officer (DPO) and Subdivisional Development Officer.

Pursuant to this creation, KK Kafley, leaves his Joint Secretary office at the Food Department to take charge as the new DPO for West. Anil Raj Rai, SDM, Ravangla, is now the DPO East at Gangtok. TM Rai will be the new Ravangla SDM while Yashoda Bhandari, deputy secretary (health)

will take over as Namchi DPO.

The shuffle at the more senior level includes the transfer of Additional Secretary, Home, CP Dewan taking charge as Director, IPR, relieving P. Thondup who is now the Special Secretary, Chief Minister's Secretariat. Industries Joint Secretary, PT Euthempa will take charge as the Director of Panchayats under the Rural Development Department.

Many of the newly recruited Under Secretaries have also been posted as Subdivisional Development Officers.

Environmental concern this year - Water

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has called for the preservation of water resources on the occasion of World Environment Day which falls on June 5. Billed as the "greenest chief minister" in the country, Mr. Chamling, in an appeal to the people of Sikkim, has said that this year's World Environment Day theme - Water - Two Billion People are Dying for It - calls for "community participation" in "safeguarding the most precious resource for life on our planet-water."

He has called for various activities at the community level to bring about awareness on environmental issues. "Clean up campaigns for jhoras, natural springs and other water bodies in government and residential premises, street rallies and shows on environmental issues relevant to the community should be organised on this day," he says in his address.

Mr. Chamling also said that tree plantation programme of local species should be also taken up to mark the Day.



Coinciding with the CM's call, the Forest, Environment & Wildlife Department is also organizing a tree plantation season for this year from the first week of June.

The State government has also been advocating the concept of Smriti Van (Memorial Forest) in all the districts with the idea of involving the society at large in nature conservation. Under this unique scheme, any individual or organisation can plant trees on any occasion in the remembrance of near and dear ones in designated areas.

FORMER DGP RETURNS AS SMU VC

GANGTOK: Former DGP, Sikkim Police, LC Amarnathan, returns to Sikkim as the Vice Chancellor, Sikkim Manipal University of Health and Medical and Technological Sciences. He succeeded Prof. Kulkarni on June 1, Sunday.

An MSc from Presidency College, Madras, Mr. Amarnathan started off as a scientific officer with the Atomic Energy Commission, before opting for a life in Khaki in 1967.

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POWER PLAY

Chamling hands over Padma Vibhushan to LD Kazi



From one Cm to another, Chamling hands over the Padma Vibhushan citation to LD Kazi

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Chief Minister Pawan Chamling called on the first chief minister of Sikkim, Kazi Lhendup Dorjee Khangserpa at his residence in Kalimpong on May 27 to hand over the Padma Vibhushan awarded to the 99 year old former CM by the President on January.

The 99 year old stalwart of the democratic movement in Sikkim, Mr. Khangserpa, while speaking to Mr. Chamling and his entourage which included his Political Advisor, BB Goroong, expressed his "honour and pride" on receiving the

country's second highest civilian award. He thanked the Government of India for the honour bestowed upon him and endorsed "full faith" in the leadership of Mr. Chamling, who, he said, had "restored democracy in the true sense in the State."

While congratulating Mr. Kazi on the award, Mr. Chamling said that it was through his efforts and devotion that democracy arrived to Sikkim.

Kazi Lhendup Dorjee Khangserpa was born in Pakyong, East Sikkim in 1904. An initiated monk, he entered politics way back in 1949 and took charge as Sikkim's first Chief Minister in 1974.

PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS UNFAIR ALL OVER THUS FAR, SAYS MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

Congress top brass visits Sikkim, kicks off national panchayati raj plan

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee (I) [SPCC] was sent into a flurry of activity last week with the visit of party high-command top-guns to the state. The visit by AICC bigwigs also harked a change of guard for Sikkim with Cong [I] secretary, Maj. Ved Prakash taking over as the AICC in charge of Sikkim and Meghalaya from party general secretary, Mani Shanker Aiyar. The new incumbent and the departing Cong [I] MP, were both in Sikkim and kicked off their party's plans and policies for the state on June 1 with a panchayati raj convention at Singtam, east Sikkim. All block units, district units and the central executive members of SPCC [I] attended the meet. The main agenda for the meet was to release the 16-point action plan of Cong [I] on panchayati raj.

While Maj. Prakash arrived in Sikkim three days ahead of the convention, Mr. Aiyar flew down to Bagdogra and then drove to Singtam to hold the panchayati raj convention. Mr. Aiyar is also the

AICC chairman of the panchayati raj department.

Mr. Aiyar stated that the panchayat elections held all over the country, specially in West Bengal, have been far from fair since they have been held under the aegis of the State election commissions. Talking to partymen in the State, he assured that should Congress come to power in the Centre, it would hand over the management of the panchayati elections to the Central Election Commission.

The new Cong [I] in-charge for Sikkim told NOW! that the party's last meeting at the Ramlila grounds in Delhi had set the pace for the Congress [I]'s new agenda - focusing on the NDA government's alleged "non-governance" and penchant for retaining "scam-tainted" leaders.

The congressmen have begun with a focus on the block and district level organisations aimed at "awakening" the farmers, youth, dalit, backward classes and women.

At the state-level, after the panchayati raj convention, district level conventions in the form of 2-day training sessions will be or-

ganised by the party between June 16 to July 15, it is learnt. A Kranti Jyot Yatra is also planned from August 9 to 15 later this year.

