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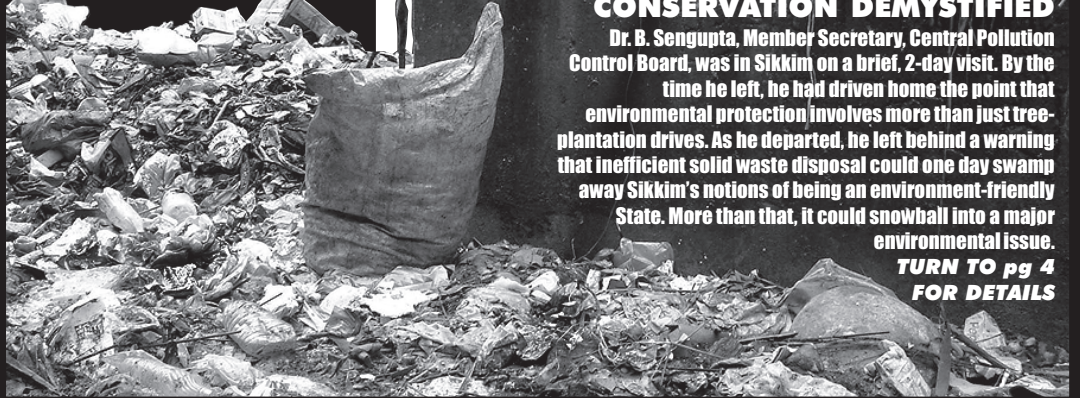
WE ARE 1

We are now a year old. Since the first issue of NOW! hit the newsstands on June 05 last, we have seen many changes. We have lost the red, seen three different sizes, lost colleagues to other professions, converted others to journalism, struggled against power cuts, computer crashes, financial deadlocks, got into scraps over what we decided to print and how we printed it. Along the way, we managed to put out some wonderful issues and also shared blame on some absolute disasters. Only two things remained consistent - the support of our readers and our commitment to all matters Sikkimese. Our mistakes were tolerated and successes celebrated. We couldn't have asked for anything more. Thank you...

- editor

GARBAGE

A PROBLEM THAT COULD SWAMP SIKKIM AWAY



CONSERVATION DEMYSTIFIED

Dr. B. Sengupta, Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board, was in Sikkim on a brief, 2-day visit. By the time he left, he had driven home the point that environmental protection involves more than just tree-plantation drives. As he departed, he left behind a warning that inefficient solid waste disposal could one day swamp away Sikkim's notions of being an environment-friendly State. More than that, it could snowball into a major environmental issue.

TURN TO pg 4 FOR DETAILS

THE BATTLE AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE

STILL AWAITING THE RIGHT DOSE



TURN TO pg 3 FOR DETAILS

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SIKKIM MATTERS

Talk Filthy

The five UD&HD garbage collection trucks empty Gangtok of some 20 tonnes of garbage everyday. These trucks have a limited beat and no one has done a serious study on how much waste Gangtokians conveniently tip into neighbourhood jhoras. There are also areas where waste just accumulates until it becomes a health hazard. While steps are taken when waste reaches such threatening volumes, the impact of untreated waste on the water-bodies [and jhoras are one] seldom elicits much concern. The recent admonishing of the waste disposal system of Sikkim, with emphasis on Gangtok, by the Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board, should be taken seriously. His advice not to go the Darjeeling way cannot be ignored, but more than the concerned department, it should be the people who react. React and change. Although the Urban Development & Housing Department could still improve on its garbage disposal system, disposal comes in only after generation. And, it is the people who generate the garbage. Many would be surprised at how effective simple efforts at "reducing, recycling and reusing" can be. Such informed measures are not so much about reducing the garbage generated as they are about making people aware of the toll they exact on the environment they survive on. A simple tour of the jhoras along the Indira Bypass, backed by a detailed talk on how plastics choke land and water-bodies should make anyone more conscious about lobbing a plastic bag full of waste into the jhoras. To blame the department would be immature. It has never been taken to task by the people themselves. Nowhere is the absence of an NGO culture or a civil society more acutely felt than in the waste disposal scenario of the State. There is just not enough information being shared on the extent of pollution in Sikkim nor enough pressure being exerted to ensure any semblance of environmental accountability in the society. Only after the society accepts that something needs to be done can the department step in and offer the solutions. Legislations alone cannot save the day. The continuing use of plastic bags and dumping at jhoras despite laws "banning" them being a case in point...

Huff Over A Puff

For the first time in its over 50-year existence, the World Health Organization has got the global community to agree on a legally binding, common, minimum agenda for a public health commitment - a tobacco-free world.

Last month, more than 190 countries approved the first ever international treaty against smoking, including an advertising ban, aimed at breaking a habit that kills nearly 5 million people a year. The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, obligates signatory countries to fighting the devastating consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure.

A framework convention is an international legal instrument governed by international law, but individual nations must then take it on and adapt it to their own constitution and laws. The draft text is impressive in the range of issues it addresses. However, the fine-print reveals that although signatory governments are committed on measures they ought to take, there are very few conditions that they are actually obliged to implement. This could be due to the tremendous pressure from the tobacco industry to dilute the provisions of the initiative.

India will now have to work out how to tackle the medical, economic and legal commitments required by this convention. Taxing tobacco products prohibitively, increasing restrictions on adver-

DEEP FOCUS

RANJIT SINGH

tisement, sponsorship and promotion of tobacco, banning smoking in public areas and clamping down on tobacco smuggling are some of the key elements in this global endeavour to reduce tobacco consumption and related mortality and illnesses.

The Indian Tobacco Control Bill, awaiting the presidential nod is far too lax even in its final form. There is no provision for health warnings in local languages for cigarettes, which are increasingly becoming popular among the rural population. There is also no curb on sale of individual cigarettes, which makes access for minors easier. Although a comprehensive ban on advertising and sponsorship has been proposed, it is a matter of conjecture as to what extent the government is actually able to implement the law. A comprehensive ban on smoking in public places was passed by the Supreme Court more than a year ago but it still remains to be implemented effectively.

Prevention activities at school and college levels will fail to have an impact if they are not simultaneously accompanied by community-based measures. The activities, which as of now essentially

aim at health communication, would be futile unless core issues that pressure youth to take up smoking, like stress, peer pressure and gender relationships, are not addressed. Messages on adverse health effects must focus on immediate concerns for the youth, such as the increased risk of impotence for boys and facial wrinkles for girls.

Cessation activities that enable smokers to quit need to be given due importance. Medicines, counselling and a supportive environment have to be ensured. Facilities for quitting have to be made easily accessible in all major hospitals. As the fitness movement gathers momentum, a smoke-free life has to be integrated with physical activity and dietary modification.

The war against tobacco has to be fought on several fronts. Unfortunately, the public health approach to the complex problem is hinged on the information dissemination campaign that cannot, on its own, deliver the desired results. There is need for a multi pronged approach, which focuses on supply curtailment, prevention and cessation besides advertising, legislation and taxation. The hazards imposed by passive smoking need to be extensively studied in the Indian context.

In relation to tackling the most difficult health issues of our times, we have arrived at the critical juncture. We must now decide which way to go.

