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SIKKIM MPs MEET KHURSHIED, HAND OVER SUPPORT LETTER

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: Sikkim's recently elected Lok Sabha MP, Nakul Rai, and his Rajya Sabha counterpart, PT Gyamto, called on Sikkim in-charge of the Indian National Congress, Salman Khurshid, in New Delhi today and handed over Sikkim Democratic Front's letter of support to the Congress bid to form the next government at the Centre.

Speaking to NOW! over the phone today, Mr. Gyamto – also the spokesperson of the SDF party – informed of having had a meeting with Mr. Khurshid. Mr. Gyamto along with Mr. Rai had left for Delhi yesterday.

Mr. Gyamto said, "We had a meeting with Mr. Khurshid this afternoon during which we handed over our letter of support to the Congress." This letter, incidentally, confirms SDF's "unconditional" support to the Congress in Parliament.

Mr. Gyamto further informed



THE NEGOTIATORS IN DELHI: [left to right] Gyamto, Khurshid and Rai

that Mr. Khurshid had himself called up the chief minister, Pawan Chamling subsequent to the SDF's landslide victory at the Sikkim Assembly elections. "Mr. Khurshid called up Mr. Chamling and apart from his congratulatory messages sought Mr. Chamling's support for the Congress at the centre," Mr. Gyamto said.

During today's meeting, Mr.

Khurshid, while accepting the letter is also reported to have admitted that he was aware that SDF's support to the NDA government was not necessarily one bound by ideology, but reflective

of the State's practise of supporting the governments at the centre.

Although the Sikkim MPs were scheduled to call on the Congress president Sonia Gandhi today, the

meeting had to be postponed following the Sensex crash which kept all senior Congress leaders huddled in emergency meetings.

Though the Congress might not view the SDF as a major ally as it has only one MP in the Lok Sabha, the support of the SDF to the Congress is still a significant occurrence as it is the first party to have broken away from the National Democratic Alliance [NDA]. Even if the SDF support does not majorly impact the numbers, its presence is still being seen as a moral victory by the Congress in its claims of forging a secular alliance which spreads across all regions.

The two Sikkim MPs are also reported to have met with NCP chief Sharad Pawar and RJD supremo Laloo Prasad Yadav in Delhi today. Both leaders have expressed hope that SDF will support the Congress-led coalition in the Centre.

Sonia to be sworn in as PM on Wednesday

After holding a second round of talks with allies on Monday evening, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has decided to be sworn in as the prime minister of India on Wednesday, May 19.

Earlier in the evening, in a sudden development Sonia Gandhi held one round of talks with her allies amid speculation that the Congress chief may not stake her claim for prime ministership.

She had also called all the Congress Members of Parliament to her 10 Janpath residence in Delhi.

The Congress chief will meet President A P J Abdul Kalam on Tuesday after he invited her for talks on government formation.

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FIRST WITH THE NEWS

No Progress Without Accountability

The Sikkim Democratic Front used a unique electioneering tool in the runup to the recently concluded elections. It released constituency-specific manifestos over and above its 112 page manifesto for Sikkim. While not covered in great detail by the media, these documents are undoubtedly being preserved by the voters to keep track of the promises made in 2004 to be tallied with those delivered by 2009 when the State goes to poll again. While no one took manifestos seriously till now because they were usually too generic and superficial, it is going to be different this time around. While the overall manifesto itself goes into great detail about how the various promises will be delivered, the constituency-level manifestos are even more specific in the various infrastructural facilities that each constituency can expect. These are promises that directly affect the people in those constituency and they will be keeping a close watch on the progress of each work. While these manifestos might not necessarily be the documents which won SDF 76 per cent of the votes in the polls, they will surely be promises against which it will be judged when it approaches the people again for votes in five years time. The ruling party will not have any excuses to defend lapses if they occur. With all the territorial constituencies voting in favour of the SDF, they have left the party with no leeway to work itself out of unkept promises.

What the government has to bear in mind now is that Sikkim has never lacked good intentions. It is in the delivery of well-meant initiatives that the State and its administrators have failed. There is no dearth of projects and proposals which are as effective in triggering development as they are populist in garnering votes. Where Sikkim fails is in the carrying out of the said projects and programmes. With no room left for excuses, the government will now have to make sure that the delivery system does not fail again. Half measures just won't work any more. And the only way this can be guaranteed is by fixing accountability. If every initiative is monitored from the very beginning itself, there is no way it can go majorly wrong. One reason why accountability was mild thus far was because the political scenario almost always remained fluid. Now, the people have concretised SDF for the next five years in Sikkim and while such absolute faith has made dictators out of leaders in the past, one hopes that this time we will get a tough taskmaster instead. Even if we keep public service on the side for once, if Mr. Chamling can deliver good and [in his own words] "action-oriented" governance in the next five years, one can commit without hesitating that he would have institutionalised SDF in Sikkim. People will not look for alternatives when they find a working [and effective] model of democracy in the party. The Opposition which has been effectively marginalised for the next five years could be truly wiped out then. While this might not be the best development for a democracy, at least the people would be happy.