The thrust will be on grassroots and developmental programmes, Maj. Prakash told NOW! He is also on the panel for programme implementation for north India.

For the SPCC [I], which has been plagued by intra-party bickering of late, it is also time to set things in motion for the upcoming 2004 general elections. Maj. Prakash disclosed that he plans to first get the organisational structure in the state working and then plan the campaign trail.

Pointing out that Cong [I] was in power in 15 states across the country, he suggested that the next government in Sikkim could well be formed by his party

"I see every possibility of a congress government in Sikkim too," he said. "The Congress president Sonia Gandhi is concerned about situation in Sikkim and I am deputed for the task of overseeing activities here. All issues will be dealt once the organisational structure gets working," he added.

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POWER PLAY

UTTAR SE PURAB TAK Uttaranchal Congressmen return impressed

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The Congress government in Uttaranchal has passed a resolution seeking to declare all "Gorkhalis" as OBC in the country. This, the Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee [I] members learnt from the Congress leaders from Uttaranchal who were recently in the State on the SPCC [I]'s invitation to attend the panchayati raj convention held at Singtam on June 1, Sunday.

Visiting the State were the Agriculture Minister of Uttaranchal, Mahendra Singh Mehra and the General Secretary of the Uttaranchal Pradesh Congress, Virendra Singh Bisht.

Apart from touring the State, the two also met the Agriculture Minister GM Gurung. The two counterparts agreed to share hill agriculture research and assist each other in various other spheres in the agri sector.

Praising the State Government's policies like going "totally organic" state and launching of new schemes like off-season vegetable cultivation, the Minister said he will try to implement similar policies when he returned to Uttaranchal.

The visiting hill leaders along with the newly inducted AICC in-charge of Sikkim, Maj. Ved Prakash addressed media persons in a joint interactive session on Sunday.

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- v) Hazardous Waste (Management & Handling) Rules, 1989
- vi) Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989
- vii) Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991
- viii) Bio-Medical Waste (Management & Handling) Rules, 1998
- ix) The Recycled Plastics Manufacture & Usage Rules, 1999
- x) Environment (Protection) (Second Amendment) Rules, 1999 regarding standard of fire works.
- xi) Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000
- xii) The Municipal Solid Wastes (Management & Handling) Rules, 2000.

Projects Completed

01. Establishment of Pollution Awareness and assistance center
02. Study of the Hot Water Springs of Sikkim
03. Study of water quality of 3 revered lakes of East Sikkim
04. Environment Assessment of Urban Settlement
05. Assessment of Pollution and formulation of action plan
06. Establishment of 2 nos of Ambient Air Quality Stations at Gangtok
07. Establishment of new Water Quality Monitoring Stations under National Water Quality Monitoring Programme
08. Implementation of Acts and Rules other than Water and Air Acts
09. Setting up of National Green Corps (400 Schools as Green Army)

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Asbestos- A Killer on the Loose

June 5 is World Environment Day. And since environment includes not just the surroundings, but also its inhabitants (see box for various aspects of "environment" as defined by the Environment Protection Act, 1986), KARCHOONG DIYALI features the exposed conditions under which garage hands work with potentially hazardous materials everyday in Gangtok. What makes matters worse is that they don't even know the risks involved.



SOME DEFINITIONS ACCORDING TO THE ENVIRONMENT (PROTECTION) ACT 1986:

- (a) "environment" includes water, air and land and the inter-relationship which exists among and between water, air and land, and human beings, other living creatures, plants, micro-organism and property;
- (b) "environmental pollutant" means any solid, liquid or gaseous substance present in such concentration as may be, or tend to be, injurious to environment;
- (c) "environmental pollution" means the presence in the environment of any environmental pollutant;
- (d) "handling", in relation to any substance, means the manufacture, processing, treatment, package, storage, transportation, use, collection, destruction, conversion, offering for sale, transfer or the like of such substance;
- (e) "hazardous substance" means any substance or preparation which, by reason of its chemical or physico-chemical properties or handling, is liable to cause harm to human beings, other living creatures, plant, micro-organism, property or the environment;
- (f) "occupier", in relation to any factory or premises, means a person who has, control over the affairs of the factory or the premises and includes in relation to any substance, the person in possession of the substance;
- (g) "prescribed" means prescribed by rules made under this Act.

Let me introduce you to an environment within the environment of Gangtok. Indira Bye-Pass, some prefer calling it the Garage Para of Gangtok, home to some of the best untrained, professional, under-aged and over-aged mechanics and welders in town. Numerous sooted and greased faces sweat out every day in this stretch teeming with garages.

Subsections (d) and (e) of the EPA, 1986 [see box] - **Handling of hazardous substance** - is a daily affair there and I am not even talking about the **environment pollutants** (b) which find their way regularly into the jhora alongside.

One hazardous substance that is handled in abundance is asbestos.

Brake linings and clutches are primarily made of asbestos. Mining of asbestos has been banned in India, but despite efforts by various national and international environmental and health agencies, India is still used as a dumping ground for asbestos imported from countries like Canada and Russia.

Inhalation of a carcinogenic substance known as asbestos results in a hazardous occupational lung disease known as Asbestosis. Asbestosis is a diffused interstitial fibrosing disease of the lung which is directly related to the intensity and duration of exposure to asbestos. Asbestos enters the body by inhalation and fine dust may be deposited in the alveoli. The fibres are insoluble. The dust deposited in the lungs causes pulmonary fibrosis leading to respiratory insufficiency and eventually death by cancer of bronchus, mesothelioma of the pleura or peritoneum, cancer of the gastrointestinal tract. The risk of bronchial carcinoma is reported to be high if occupational exposure to asbestos is combined with cigarette smoking. Exposure of over six months to asbestos is risky as this could result in cancer even after a gap of twenty years.