The then Chief Minister of Sikkim NB Bhandari sent shock waves through the Union Capital with his "no seat-no vote" stand taken publicly on the seat reservation issue. He eloquently voiced his demand for the restoration of seats reserved for the Sikkimese Nepalese in the State Assembly, which was taken away during the Janta Government in 1979. He has said that if there was no reservation there will be no election in Sikkim.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been soft-peddling the issue since her return to power. When asked during her Sikkim visit what the centre was planning to do about the issue, Mrs Gandhi said, "This is a very complex matter and will have to be studied in some depth."

What has hurt the Nepalese in Sikkim, constituting 75% of the population, is that while all their 15 reserved seats have been taken away, the minority Bhutia, Lepcha tribals were given 13 reserved seats including one Sangha seat.

The main Opposition party, the Sikkim Congress (reduced to only 2 MLAs in 1979 from 11 in 1974), led by Ram Chandra Poudyal filed a writ petition in 1979 which moved from the Delhi High Court to the Supreme court for the final verdict.

Poudyal had asked the court for a stay on elections to the Assembly till the final hearing of the case. Poudyal, whose Sikkim Congress (R), which fought the 1979 elections under protest against Bill No. 79 of 1979, kept

THE SEAT RESERVATION ISSUE

Political Advisor to the Chief Minister, **BB GOOROONG**, provides the introduction to the issue that has captured the imagination of all Sikkimese...

the issue alive through various legal, political and other means. The issue remains as sensitive today as it was in 1979 when the Bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha.

To say brand the various stands on the issue as "politically motivated" would tantamount to ignoring the gravity of the situation.

Underlying the demand for restoration of seats for Sikkimese Nepalese in the Assembly is the fear that if this demand is not conceded, even the majority community of today will one day be reduced to minority which is when political safeguards guaranteed today would come of help. In the absence of political safeguards, it will only be a matter of time before the distinct cultural and historical identity of this section of the Sikkimese people is swamped to extinction.

This fear is justified when one considers the phenomenal rise in the population of Sikkim during the past decades. This is mainly due to the sudden influx of outsiders into Sikkim after the Merger. The population rose from 2.10 lakhs in 1971 to 3.16 lakhs 1981, showing a record increase of about one lakh in a decade. The population of Sikkim was approximately 60 thousand in 1901 and rose steadily to about one lakh in 1931. After 30

years it reached 1.60 lakh 1961.

From the very beginning of her history, Sikkim had her own representative form of government which involved all the three ethnic communities of Sikkim - the Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalese. In later years, provisions were made in the Sikkim Council to accommodate members from other communities, such as the plainsmen who had been residing in Sikkim for quite sometime.

The evolution towards a just system of a representative form of government was not brought about easily. It was not an overnight achievement, as many would have us to believe. It took years of patient toil, sacrifice and dedication to build the society that exists today. And yet, what we have today is not a financial achievement. Democracy, in the final analysis, is not an end itself; it is a means to a finer life than we have known so far.

A keen political observer of Sikkim in 60s commented: "These politicians are still immature. In general, the political leaders are motivated by personal ambition... Most Sikkimese leaders feel that in order to succeed they must be either avidly pro-India or aggressive pro-Sikkimese. The result is the general absence of the state idea among

the leaders, and people often claim themselves to be Bhutias or Lepchas or Nepalese, but seldom Sikkimese."

This analysis is as true today as it was then. We are still divided on ethnic grounds. In safeguarding our distinct communal separateness we have caused unnecessary harm to ourselves, our community and to the people at large. The Bhutia-Lepchas who want to preserve their culture and traditional heritage are dubbed as anti-nationals; and the Nepalese who fight for full-fledged democracy and 'majority rule' in Sikkim are suspected to be in league with the 'Gorkhaland' movement in the neighbouring areas.

These development, whether they are true or not, are to a great extent responsible for the estranged relationship between the Centre and the State. The need for the hour is to cast away the existing fear and suspicion from our midst and replace it with faith and confidence. There is bound to be a give and take attitude from both the sides, but the solution to the present crisis must be brought about in the best interest of the people of Sikkim and the country at large.

-to be concluded

This article is part of the book on the political history of Sikkim commissioned by the State Government as part of its Study Series on Sikkim, which the writer is authoring along with **KR Chakravarthi**

COMBATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Still awaiting the right dose

The age of induction into experimenting with "drugs" is getting lower and incidents of overdose becoming more common. Sikkim, it seems, is yet to work out the right combination to combat this problem. Rounding up "addicts" does not help, since fear cannot cure the chemical dependence one develops, but ignoring that the problem exists is even more dangerous. The problem needs to be tackled with the right dose of policing, counselling and awareness. MITA ZULCA with more on the current situation...

Prashant,* was only 21 years old when he died of a drug overdose last week. An intelligent and nice kid, he had been hooked on to Spasmo Proxyvon for the last two years. Prashant had checked into Kripa, Darjeeling, a de-addiction and rehabilitation centre in an attempt to kick the habit. But after two months there, he convinced his parents to take him home. Three months back he visited a local doctor here at Gangtok.

"He came once to my clinic. He had been pushing the drug intrarterially for the last one year. The day I saw him, he had an infection, an abscess in his frontal groin. I prescribed some antibiotics and asked him to come again with his parents but he never showed up," says the doctor who refuses to be named.

Prashant, like so many others, was initiated into drugs by his friends. In the beginning he popped Spasmo Proxyvon tablets. When that stopped giving him a high, he took to injecting himself intravenously. When he had completely exhausted his veins, he started injecting into his arteries. Soon he reached a point when he was desperate enough to inject himself in the groin. That was the point when he visited the doctor. Nobody can say for sure how Prashant spent the next few months. But last week he was found dead of overdose in his room.

Drug addiction is reaching mammoth proportions in the state. Although accurate statistics are not available on the number of drug abusers, trends show that it is a problem which is increasing each day.

Records at counselling ward at the STNM hospital shows nearly a hundred cases of substance abuse registered in a month. A large number of these patients are known to inject Spasmo Proxyvon tablets dissolved in water. According to doctors this is the most dangerous thing to do. The tablet does not dissolve properly, sediment start accumulating and an abscess develops. Blood supply gets blocked and the limb starts rotting. There is no option then but to amputate the limb. STNM hospital has recorded three cases of such amputations last year.

"Apart from that, the bolus or the undissolved part of the tablet or capsule can get stuck in a vital organ like heart, lungs or brain which can be life threatening. Also, a heavy dose of the drug will depress the respiratory centre and the heart centre of the brain which is lethal," says Dr. I L Sharma, Psychiatrist, STNM hospital.

Drug addiction is no longer something that Sikkim can ignore. Younger and younger children are being initiated into this chamber of horrors. Last year a 10-year-old committed suicide after suffering from withdrawal symptoms so severe that he would stab himself with a compass.

"Substance abuse is such a huge problem that no agency can handle it just on its own. Everyone has a role to play. From law-keeping agencies, to parents, to recovering addicts and NGO's," states Dr. Sharma. The Sikkim Rehabilitation Centre (SRC) which completes its first year of operation on June 18 next week has had more than 70 addicts coming in for detoxification.

"There are many more who want to come or need to come but don't

due to many factors. Often the whole family is in denial. They don't want to acknowledge a drug addict in the family for fear of social stigma," says KC Nima, Project co-ordinator and counselor, SRC.

Sadly, however, of the 70 or so who went in for detoxification, around 30 have had relapses.

Why such a high rate

of relapse?

"Family support is the most essential factor in the recovery process. Often the recovering addict feels alienated from the rest of the so-called 'normal' people. Admission into a rehab is not the end of the problem. They need psychological support and parental counselling at every stage," adds Nima. It is here that support groups like the Hope Centre can play a crucial role. A place where recovering addicts can come together and share their problems with fellow recovering addicts.

Regular family meetings help in creating mutual understanding and empathy.

But while drug addiction is a behavioural and psychological problem and needs more compassionate handling, drug trafficking falls in the ambit of criminality. The ease with which these addictive substances can be bought shows that not enough has been done to stem this problem.

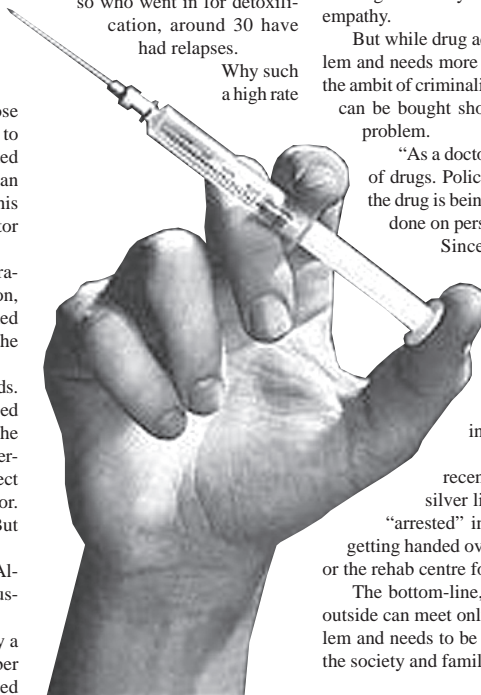
"As a doctor I want the law to be very strict on traffic and sale of drugs. Police in plain clothes should visit the chemists where the drug is being sold openly. More stringent checking needs to be done on persons and vehicles at the border," says Dr. Sharma.

Since it is mostly prescription drugs that are being abused, policing their supply becomes slightly complicated. The drugs cannot be banned outright and even arrests for sale without proper prescriptions would attract only a light rap on the knuckles. Peddling is a more serious crime and that is perhaps what should be cracked-down upon rather than rounding up addicts and keeping them in the thana for 24 hours.

Even if one were to see something positive in the recent spate of crackdown on drug abuse, a possible silver lining could come in the form of each drug addict "arrested" in the now common evening raids in the capital, getting handed over to the counselling centre at the STNM hospital or the rehab centre for detoxification.

The bottom-line, however, remains that such initiatives from the outside can meet only with partial success. Addiction is a social problem and needs to be dealt at that level with the active involvement of the society and family.

* some names have been changed





Kutse Shegu

The 49th Day Kutse Shegu of our beloved father, Late Mr. Ganden Lama, who left for his heavenly abode on 7 May 2003, falls on 24 June 2003. All friends, relatives and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Lingdok, East Sikkim. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who extended their help during the hour of bereavement.

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GANGTOK: Environmental protection is not just about tree-plantation drives, stresses a passionate Dr. B. Sengupta, Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

"There is a misconception among people that environment conservation ends with planting trees. No, its not. Environment protection also includes controlling air, water and noise pollution," said the doctor, who was in Sikkim on a two-day visit on the invitation of the State government, particularly the Sikkim State Pollution Control Board.

During his stay, Dr. Sengupta assessed the status of the municipal solid waste, water and hospital waste disposal and air pollution situation in the State. He did not return very pleased.

Sikkim, despite its numerous legislations, policies and programmes on environment conservation, is hurtling headlong into an environmental nightmare because of rapid urbanisation and inadequate infrastructure to control such a deluge, feels Dr. Sengupta who also identified the areas that need immediate attention of the concerned authorities. Municipal waste management tops the list.

"Efficient management of waste is extremely important. It should be the number one priority of the government. At present, solid waste collection is being carried out in a very limited manner. Most of the solid wastes are being dumped directly into the jhoras ultimately finding their way into the rivers. I visited a number of jhoras in and around Gangtok and found them clogged with solid wastes, plastics and polythene bags. This is totally un-

Conservation demystified

Dr. B. Sengupta, Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board, was in Sikkim for a brief, two-day visit. By the time he left, he had driven home the point that environmental protection involves more than just tree-plantation drives.

SARIKAH ATREYA reports

acceptable. It requires some urgent joint action by the SPCB and the UD&HD to clean up the mess," says Dr. Sengupta.

Pointing out that the MoEF has a scheme, which can be taken up by the SPCB, for proper segregation and disposal of domestic wastes, Dr. Sengupta stressed that all that was required was "bureaucratic and political will" to implement it.

Another major problem Sikkim faces is with sewage management.

"The sewerage system is almost nonexistent in the State, including Gangtok. Whatever waste water treatment is being carried out in Gangtok is inadequate. The sewage treatment plant at Adampool is non-functional and sewage is entering the jhoras and draining into the rivers and polluting them beyond comprehension. Studies carried out by the SPCB show that there is a high level of E-Coli bacteria presence in the river waters. Improper sewage management is to blame. Even water supply pipes pass through the jhoras here. A small leak in the pipes could lead to contamination of water with deadly pathogens. I have warned the Health and

UD&HD secretaries of the health implications posed by such practices and urged them to come up with alternatives soon," he detailed.

The doctor even suggested that Sikkim approach the National River Conservation Directorate for help since it sponsors many schemes for sewage treatment. Sikkim, he revealed, is yet to approach the Ministry with a proposal in this regard.

Another major area of concern, feels Dr. Sengupta, is biomedical waste management.

"Under a central government directive of 1989, the SPCB is the prescribed authority for management of biomedical waste. It is surprising that not much work is being done in this field. All hospitals are required to take authorization from the SPCB to segregate and treat all hospital wastes. The government hospitals in the State are in the process of setting up incinerators for waste disposal but that is not enough. It is a shortcut method. If not properly used, such incinerators could lead to air pollution. The hospitals should take up common biomedical waste treatment facility programme with the assistance of the SPCB," he suggests.

The growing vehicular population, specially those running on diesel, on Sikkim

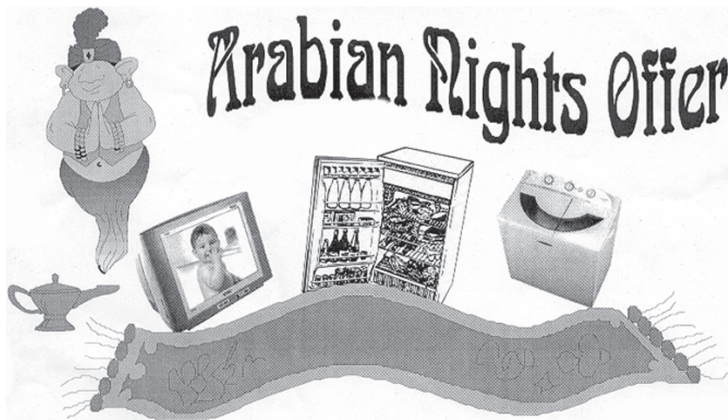
roads also worries Dr. Sengupta. In this regard, Dr. Sengupta says that a study needs to be carried out by the scientists at SPCB and medical specialists to ascertain the level of air pollution in Gangtok. The concerned authority in-charge of air pollution control should prepare a road map that will spell out by when Sikkim will adopt Euro II and Euro III norms for vehicles and what fuel quality improvement and fuel adulteration control programme they have in the pipeline.