(source: Indian Medical Journal)

Now, analyse this...

Zafar Alam, 32, is a motor mechanic working at a garage at the Bye Pass who has been engaged in his profession for the last 10 years. Talking to NOW!, Zafar admitted that every time he gets down to clean a brake lining, he experiences breathlessness accompanied by cough.

Old brake linings are rubbed with sandpaper to increase the frictional ability of the asbestos. Nobody, including Zafar, knows whether he will be a cancer patient in the years to come but at present no mechanic is provided with safety provisions required while handling such substances and very few even remember any official from departments which overlook the working conditions and safety measures in the state ever visiting their workplace. "They come to check the licence of the garage though," offers another garage-help, his hands busy renewing an old brake shoe.

Few studies of asbestos-exposed victims have been undertaken and there is no registry for Asbestosis, not only in Sikkim, but in India. Lack of such data makes things difficult for those fighting the disinfection campaign of the asbestos lobby. The enforcement departments, including those of labour and mines, lack the expertise to measure airborne concentration of asbestos accurately. Besides, those in the industry are close to policy makers, which further makes the task that much tougher for those working towards achieving a ban on asbestos. The medical surveillance of asbestos exposed workers

is not streamlined and is not undertaken in a proper manner. One of the main reasons is lack of adequately trained physicians. This also hampers the correct diagnosis of asbestos related diseases specially the mesothelioma. Every attack of Tuberculosis or any other lung-related ailment in a mechanic could have been triggered by exposure to asbestos, but we shall never know for sure.

Another such worker, Mohammad Marguf, all of 14 years, works as a two wheeler mechanic. Although he has still not developed the trademark complaints of breathlessness suffered by mechanics, that still does not rule out some alarming facts. According to the Factories Act, 1948, a child below 14 years of age is not allowed to work in any factory. An adolescent between 15 and 18 years can be employed in a factory only if he obtains a certificate of fitness from an authorized medical doctor. A child between 14 and 18 years of age cannot be made to work for more than four and a half hours per day. Tell Mohammad about his rights and he giggles. He thinks its a joke, reality for him is much different.

The two mechanics quoted above offer only a sampling of the conditions they work in. When asked whether they knew of other mechanics with lung disorders, they mention two of their colleagues who had died last year of TB. Was it asbestos intake which caused it? We might never know, but one look at how they expose themselves to this element makes the entire policing of hazardous substances suspect. They handle the material with bare hands and inhale all the asbestos particles that fly off as they grate it.

Introduction of measures of prevention of asbestosis dust such as wet process, enclosed apparatus, exhaust ventilation etc. seem remote while efforts from NGOs, law enforcing authorities and the owners of the factories seem equally distant too. Personal protective equipments such as goggles, gloves, masks or respirators with mechanical filters with oxygen or air supply sound good only when read in journals and are a practical impossibility.

This is not an attempt to accuse the concerned authority's lapses but just a wake up call to everyone. With organisations like Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI) and International Labour Organisation spearheading campaigns to get asbestos banned all over the country, smaller efforts in the household and community level to educate and introduce precautionary measures against the menace will help the cause.

Here's wishing the entire State a Healthy World Environment Day, and if it's not too much to ask, a healthier environment tomorrow.

Water Resources Development

Contd from pg 2

ferent agencies, unfortunately there is no link conservation and utilization of the resources. A clear link and coordinated approach between these two is an urgent need for detailed perspective plan to cover all the issues relating to conservation, management and development of water resources in Sikkim.

Water resources management in a mountain-state like ours demands an integrated approach.

Considering the decennial population growth of Sikkim it has become imperative for us to reclaim these lands for productive purposes. Species which can help in reducing water loss due to evapo-transpiration and augmenting recharge of ground water must be identified and

propagated and tree and food crop species/ varieties with high water use efficiency chosen.

However, the success of all these programmes depend mainly on the active involvement of farmers and the conservation methods conceived by the local people and the traditional methods which still in vogue should be encouraged and when ever necessary scientifically corrected.

SIKKIM GRAHAMITE ASSOCIATION

Sikkim Grahamite Association is a registered organisation formed by alumnus of Dr. Graham's Homes School, based in the State of Sikkim. The Association formed in 1998, has all along made efforts, to foster feeling of fraternity and good well amongst the Grahamite OGBS, as well as assist the school in all manner possible.

The association in its meeting held on 25th April 2003 has passed the following resolution:

- Members can opt for life membership by paying one time membership fee of Rs. 1000/-
 - The annual membership fee has been reduced to Rs. 100/- from existing Rs. 300/- from the current year.
 - To make efforts to enrol new members by making appeals in local papers.
- All those ex-Grahamites interested in joining our fraternity, may contact the undersigned to enrol as members.

Karma N. Bhutia, General Secretary, Sikkim Grahamite Association
Phone Nos: 229439 (O) 223702 (R); e-mail : knbhutia2001@yahoo.com

REGAP SIKKIM



COME AS A GUEST, GO BACK COMPLAINING

SARIKAH ATREYA speaks to family which had a disastrous Sikkim visit. Their travails are more common than you think and should perhaps prompt a rethink on local attitudes vis a vis the budget tourist...

A summer getaway to Sikkim was a long-cherished dream of Anup Guha* and his family of four.

So, when the mercury shot high in Kolkata, Guha, a clerk with a government organisation in Kolkata, took the Darjeeling Mail last week, wife and two children in tow, and headed for Gangtok on a shoestring budget. Lugging eight huge bags stuffed with woollens, he fended off small-time brokers and checked into a small lodge in Arithang. At Rs. 350 per day, Guha found the lodge with "no geysers, dirty bed sheets, paan-stained walls and no TV" a bit steep but consoled himself and his family that the Sikkim experience starting the next day would make up for it.

Their ordeal, however, had only just begun.

The next day, they arranged with the "travel desk" at the lodge for local sight-seeing. The Guhas were booked for a 10-point trip. A taxi picked them up at ten in the morning and took them to Hanuman Tok, Ganesh Tok, Tashi View Point, Hurlhurey Dara at Nam Nang and Chorten monastery. In less than three hours, the family was brought back to the Motor Stand and told that the sight seeing was over!

"We were told that we would be taken to ten spots but we were shown only five. When we asked the driver to take us to the other five spots, he told us that we had already visited them. He mentioned some names,

but we did not even stop there. In fact, the driver had just pointed the places out from the vehicle. We were not even taken to Rumtek even though it was part of the itinerary. The driver told us that we would have to pay Rs. 250 extra if we wanted to go to Rumtek," lamented Guha while talking to NOW!

A complaint with the lodge's manager proved futile.

Not the ones to give up easily, the Guhas put behind the disappointment and looked forward to the Tsomgo Lake and Baba Mandir trip the following day.

Little did they know that more problems awaited them.

"We had no idea that going to Tsomgo lake would be such a big hassle. The vehicle the hotel arranged for us was a share-cab, yet we had to pay Rs. 850 for the four of us. We were to leave at 9 in the morning but the driver turned up only at 11:30. His excuse was that he had to wait three hours for the permits."

Then, they were bundled up into a Commander with six others and taken to one of the most-sought after destination in the State. After a stomach-churning two and a half hours uphill ride, the Guhas had to fight for elbow room with "hundreds of other tourists at the Lake."

"We faced immense problems in Tsomgo. There were no toilet facilities and the rarefied air, polluted with vehicular emission made breathing difficult. There

were more than 200 vehicles there and hardly any snow. It was such a let down," said Guha.

By 3 pm, the weather packed up and it started to rain. The group was quickly bundled in and driven back to lower climes at a neck-breaking speed.

The travel desk at the lodge told the family that if they wanted to see snow and "some breathtaking scenery," they would have to go to Yumthang in North Sikkim, an outing beyond their budget.

"We decided to come to Sikkim and not Darjeeling since we had heard so much about this place and how it was much better. But we were disappointed. There seems to be no organised tourism here. The travel agents and the drivers quote exorbitant rates and we are at their mercy all the time. There is no coordination with the government. Unless we come on a more lavish budget and with more than a week to spare, its re-



Tourists returning from a "hill-station" wait out a five hour long traffic jam short of Singtam on May 23. a NOW! file photo

ally no point," Guha lamented.

"But we are happy that we saw the Kanchenjunga and made it to 12,000 feet. We would certainly like to come back someday. Hopefully, by that time, things would have improved here to cater to the needs of budget tourists like us. After all, we also add to the local economy." The optimist in Guha refuses to die.

The Guhas have left for Kolkata. Mrs. Guha bought "some woollen clothes and jeans for the kids" and some knick-knacks for the relatives. Guha is looking forward to reimbursing his LTA and is already planning the family's next vacation. Maybe to the beaches of Digha this time.

*Names changed.

Panchayats get more administrative muscle

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: In a bid to delegate more power to the panchayats, the State government has decided to hand over all government institutions like primary schools, primary health centres, Village Level Officer, libraries, community information centres, rural tourism, minor irrigation works, etc., falling under a Gram Panchayat Unit [GPU], to the administrative control of the presidents of GPU.

This was decided in a meeting held in the chamber of the Development Commissioner here on May 26.

However, the GPU president will manage these institutions with the help of government officials in-charge of these institutions who will act as member secretaries of their respective GPU committees.

This decision was taken in

pursuance of the directives of the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling, who said that the GPUs should be "the point of convergence of decentralized administration." The State government has decided that the offices of the president of GPUs would be established without any delay so as to empower Panchayats to prepare, sanction, supervise and implement various welfare schemes and projects for their Units.

The State government has also decided that the Planning and Development department would provide an amount of Rs. 10 lakhs to all the 166 GPUs and Rs. 50 lakhs to the four Zilla Panchayats in the State.

Each subdivision in the State will also have a Sub-Divisional Development Officer, who will assist the GPU president. The GPU president will also be provided with a Rural Development Assistant.

FOUND An original and attested Other Backward Caste certificate of one Binod Subba of Timberbong, West Sikkim. The document is with the NOW! Office and the person may come and collect it anyday.