The increase in tourist activity has also led to increased pollution of air and water by hotels, the visiting Member Secretary points out. While the abundance of natural beauty is the USP of Sikkim as a tourist destination, the industry is paradoxically contributing to pollution.

"Hotels are coming up everywhere but not a single one is conducting any environment assessment. Hotels are also not taking due clearance from the SPCB which is a mandatory requirement under the Water Pollution Control Act. By not taking any precautions, hotels are adding to the water and pollution problem, especially during the tourist seasons. This issue also needs to be urgently addressed," he said.

The State should take up the Eco-city Project under the Ministry, suggests Dr.

turn to pg 11



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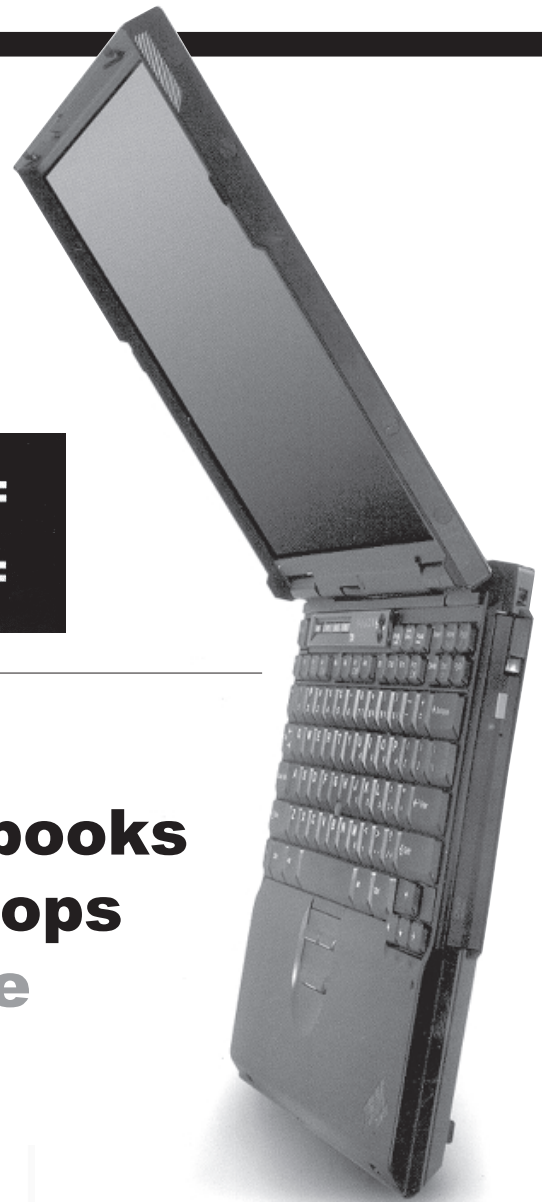


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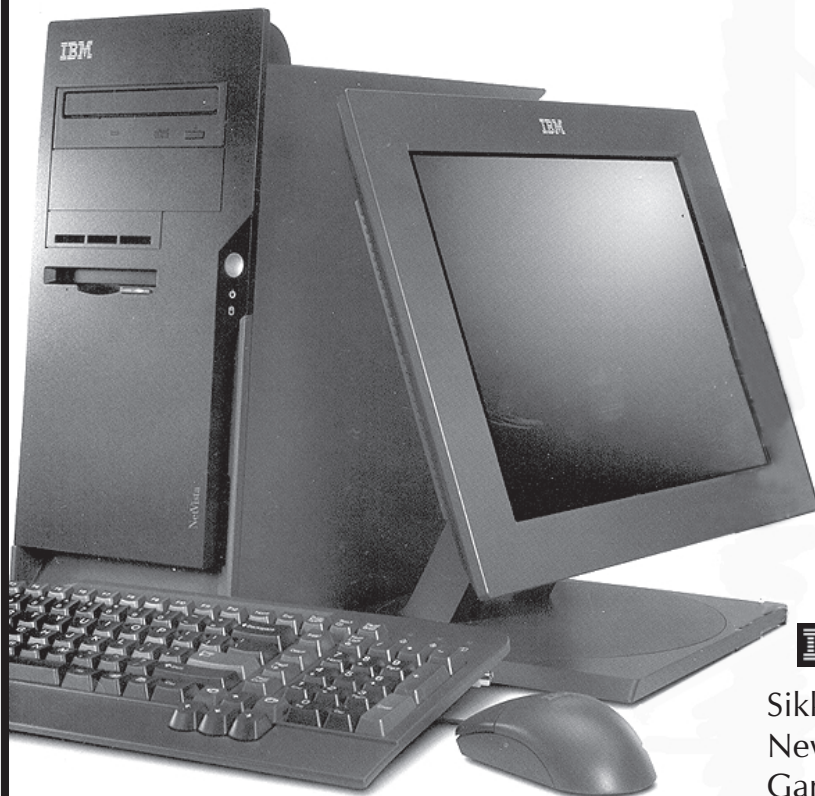


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FOCUS

HOMICIDAL COP GETS LIFE

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Two years after killing his estranged wife in a "brutal" stabbing incident at Baluakhani here, Chandra Sekhar Subedi, a constable with the Sikkim Armed Police [SAP] was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on June 10, Tuesday.

The District and Sessions Court (East and North) at Gangtok passed the judgment and also imposed a fine of Rs. 5,000 on the accused along with the life sentence.

The Court, in its final order, records that there was enough evidence to hold Subedi responsible for the crime.

In a reversal of roles the cop will now cool his heels at the state jail at Rongyek along with the dozen or so other policemen al-

ready serving sentences there.

Subedi, was posted as a guard at the office of the Assistant Director, Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau at Baluakhani when the crime was committed on 11 March 2001.

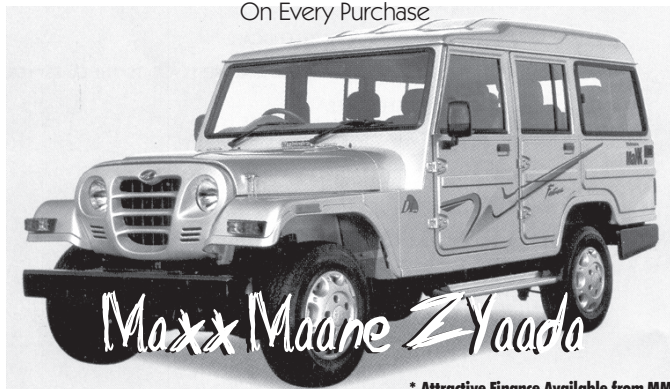
It is learnt that the estranged wife, Manju, used to receive Rs. 1,500 every month from the constable ever since they parted ways. The amount was deducted from the constable's salary. On that fateful day, Subedi's wife had gone to the guard room at Baluakhani to collect her dues. When she realised that she was being given less than what was her due [Rs. 760 against Rs. 1,500] she went into Subedi's barrack to demand the rest. Eye witness accounts reportedly deposed in Court that a heated argument followed and ended only after Subedi had fatally stabbed Manju.