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FROM-THE-SPOT

Back from the Top of the World

a NOW!
EXCLUSIVE

GANGTOK: Everest summiters might be getting felicitated all over the world and Darjeeling might have gone overboard with its celebration of a successful Everest summit on a golden jubilee year, but the welcome for Everest heroes was rather low key in Sikkim. Nadre Sherpa and Phool Maya Tamang of Sonam Gyatso Institute of Mountaineering, Gangtok, returned to the capital on June 3, Tuesday, to a small welcome function at the institute. This despite the fact that Nadre Sherpa actually summited Mt. Everest along with his climbing partner from HMI, Kushang Dorjee, on May 21, the day Everest saw its fiercest weather this climbing season. His colleague Phool Maya Tamang, arguably the only woman mountaineer that Sikkim has, made it to Base Camp-V, just another base-camp short of the a final climb to the summit.

The SGMI instructors were part of a 15-member HMI expedition to the Everest from the North col. Their climb is special, not just for the fact that it coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Tenzing-Hillary successful expedition of 1953, but that the expedition was one of only six successful expeditions this season from a slew of 25 hoping to make it to the top. Only Nadre and Kushang made it to the top from the group.

THIS WAS THE TOUGHEST CLIMB EVER, SAYS NADRE SHERPA ABOUT HIS MAY 21 EVEREST ASCENT



Nadre Sherpa and Phool Maya Tamang at SGMI, Gangtok, on their return from Everest

An obviously travel-weary Nadre Sherpa, while talking to NOW! upon his return admitted that his latest experience was the toughest climb ever, even tougher than the 1996 Everest expedition when he became the first Indian to summit Everest from the North Col - a feat for which was awarded with a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh by the State Government at the time.

"It was the weather that made climbing tougher. Winds screaming at 90 km per hour forced back more

than a hundred climbers the day we summited," reveals Nadre Sherpa.

Bivouacked at base camp-V, Nadre Sherpa and his climbing partner bore the full brunt of Everest winds as it tore away their tents and blew away some of the oxygen cylinders they had brought along for the final push. The duo started their final climb on the midnight of May 20 and bypassed base camp VI where mountaineers normally halt for rest. Marching onwards on sheer willpower, they

had to even grapple with winds blowing away the valve controls of the oxygen tanks they had with them. These valves, it might be mentioned here, are necessary when climbing at such high altitudes, not only to conserve the scant supplies, but also regulate oxygen intake, too much of which can also prove fatal on Everest.

Nadre Sherpa made the climb even more challenging when he decided against using Sherpas to lay the ropes beyond base camp V. He rigged his climbing aids himself, a rare practise among mountaineers, who leave everything else apart from the actual walk to Sherpas.

Talking about his induction into mountaineering, a modest Nadre Sherpa, who hails from Padamchen in east Sikkim, admitted that he was never interested in studies and quit after class VIII. The lure of the mountains was always strong and soon he started trekking in Darjeeling and went on some minor expeditions. Never having undertaken any formal training, Nadre Sherpa is a completely self-taught expert on mountaineering. His first major climb was Mt. Bhagirathi in the Garhwal hills. His success there earned him an instructors post at HMI, Darjeeling. It was during the

Khangchendzonga Parikrama expedition of 1992 that he met the Director of SGMI at Bakhim and took up the offer to teach in Gangtok.

Although his latest climb was the most demanding, Nadre Sherpa admits that his most exhilarating expedition was the one to Mt. Negi Kangshang, the highest peak in Arunachal Pradesh. "The view from the top of Negi Kangshang was simply breathtaking. It is definitely my most memorable climb," he said.

A prolific climber who has scaled almost all challenging peaks in the Indian Himalaya, Nadre Sherpa, after his two successful ascents of Everest has no personal ambitions left to achieve. "I will head for any expedition that my institute directs me to," he said instead.

Surely, after he has rested on his latest laurels, the mountaineer in Nadre Sherpa will make him seek out another peak to conquer.

His SGMI colleague and member of the latest Everest expedition, Phool Maya Tamang, however, has more immediate plans. She has been selected for an All India Women Expedition to Mount Argam Khangri in Ladakh next month. She leaves on July 1, 2003.

When asked to share her Everest experience, she said it was "simply thrilling" and admitted that she was disappointed that foul weather limited her ascent to base camp V. "I continue to nurse a desire to summit Everest one day," she adds.



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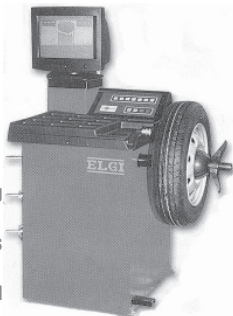
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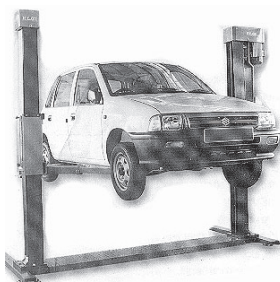
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DESPATCHES

Robi-Babu, Tenzing Norgay's friend, philosopher and guide

from **AMITAVA BANERJEE**

DARJEELING: While the spotlight of the world was focused on Tenzing and Sir Hillary, Rabindranath Mitra watched from the sidelines. It brought back fond memories.

The 87-year-old Rabindranath Mitra, has always preferred to stay out of limelight with the multitude not knowing of his enormous contribution towards mountaineering and upliftment of the Sherpa community. Not many know, for example, that had not given the Tricolour to Tenzing Norgay, it would not have fluttered on the top of the world on May 29, 1953 when Everest was first summited.

"I saw Tenzing packing his rucksack the day before he was leaving for the Everest expedition in 1953. He was packing in the Nepal, British and the UN flags and I told him to take along the Indian flag also. Since we could not get hold of a small, triangular flag, preferred by mountaineers we gave him a 2ft by 3 ft flag," recalls Mr. Mitra.