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from AMITAVA BANERJEE

DARJEELING, June 8, 2003: Vehemently protesting the Special Service Bureau [SSB] firing on a guide, the tourist guides here are threatening to close down the Sandakphu-Phalut trek route.

The latest development is the fallout of the incident in which, tourist guides here allege, that following an argument with guides on the night of June 5, an SSB personnel fired at and injured 20-year-old Kiran Rai at Meghma, 31 kms from Darjeeling.

In its defence, the SSB has claimed that some locals had attacked the SSB camp and tried to snatch a rifle forcing the personnel to fire two rounds in self defense. After the incident, two other guides Arjun Rai and Gulam were arrested but were later released. The Police has thus far

GUIDES THREATEN TO SHUT DOWN TREKKING ROUTE OUT OF FEAR OF TRIGGER-HAPPY BORDER GUARD

STOP-PRESS: SSB Inspector General, AC Negi, while talking to the Press here on Tuesday shed some more light on the incident. He contended that the 40-member expedition had one Gul Mohammad Lone as their cook. Since Lone hailed from Baramullah in J&K, the SSB personnel called him in for questioning. He in turn instigated the inebriated guides to confront them. In the resultant scuffle, the shots were fired by accident. Mr. Negi, however, added that the exact details would be known after the enquiry being conducted by a Deputy Commandant.

backed the SSB version.

The guides, however, have a completely different story to tell. According to them a few tourist guides were returning from a trek along with 40 students from the Kendriya Vidyalaya when a scuffle broke out when a few SSB personnel used the toilet built by the travel agency. The quarrel conflagrated to a situation where the group was fired upon and

Kiran Rai injured.

Tashi Sherpa from Maneymbhanjyang a colleague of Rai informed that Kiran was the only earning member of his family. Though the doctors had proclaimed Kiran out of danger, they

suspected that he could become lame from the bullet injury.

Countering the allegation, SSB Inspector General, AC Negi claimed that "criminals" tried to snatch a rifle and were fired upon. The guides, however, insist that this could not be an incident of "mistaken identity" since the guides were wearing badges provided by the State Forest Department.

Sources further reveal state that the SSB has already started negotiations with Kiran Rai's family and

has reportedly offered compensation to the guide's family. A SSB officer stated that internal investigations had begun and if found guilty necessary action would be taken against the SSB guard who had fired.

The Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) has also demanded that action be taken against the SSB guard and that the family be rightfully compensated.

Incidentally, since the early months of 2002 the SSB has been manning the porous Indo-Nepal border.

Trained to be better panchayats

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: The week-long training session for gram panchayat presidents held at the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) ended here on the June 7, last Saturday. 33 GPU Presidents from all over the state attended the training.

During the course of the week, faculty members from the institute and resource persons from all line departments of the State, including senior functionaries, held sessions with the participants.

The Secretary RDD also in-

spected the training sessions and expressed satisfaction with the manner in which it was progressing.

The training programme was inaugurated by the Minister RDD, GC Rai, earlier in the week, who during the course of his speech talked about the importance and power delegated to the Gram Panchayats by the present government. The valedictory function of the final day was presided over by the Adhyaksha (West), RM Rai.

During the interaction session, the trainee presidents thanked SIRD for holding the training, which they stressed would go a long way in empowering them further.

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Kutse Shegu

The 49th Day Kutse Shegu of our mother, the late Smt. Kiki Bhutia who passed away on 2nd May, 2003 falls on 19 June 2003. All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us at our residence at Shomoon House, 31 A National Highway and offer prayers for the departed soul. I take this opportunity to thank all the relatives, friends and well wishers who stood by us at our bereavement and regret my inability to thank them individually.

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DESPATCHES

State works on conservation and sustainable utilisation of medicinal plants

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: A state-level workshop on conservation and sustainable utilization of medicinal plant was organised at Forest Department conference hall here on June 7, 2003.

The workshop, organised by Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife, Government of Sikkim and Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Tradition (FRLHT), a Bangalore-based NGO, was inaugurated by Forest Minister, DT Lepcha. The programme was also attended by Member, State Planning Commission, KC Pradhan, GA Kinhal from FRLHT, Principal CCF cum Secretary Forest TR Sharma, delegates from various departments of central and state government, research institutes and NGOs from various parts of the state.

While talking about various efforts made by the State Government towards sustainable development of medicinal plants, the Minister highlighted the constitution of the State Medicinal Plant Board, identification of 13 sites in different ecological zones, prepa-



The recently inaugurated State Biodiversity Park at Tendong, South Sikkim

ration of bio-diversity registers by panchayats, State biodiversity park at Tendong, ban on extraction of medicinal plants from forest areas for a period of 5 years from 2001. The Minister also talked about the development of bio-villages where composite community bio-centres could be set up for undertaking cultivation of medicinal plants under poly-houses or sheds along with other income generating activities. Community herbal nurseries, home herbal gardens and

medicinal plant cultivation as co-operative farming has good potential in the state, he added.

The Workshop was a part of the programme of finalization of an action plan for the protection of medicinal plants and revitalization of associated local health cultures of Sikkim. The department had conducted public hearing at 15 places all around the state to get the views of the public on conservation and protection of medicinal plants.

ACTION MAIL

CHAWONG PHAMTAM A Model Village ignored

Chawong Phamtam, a model village, 33 kms away from the capital under Kabi Tingda constituency (N) shows the real figure of negligence by the State Council of Science & Technology for Sikkim.

A brief account of its woes reads as under:

To commemorate the 50th year of India's Independence, the Govt of India declared 50 backward villages as Model Villages. Chawong Phamtam was the one.

In the first phase of the survey in the late nineties, implementation of multi-projects to substantiate the socioeconomic development of the village with the application of Science and Technological inputs, funded by the Science and Society Division, Ministry of Science and Technology Govt of Sikkim, was assured. These projects included those in collaboration with HESCO-DEHRADUN (WATER MILLS); SULLAB-DLHI (International Low Cost Sanitation); RRL-ORISSA (Improved Smokeless Chulas & Cardamom curing house); ASTRA-BANGALORE (Application of science and technology in rural areas); PICCO-NEPAL (Hydel-in collaboration with Krishna Grills and engineering works Biratnagar); BAMBOO SHOOT CANNING; MYSORE (In collaboration with Indian Institute of Food Technology); AH&VH (Livestock development); Adult Education; Health; Agriculture etc.

Started with much fanfare, the model village project looks desolate today with most projects abandoned or half-finished.

Why?

Saldong Barfungpa, Chawong Busty

The State Council for Science & Technology responds

The official looking after the Chawong Phamtam project informs NOW! that he took charge of the project only in January this year. Since then, he maintains he has been working hard on the project and has also asked for an extension on the initiatives undertaken there. He contended that the project has been implemented properly and invites the complainant to visit the area and see things for himself and has added that the department is ready to clarify any grievances of the complainant.

According to him, the ASTRA-BANGALORE project has already been installed and is functional since the year 2000. Materials for the HESCO-DEHRADUN project have now reached the department and this would be completed by July. Regarding the SULLAB-DLHI project, engineers from Delhi would be coming by the end of this month for construction of SULLABH toilets in the school there. Talking about the RLL-ORISSA project he said that one Cardamom Curing House has also been already constructed. The PICCO-NEPAL PROJECT will also start soon now that the necessary material has arrived. Even adult education has been started he added.

Regarding community health, the officer told NOW! that the department has been organising health awareness programmes in collaboration with Phodong PHC. He further said that the department had requested the Panchayat to identify trained birth attendants for proper training with the CMO of Mangan. Regarding Bamboo shoot canning the officer said that a building is under construction.

The officer also revealed that the Council has undertaken projects at Chawong Phamtam which had earlier not even been included in the proposal.

Everyone's got complaints and the best thing about a democracy is that these complaints can be voiced. "Action Mail," is a platform where the public mails us their grievances and we get them the replies from the concerned authorities. If you too have a problem that needs redressal, just mail your complaint to us at NOW! Gairi Gaon, Tadong, Gangtok, East Sikkim or email us at sikkimnow@rediffmail.com.

NOTICE

**OLD PAULITE ASSOCIATION
- SIKKIM CHAPTER - GANGTOK.**

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the OPA will be held on 12 June 2003, Thursday at Hotel Dew Pond, PS Road [Ph: 223435] at 5 PM.

AGENDA:

- . To confirm the minutes of the last meeting.
 - . Review the working of the Association.
 - . Discuss and finalise the programme for 'Futta 2003' to be held on 21 June 2003.
- All members are kindly requested to attend the meeting on time.

**General Secretary
OPA - Skm Chapter**



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Educating the heartland

Loden Gyatso Lepcha was denied "English-medium" education during his formative years because he lived in remote Dzongu and the nearest such school was beyond the economic means of his parents. Through the years he learnt that "knowledge was power" and accessibility more important than money to attain this power. He decided that the chance that he did not get would be available for the next generation. With scarce resources and ample dedication, he started Mayal Lyang Academy. Dzongu's only English-medium private school. SARIKAH ATREYA profiles this noble initiative...



NOW! pix

PASSINGDANG, DZONGU: Accessibility, more than economic status decides the education one gets. While poverty, low educational status of parents and occupational pressures contribute to keeping a child away from school, more often it is the remoteness of their dwelling place which denies them a chance at good education. No where in Sikkim is this more apparent than in the Lepcha heartland of Dzongu in North Sikkim. Due to its low population density and inaccessible terrain, North Sikkim has the lowest concentration of Schools. In 1998-99, hardly 10 percent of pre-primary schools were located here. Until a few years ago, the children of Dzongu, especially those from economically backward families, could hardly avail of basic primary education, chances of an English-medium education were even rarer.

But all this has changed now, thanks to the dreams and persistent efforts of one young man, who realized the value of formal education at a very young age and opened the only English-medium primary school in Dzongu at Passingdang.

Meet Loden Gyatso Lepcha who set up the Mayel Lyang Academy at Passingdang, a sleepy village in Dzongu in 1998. This is the only English-medium primary school in the region following the ICSE syllabus.

"When I was small, I wanted to study in an English-medium school but my parents could not afford to send me to one. The fact that I was denied education in an English-medium school due to economic reasons was deeply embedded in my mind. There were many like me in the area who could not avail of this facility due to the same reasons. I did not want the future generations to be deprived like us. I wanted to do something to change



this," explains Loden.

Not one to wait for someone else to do something, the 27-year-old took matters in his own hands and decided Passingdang needed an English-medium school and set out to establish one. Without waiting for the logistics or financial backing to fall into place, Mayel Lyang Academy was born in a small room in Loden's own house.

Soon, families from the village started to send their children to his school and within a year, the small room could no longer accommodate the students. Loden then took a small patch of family land near by and with limited resources, extended his Mayal Lyang Academy into a three-room structure.

The School building is made up of thatched walls, mud floor with the only modern material used being the GI sheets on the roof! Despite this, the School now runs classes from Nursery to Class III and has 46 students from all over Dzongu.

What sets the school apart from other private enterprises is that it has been providing free education and residential facilities to impoverished children from the area since its inception. Loden and his wife

The humble facade of the alma-mater hides an initiative that is both noble and brave. Students of Mayel Lyang Academy pose outside their school [above]. The couple behind the initiative, Loden Gyatso Lepcha and his wife at the school campus.

share their home with children who cannot otherwise afford to go to schools.

It all began when Loden met a very poor family from a nearby village.

"I had gone to this remote village and met a very poor family who could not afford to send their son to school," recounts Loden. "I sought the permission of his parents and brought the boy with me and admitted him to Mayel Lyang. The boy stayed with me as part of the family."

Very soon, Loden starting bringing home such underprivileged kids from the nearby villages and took care of their educational needs.

"The only way to ensure that these children received at least a primary education was to bring them here and put them under our care. So the hostel was necessary," he says.

Within a short span of time, Loden's house was accommodating more than ten kids, which served both as their homes as well as a hostel. There are now 14 kids staying with the family, the youngest being a six-year old and the oldest one, a 12 year old girl, who now goes to the government high school in the village.

Despite severe financial crunch and limited resources, Loden and his family provide the children under their care with everything from their educational needs, to nutrition, to clothing, to emotional bonding. There are also regular paying day-scholars in the school.

"Knowledge is power," says Loden, which is incidentally also the school's motto. Having realized at a very young age that one needed a

good educational foundation to get anywhere in this age of cut-throat competition, Loden is making sure that kids from his community are not deprived of the same in their precious learning years.

The students are taught all regular subjects with special emphasis on Lepcha language and literature, which is taught from the Kindergarten level onwards. In fact, the school anthem is based on a Lepcha poem by Dorjee Wangdi Lepcha, a teacher at the TNSS school in Gangtok.

There are six teachers in the school with Loden's cousin, Pema Rinzing, as the principal. The staff salaries and all other expenses are somehow met by the school management from their own resources. There is no government funding as yet and the only outside aid the school receives is a monthly assistance of Rs. 2,000 from the Human Development Foundation that augments the resources to some extent.

This low-profile Lepcha family's efforts have not been in vain. While it is certainly difficult to make ends meet with just 46 students, there have been numerous rewards in the form of its students excelling in studies and grateful parents. Two former students are now studying at the prestigious Tashi Namgyal Academy while others are performing well at various government schools.

The process of realising his dream of making sure that children from his community have access to modern education has been a very difficult one for Loden. His dogged determination has seen him through and proves that one does not need vast resources and capital to make a difference. Such efforts deserve accolades from the society and the government.