Called "Robi-Babu" by Tenzing Norgay, Mr. Mitra went on to become a friend, philosopher and guide of him.

Recollecting the months preceding the 1953 John Hunt expedition, Mr. Mitra reveals that Tenzing was not keeping in good health and his wife, Ang Lhamu, was adamant that he did not leave

Darjeeling again. Tenzing Norgay, was equally determined to be a part of the expedition.

"Tenzing sought my help and I went and coaxed Lhamu to allow him to go even assuring her that if anything happened to Tenzing I would support the family," Mr. Mitra told NOW!

He recounts the day when news arrived that Tenzing and Hillary had conquered Mt. Everest: "The news was suppressed and the broadcast was done on the June 2, the day of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth."

The delay notwithstanding said, it was celebration time and it was providential that Mr. Mitra ran into Jana Kavi Dharmaraj Thapa. "Sitting at Dilkhush Cabin, the Kabi composed the ever popular song on Tenzing. He tuned it and we got hold of Municipal Boy's School students to sing the song to Tenzing's family to commemorate the great victory," reminisces Mr. Mitra.

He also contributed the passage money for Tenzing's wife and daughters, Pempem and Nima, to meet their father at Kathmandu on his return from Everest. Tenzing never forgot his friend, philosopher and guide. It was the beginning of a long journey of camaraderie. Mr. Mitra recollects in 1954, when Tenzing was invited by Explorers Club of New York, he wanted to take Mr. Mitra along and when the Club was hesitant to bear the added expenses, Tenzing curtly

declined the invitation.

Mitra's contribution towards HMI is also not known to many. He is the one to have written to Late Dr. BC Roy, the then Bengal CM, requesting for an Institute for promotion of mountaineering and to keep Tenzing's name alive. Dr. Roy in turn brought this to the knowledge of Late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and thus the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute was born in 1954.

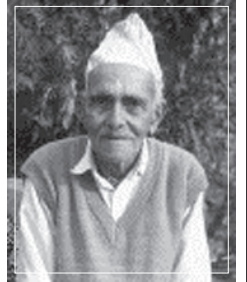
It was quite rare for a Bengali Babu of those days to have such good relations with a simple Sherpa. Mr. Mitra became close

to the community when work for his Nepali magazine "Saathi," published from Darjeeling took him to Sherpa homes frequently. That is how he met Tenzing Norgay. Soon the bond grew.

"I even removed the British patent over the Sherpas," claims Mr. Mitra. Earlier, Sherpas could only be hired for expeditions through the Himalayan Club. "It was as if Sherpas were patented to the Himalayan Club. We broke this and started our own Sherpa Climbers Association," he recounts.

Hardly any new generation Sherpa has ever heard of Rabindranath Mitra or of his contribution towards their community. He now lives in an apartment at 2 Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri, with his wife.

*Anthyesthi
Kriya*



Our beloved daddy Shri Bedhnidhi (Pokhrel Kancha) left for heavenly abode on Wednesday the 28th May 2003. Pokhrel family thanks all friends and well wishers for their presence & consoling in the last voyage.

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DEVELOPMENT

MOBILE CONVERSATIONS NOW POSSIBLE UP NORTH



by SARIKAH ATREYA

MANGAN: The North District has now come under the mobile telecom network. The launch of BSNL mobile services is being seen here as a major step towards bringing together the otherwise inaccessible and far-flung villages of the district.

Although mobile services

were started a month back, BSNL formally launched its mobile services for the North District here on 29 May. Area MLA and Power Minister, Hissey Lachungpa, who launched the service, said: "The North District has the most difficult and inaccessible terrain in the State. Telecommunication has made life much easier for us. The

mobile service will now ensure that the district stays well connected with at least Gangtok."

Mr. Lachungpa said that it was due to the persistent efforts of the district and the telecom officials that mobile services have finally reached the remote corners of the State.

"Mangan is not only the large cardamom capital of the world, it is also the gateway to North Sikkim. Mobile connectivity will mean that farmers can find out the latest market rates for cardamom right from their fields," he later said, addressing a function held at the district administration office.

He further suggested that the mobile network should be extended to cover Lachen, Lachung, Chungthang and Yumthang, which are still not fully connected by land-line telephones.

"The large number of tourist who come to these remote places would greatly benefit from the mobile services. This way, the local economy will also benefit," he said.

He commended the efforts put in by the officials and staff of the Telecom department in upgrading and maintaining telecom services in such difficult terrain.

The Minister however insisted that the services provided be "good" and not plagued by frequent disruptions. He also asked the department to issue SIM cards soon to the new subscribers.

Mr. Lachungpa made the inaugural call to the Chief General Manager, BSNL at New Delhi. Speaking to the CGM, Mr. Lachungpa expressed hope that BSNL would provide quality service in the District. He also asked the BSNL chief to provide more connections to the district.

The BSNL mobile services would cover Mangan and its surrounding areas, Hee-Gnathang and parts of Dzongu in the initial phase. The General Manager, BSNL Sikkim, telecom officials, the District Collector, North, and officials from the District Administration were present on the occasion.

Sikkim's performance at CBSE falls, scholarships improve

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: On May 31, the CBSE results finally reached the Education Department and the results this year have been only marginally different from last year. The "official" results declare that only 42 per cent managed to get through in the class X exams, three points lower than last year's pass average of 45 per cent.

The class XII students from the CBSE's All India Senior Secondary Education (AISSE) have fared much

better than the class X students with a pass percentage of 74 per cent.