DEVELOPMENT

A WEEK TO DE-STRESS

THERAPEUTIC TOURISM DEBUTS WITH CONNEMARA

a NOW! REPORT

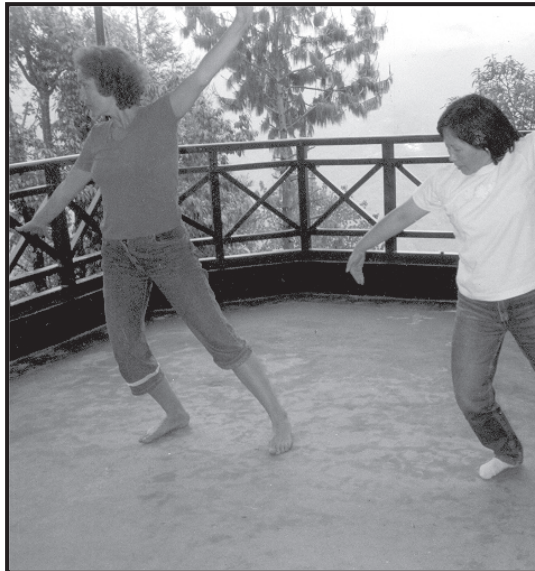
RUMTEK: Connemara Sikkim, a unique centre for health and fitness opened its innings recently when a group of foreign tourists checked in for the "Connemara Week" - five days of relaxing therapy in the midst of nature.

Run by Karma Doma and Helena Lund, the center is located at Shambhala Resort, Rumtek. The duo have trained at the well known "Connemara Institute" in Sweden.

At the Connemara Centre, here at Rumtek, they offer various kinds of energy-enhancing treatments to rejuvenate your body, mind and soul.

"We want to provide holistic body and soul care. We chose this place because there is so much natural beauty around. It's an ideal place to de-stress and optimize your energy level," says Karma.

To help one revitalise, they offer many options. From Aroma Therapy (luxury therapy with essential oils), to Kinesology (to optimize your skeleton) to the clas-



POETRY IN MOTION: Qi Gong practise in progress

sical Swedish massage (to release tensed muscles both at the physical and mental level). But it is Qi Gong, an ancient system of physical training and philosophy based on traditional Chinese medicine

that forms the core of therapy. "When Qi or energy flows in a dynamic and harmonious stream in our body we feel healthy and invigorated both mentally and physically. Illness results only

when the energy flow is blocked or inhibited," explains Helena.

What the "Connemara Week" offers is an opportunity to break-down blockages and restore the balance to make us more energetic and fit. A fact vouched by the recent visitors who completed the course.

"I have had five days of wonderful experiences. The understanding and hard work put in by the two girls is amazing. I am positive that the experience will change my life from mediocrity to happiness," says Norma Warner from the US of A.

Equally enthused is Ilsa Easson, a visitor from Turkey. "For me it was a life saving experience. No western medical treatment could help me as they treated only the symptoms. Helena and Karma went to the source of ailment, cured it and in the process set many things straight which had lost balance in the course of my life," she tells us.

The Connemara Energy Concept requires one to relax, be calm

and away from distractions, so that you are free to train with your vital energy. The centre at Shambhala provides the perfect backdrop for this kind of therapy.

A unit of Shambhala Resorts, the center can house up to four people at a time with provisions for a larger group to stay at the resort itself. All costs are inclusive of food and lodging.

"We cook the food ourselves to ensure hygiene and nutritive value. We serve only vegetarian food with lots of salads and health drinks," says Karma.

The centre is the only one outside Sweden to have been franchised "The Connemara Energy Concept". It is an advantage that could well work in its favour.

"I know that this will become a centre of light and healing in Sikkim. I will return to South Africa with more light, having released so many of my deep blockages in this unique environment," says Lorraine Forbes.

"Connemara Sikkim" seems to have taken off in right earnest. In future it has the potential to become a major tourist destination for those looking to de-stress and regain their energy levels. Therapy in the hills. Sounds like a good combination.

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Sunny Environment Day at Tashiding

a NOW REPORT

TASHIDING: World Environment Day, June 5, was observed with great pomp and grandeur by the students and teachers of Tashiding Senior Secondary School, West Sikkim.

The occasion was graced by

the Tashiding Gram Panchayat members, officials of the Forest Department, hospital staff and some guardians. The day also saw the formation of an Eco-Club at the school.

Nature too, perhaps realising that the day was special, parted the clouds and offered a bright and sunny day, rarity in the overcast

weather that West Sikkim has at present. The setting was perfect for the rally taken out by the students with placards and banners on the need for environmental conservation.

Poetry recitations followed and then it was time for a plantation drive of some 250 saplings in and around the school campus.

Vajra Guru recitations at Rumtek

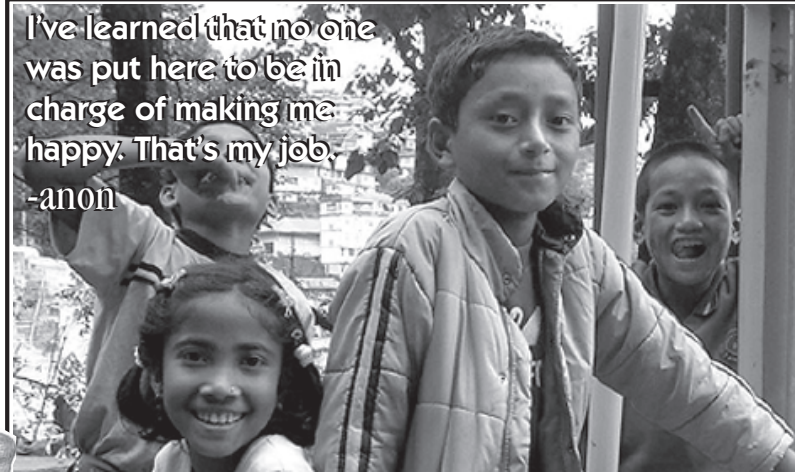
RUMTEK: Recitation of one billion Vajra Guru Mantras begins here at the Dharma Chakra Centre on June 14. This, the chairman, Lhengay Administrative Council, Tshurpu Labrang, informs, follows the directions of the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorjee.

A 2-day Tsechu ritual lama dance was also held on July 9 and 10. On the June 11, Gyaltsab Rinpoche initiated the Vajra Crown ceremony and long life Kawang (Initiation).

Env Day around Sikkim

SANG: World Environment Day was observed here at the Sang Senior Secondary School premises on June 5. A rally from Sang bazar till Masha was also organised, followed by poetry recitation by students. A plantation drive was also held later.

Similarly, in Marchak, Lower Tintek, Environment Day festivities were organised by the Sirijana Club a plantation drive on either sides of the road from NHPC dam-site to Marchak and at the Marchak primary school campus.



I've learned that no one was put here to be in charge of making me happy. That's my job. -anon

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RECAP SIKKIM

Conservation demystified

Contd from pg 4

Sengupta. Under this project, model municipal and biomedical waste treatment facilities can be created, heritage and historical sites identified and conservation plans carried out.

"Namchi is a good candidate for this project. The SPCB should prepare a detailed project report and submit it to the Ministry for funding," he adds.