A total of 3,992 students appeared for the class X exams, of which only 1,678 managed to get through. In class XII, 1,891, of the 2,579 students who had taken the exam, passed.

The vocational stream continued to get excellent results and did a repeat of last year's "cent-per cent" pass percentage. The Humanities stream came second with 79 per cent qualifying for college admissions with Commerce students following close behind with 73 per

cent. Science students with a total pass average of 52 per cent fell below last year's 57 per cent mark.

In another development, the State cabinet, on Saturday, approved a "raise" in scholarships for merit holders. The hike of over hundred per cent has been specifically targeted for post-graduation courses.

Scholarships have been enhanced from Rs. 800 per month to Rs. 2,000 for those pursuing higher education in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, English, Economics, Statistics, M.Ed., M.

Com. and B.Ed and from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 2,500 per month for M. Phil and Ph.d.

The Cabinet has also decided to enhance merit scholarships for students scoring more than 70 per cent in the class XII exams. This has been raised from Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,200 plus reimbursements. However those who scored below 70 per cent per cent but still managed to get honours courses in colleges can also avail the scholarship, the Minister Education, RB Subba assured while talking to NOW!

ECOSS COMPLETES 3 HECTIC AND FRUITFUL YEARS

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The 3rd Annual General Meeting of the Eco-tourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS) was held here on May 24.

ECOSS has been promoting the concept of ecotourism through sustainable development in the State as well as the entire Himalayan region for the past three years. Its main objectives is to work towards developing and promoting Sikkim as an ecotourism destination and to ensure that ecotourism has positive and beneficial linkages for the marginalised mountain communities through the forging of ties with other national and international ecotourism and conservation organisations.

PD Rai, Chairman, ECOSS, said that the organisation has been working hard to build both partnerships and relationships with different organisations within the government and outside in order to find a "greater synergy" in its operations.

He said that ECOSS was born out of the need for greater ecotourism products in the State.

"We felt that we had to have a model for tourism development in the State that was different from that of Darjeeling, since we were a relatively new entrant in the sector," he explained.

"The year 2002-03 has been one of trying to carve a niche for ourselves in the development sector. Much effort has been put in gathering the momentum of substantive work that has propelled our activities forward. We have completed a series of projects both local and global and more are in the pipeline," Mr. Rai added.

In retrospect, ECOSS feels that time has come to rethink its views on the threats on the fragile environment and sustainability in the changing global scenario, and the threats posed by man's own actions.

"We are committed to ensure that ECOSS stays around to make more powerful noises to stop wanton destruction of our forests and natural capital and ensure that the locals are part of the processes that make up the tourism industry," Mr. Rai said.

The executive secretary, Renzino Lepcha, in his annual report on the activities of ECOSS, said that the year 2002-03 has been "hectic and fruitful" with more than 20 projects undertaken. The year began with the International Year of Mountains conference in Yuksam in West Sikkim in April 2002, in association with the World Mountain People Association. Besides, ECOSS has been providing consultancy services to various foreign delegates and organisations from AUSAid, UNDP, Nepal, Bhutan and Vietnam and to various organisations from Kalimpong and Nagaland.

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BUSINESS

Citizen's Bank out to woo Traders

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The Citizen's Urban Cooperative bank held a meeting with the members of the Lal Bazar Traders' Association at the Lal Bazar shopping complex on May 29. N R De, the Managing Director of the Cooperative bank informed the gathering about the Sikkim Janata Deposit Scheme or the Daily Collection scheme which can be opened by anyone above

the age of 10 years. "No bank has ever launched this scheme in Sikkim. Starting with Rs20 you can go up to any level and anybody can withdraw their money anytime or take small loans against the amount deposited," said NR De.

He further added that under this scheme customers are not required to visit the bank for making the deposits. The bank employees themselves would collect the deposits from their doorsteps.

Identity cards would be issued to these bank employees in order to avoid impersonation. "While withdrawing money interest would not be charged, however, some service charges would be deducted," added the MD.

The MD further stated that their bank is specially meant to serve the lower and middle-income groups. The bank also offers additional interest at 0.5% on fixed deposits to senior citizens and women customers. Mr YT Namchu, Marketing Executive of this bank further told NOW! that nine members of the Lal Bazar Traders' Association opened up an account for this daily collection scheme.

Digital Copiers ready to copy

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Gestener (India) Ltd. in association with Kiran Electro Copiers, Gangtok organised a Road show specially for the 'jobber' segment at MG Marg for its Digital Copiers and Multifunction Devices including Colour copiers on May 26

and 27 at Kandoi Building here.

While talking to NOW! Prithvish Bose General Manager East, said that because of Sikkim being a quality concerned market, that the Gestener Company was here to provide all that Sikkimese need. He also mentioned that Gestener (India) Ltd was a subsidiary of NRG Group, London and part of the 14 Billion dollar RICOH group of companies, and that they set up their Indian operations in 1924. Gestener has major plans for the state of Sikkim and as part of its efforts has tied up with M/S Kiran Electro copiers to strengthen its marketing and service set up in the state.

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Kutse Shegu
The 49th Day Kutse Shegu of Late Mrs. Phigoo Bhutia who left for her heavenly abode on 28 April 2003 falls on 16 June 2003. All friends, relatives and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Old Children's Park, GtK. We would also like to thank all those who extended their help during our hour of bereavement.
Sonam Phintso (son)
Tashi Doma (daughter)
nephews, nieces & grand children.

Lochog
The first anniversary "Lochog" of late Venerable Chemed Rinzing Rinpoche, (Prof. C. R. Lama) falls on 4 June 2003 and will be held at Khordang Gumpa, Dhansara Village, near Ranidanga, SSB Camp, Silliguri. He was the traditional holder of Khordong lineage of Changder order (Tradition of the Northern Treasures). He was also the direct reincarnation of venerable Nuden Dorjee and venerable Kalden Lingpa respectively. He served as the Head of the Department for Indo-Tibetan Studies at the Vishva Bharati University at Shantiniketan in West Bengal, for many years. All devotees and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers to the departed soul, on the above date and venue.
Mrs. Sangay Doma (wife)
D.M.R. Lama & Ugen C. Lama (sons)
Mrs. Norzin Lhamu Lama & Mrs. Nise Lhamu Lama (Daughters)
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2. The BR for the same should be drawn in favour of Accounts Officer, Building & Housing Department under Revenue Head 1159-80-800-11
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Chief Engineer
Building & House Department
Release Order No: 27/IPR/03-04
Dt: 31.05.03

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Responsibility : You are responsible for Client/Customer relationship and person management. Business partner relation & Logistic management.

Required Skill : You should be female graduate with knowledge of customer relation management, supply chain management, Business intelligence, excellent communication and relation building skill are prerequisite. You should be below 25- Years of age.

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*Part-timer can also apply.

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RECAP SIKKIM

BAICHUNG DRIBBLES BACK INTO EAST BENGAL

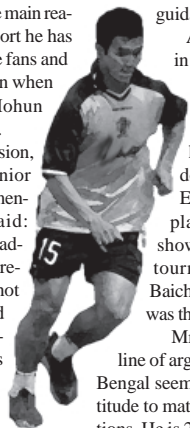
"It feels good to be back", Baichung said, while speaking to NOW! from Kolkata, just ahead of his signing with old club East Bengal for the upcoming season.

It's a homecoming of sorts for Bhaichung who launched his footballing career with the red-gold jersey of East Bengal. Completing all paperwork on Tuesday June 3, Baichung ended months of speculation over which club he would finally join.

Asked why he chose to return to East Bengal, Baichung said that the presence of coach Subhash

Bhowmick was one of the main reasons apart from the support he has always received from the fans and members of the club even when he played for rivals Mohun Bagan in the last season.

Welcoming the decision, Karma P. Bhutia, a senior government officer and mentor to Baichung said: "Mohun Bagan is in an administrative mess. Team relation in the club is also not up to the mark. I advised Baichung to look for another club. I think he has taken a good decision. Subhash Bhowmick is an excellent coach and Baichung will benefit from his



guidance." Also tilting the balance in East Bengal's favour was Baichung's insistence on seeking bigger challenges. His skills have already outgrown domestic football and East Bengal's ambitious plans to make a good showing at international tournaments convinced Baichung that his old club was the one to be in.

Mr. Bhutia, supports this line of argument and says, "east Bengal seems to have the right attitude to match Baichung's aspirations. He is 27 at present and strikers peak between 28 to 30 years of

age. It was important for Baichung to sign with a club which would help him attain his best."

Although signed with East Bengal, the option of joining a European club remains open. In fact, one of the clauses in Baichung's latest contract with East Bengal specifies that he be released should a European club call him up for trials. This could happen sometime in August-September.

About the reasons why he turned down the offer from Singapore's Wellington Woodlands soccer club, Baichung admitted frankly that the money they offered did not excite him.

At the moment, however it is the ASEAN tournament which is

foremost in his mind.

What of the injuries that he's been plagued with all of last year?

"I took a long break and am fully recovered now," he said.

Mr. Bhutia, who kept a close watch on Baichung's fitness regimen during his sojourn in Gangtok adds: "Baichung has been training hard for trials in Europe. Although his endurance level might be only 70 per cent by European standards at present, he is more than fit for the domestic circuit. A few good matches and he will be gunning on all cylinders."

That's reassuring. It has been a long time since the Tinkitam Express grabbed the sporting headlines with his antics on the field.

Sub Juniors bring back medals

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The 13 member contingent from Sikkim have returned home after participating at the 21st Sub Junior National Taekwondo Championships held in Kanteerva indoor stadium, Bangalore between May 23 and 25.

The contingent have returned with four medals for the State.

Sabita Sundas (pic alongside) of Mt. Deepam School and Biren Pradhan of T.N.S.S.School brought honours for Sikkim bagging a gold medal each in their respective categories thus becoming the new Sub Junior National Champions. Birju Pradhan also of Mt. Deepam School and Pritam Thapa of Sichey government school bagged silver and bronze medals respectively in other categories.

Chief Coach cum instructor Sikkim Amateur Taekwondo Association, Tirkok Subba told Now! that they had expected three gold medals for Sikkim after the arduous training sessions. "It is a great achievement for Sikkim, the tini-



est and least populated state to produce two national champions", he added.

The coach lauded the initiatives taken by the chief minister to extend the Dojang at the gymnasium hall for coaching the taekwondo trainees. SATA has also appreciated its gratefulness to Mr VB Pathak, Secretary Sports and youth affairs for his cooperation towards the renovation of the hall.

He also said that the members of SATA were grateful to Mr Shanti Kumar of Sports Authority of India (SAI) Namchi for providing mats, which made a big 'difference' during practice sessions.

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