The Member Secretary also highlighted areas where the SPCB could improve. The Board has been set up by the State government under the Department of Forests, but its efficiency is hampered by the acute shortage of technically-qualified manpower.

During his stay, Dr. Sengupta kept a hectic schedule and met the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling, the Chief Secretary and ministers of Forest, UD&HD, and Health and updated them on the various environment issues that demanded immediate attention of the State government.

"I had wide-ranging discussions with the CM and the concerned ministers. All of them gave me a patient hearing. Mr. Chamling understood the environmental concerns and has assured all possible support. Sikkim is being projected as an eco-friendly State with the 'greenest CM' in the country it is therefore imperative that environment conservation in the truest sense be top priority here," Dr. Sengupta said.

As he left, Dr. Sengupta parted with a special word of advice: "Sikkim is an eco-fragile area with great tourism potential. We do not want what has happened in Darjeeling to be repeated here. I urge the Sikkim government and the people, particularly those in Gangtok to take all precautionary steps to protect the environment before it is too late."



Connemara Sikkim

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Karma or Helena at
9832054928 & 9434012329

EMPLOYMENT

WALK IN INTERVIEW for the following purely technical posts for the extra mural biomedical research projects (Population Based Cancer Registry and Morbidity Surveillance) involving extensive field activities will be held on 18 June 2003 at 10:30 AM in the Library of the STNM Hospital, Gangtok.

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Qualification - Essential - MBBS from a recognised university and duly registered under Indian Medical Council.
Desirable - MD Medicine or Community Medicine / one year field experience.
- Field Investigators - 3 Posts**
Salary Rs. 5,920 PM Consolidated
Qualification - Essential - B Sc in Biological Sciences / Statistics & MPW or similar training under State Health Department.
Desirable - One year Field Experience and working experience in computers.
- Statistician - 1 Post**
Salary Rs. 9,600 PM Consolidated.
Qualification - Essential - MSc in Statistics.
Desirable - One year Field Experience and working experience in computers.
- Computer Operator / Programmer - 1 Post**
Salary Rs. 9,600 PM Consolidated.
Qualification - Graduate with Diploma in Computer Applications with adequate experience / knowledge of data entry work.
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- Social Investigator - 2 Post**
Salary Rs. 6,705 PM Consolidated.
Qualification - MA in Sociology / MSW or Graduate with 2 Years diploma in Social work.
Desirable - Working Knowledge of Computers.

- ◆ Preference will be given to local candidates
- ◆ These posts are purely temporary
- ◆ Age should be below 35 years for all the above posts

Interested candidates may appear for the interview for the posts on the date, time and venue mentioned. Candidates will have to produce all certificates and testimonials in original in support of their qualification and experience at the time of interview.

No TA / DA will be admissible for attending the interview.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

Applications are invited from interested candidates to undergo craftsmen training at different field institutions of the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T), Ministry of Labour, Government of India under the scheme of 'Establishment of New Industrial Training Institute in North Eastern States and Sikkim.' The Training Courses offered and the requisite criteria for application by the candidates are mentioned below:

The Selected candidates shall be eligible for TA (one time to and fro fare by sleeper second class and a bus fare as applicable) and stipend @ Rs. 500/- per month per trainee. The trainees are also exempted from payment of tuition fees and hostel rent.

Candidates desirous of undergoing training in any one of the various courses mentioned below may apply to the Director, Technical Education, Govt. of Sikkim, Tashiling, Gangtok. The last date for receipt of applications is **21st June 2003**. The application must be supported by attested copies of the following documents:-

- Educational qualification certificate.
- Certificate of Identification as proof of being a local and
- Employment card.

Sl. No.	Details of Courses	Training	Eligibility Conditions
1.	Computer Operator & Programming Assistant	1 Yr.	12th Class passes under 10+2 system or Dip. In Engineering from any polytech -nic of 3 years duration after 10th class.
2.	Desk Top Publishing Operator	1 Yr.	12th class passed under 10+2 System or its equivalent. Typing speed of 30 wpm in English
3.	Instrument Mechanic	2 Yrs.	Passed 10th Class examination under 10+2 system of education with science as one of the subjects or equivalent.
4.	Stenography (English)	1 Yr.	Passed matriculation examination with English as cognate subject or it's equivalent or 10th class under 10+2 system with English as cognate subject.
5.	Secretarial Practice	1 Yr.	Passed matriculation examination with English as cognate subject or it's equivalent or passed 10th Class under 10+2 system with English as cognate subject.
6.	Cutting & Sewing	1 Yr.	Passed 8th Standard or its equivalent.
7.	Information Technology & Electronics System maintenance	2 Yrs.	Passed in 10th CLass examination under 10+2 system of education with minimum 60% marks in Maths & Science put together Desirable: 12th Class with Math & Physics.
8.	Architectural Draughtsman	3 Yrs.	Passed 12th Class examination under 10+2 system of education with Science & Maths as cognate subjects or it's equivalent.
9.	Hair & Skin Care	1 Yr.	Passed matriculation examination with Hygiene and Physiology or Biology as Elective subject or 10th class under 10+2 system with Hygiene and Physiology or Biology as elective subject or equivalent.
10.	Electronic Mechanic	1 Yr.	Passed 10th class examination under 10+2 system of education or equivalent
11.	Electrician	2 Yrs.	Passed 10th Class examination under 10+2 system of education.

Director of Technical Education
Education Department
Govt. of Sikkim, Gangtok

Release order No: 35/IPR/03-04. Dt:06.06.03

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RECAP SIKKIM

Funds limit Sikkim's claim to more mountaineers

by **TINA RAI**

GANGTOK: Sikkim has produced famous mountaineers like Sonam Gyatso, Phu Dorjee, and Sonam Wangyal in the past. The crop of mountaineers of note, save the recent Everest summiteer, Nadre Sherpa, seems to have dried up. NOW! met GT Bhutia, Principal, Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute (SGMI) to ask why the state was not producing fresh talent in this field.

Mr. Bhutia admitted that Sikkim has many prospective mountaineers. His Institute alone has trained 500 boys and girls on basic and advanced mountaineering. However, the Principal admitted that these kids did not pursue mountaineering further since their are not enough jobs available locally for them and also because

mountaineering is an expensive passion in the absence of sponsors.

What further limits their progress is the lack of enough expeditions to hone the skills on.

"The only way out is that the state government provide some funds to mountaineering associations so that they can send these young men and women on expeditions," he said.

Mr. Bhutia further maintained that most people pursue mountaineering as just a hobby, for it to be taken up as a profession, one has to arm himself with successful climbs on major peaks. These can happen only when the local mountaineering association sponsors expeditions. Experience on real mountains makes one a sought after professional, he said.

Despite Sikkim's obvious natural talent for climbing mountains, SGMI has just not undertaken enough major expeditions

for want of funds. Its instructor, Nadre Sherpa recently climbed Mt. Everest, but as a member of the Darjeeling-based Himalayan Mountaineering Institute team. To date, SGMI has undertaken 30 expeditions, the most notable of which are the ones to Khangchendzonga, Siniolchu, Pandim, Khanchengyao within Sikkim and Hathi Parbat, Shivling, Khaglacha and Nun outside Sikkim. It needs to boast of more.

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