A Toast For Teesta

Just as India, in a cartographic sense, can boast of its own private ocean, Kalimpong's pride is the Teesta. I have been fascinated by this green river ever since I can remember. Perhaps you too may have looked at it as you travelled on the road that runs parallel to its bank and wondered about the many secrets locked up in its sandy bed.

The portion below the bridge most definitely contains a wealth of coins thrown in by diverse breeds of devout individuals all with their own separate agendas for the divine to pay attention to. Perhaps one of them may belong to that over zealous coin thrower, who in the process of pursuing a blessing actually tossed herself out of the speeding jeep along with her rupee, to miraculously escape with just a minor bruising from the Gammon concrete.

And what about the rusty carcasses of the numerous vehicles that its waters swallow every monsoon? Here it may be an army truck hosting a silent school of scales. Or the submerged remains of a jeep perhaps, inquisitively nibbled at by a trulent trout.

Of course, synonymous with the Teesta is also its bazaar. There was a time when it was a junction, a sort of an intersection where people got down to stretch their legs and maybe drink a glass of tea or coke. Or they could have simply walked to the edge of the road and cast a glance at the turbulent Teesta to drink of its temperamental greenness and loosen themselves to the sound of its feisty flow.

Back then, when we did not travel as frequently as we do now,



reaching the Teesta was an occasion to be looked forward to. It was a signpost marking the end of a significant portion of the journey. And although none really got down to stay behind, it was with a certain sense of unfulfilled longing that one boarded the jeep to continue ahead. A feeling also felt by the narrator of perhaps what is one of the greatest short stories of the Nepali language, "Kheer". It is not coincidental that this story, heavy on symbolism, is set on the Teesta.

Teesta after all is more than a river. Although not as religiously significant as the other great rivers, it has a special place in our hill hearts. Its banks serve as locales for life's great picnics and also its eternal farewells. And while it has not spawned civilisations as such, its sand is an important ingredient of our nascent progress.

Of course to come back to more mundane matters, the shifting of the bridge had initially sucked its economy dry to the bone. Being bypassed by the bulk of the traffic meant that the bustling bazaar was

a thing of the past. But fortunately human resilience is a marvellous thing and Teesta too has not escaped from the optimism of its denizens. The shelves are certainly looking fuller and the giant papayas as ripe and inviting as ever. But even then one cannot but miss the old times, when that pontoon across the waters allowed only one vehicle at a time. The vehicle slowed down, the bridge gave away just a little, its elasticity arching in deference to the jeep and its load. There was the swish of the trajectory of the wishing coins and the prayerful crossing of the hands. That sense of history is gone with that bridge and except for memories in the head [at least I do not have any photographs] to remember the poetry of its steel and engineering.

Remember the stricture that prohibited any photographing of the structure. The consolation today is that the new construction is so sound that there are no such orders betraying the insecurities of that bygone age. And perhaps as a metaphor for our ever-increasing mobility, it does not require you to slow down or cross one at a time. Now you may drive by at top speed along with countless others in similar hurry as you. Only the Teesta flows as ever.

Kpg
state of
mind
by PRAVEEN
MOKTAN

-55-

Now that I had brought my wife to my house, I found I had no idea what it meant to live together as a married couple like other people. I had no pots and pans to cook our food, and she had no clothes except those she was wearing. I had also no blankets and lacked many other things: and, thinking carefully of what we would need, I felt very worried and wondered how I could get all the money that would be required. I borrowed ten rupees from my master and went with my wife to the market and let her choose what she wanted for the house, as a woman knows more about these things than a man. The most important thing to buy first were two cooking pots and a few plates. Then I also bought some rice, some cooking oil and some spices: and thirdly two pillowcases and two bed sheets for both of us, for two rupees and eight annas, and one small box for her.

It was now at the end of the month and, as soon as I got my wages, I spent another twelve rupees, and I bought two cheap saris for her, suitable for the summer, two petticoats and two jackets. Nearly all the wages I earned now went to food, about sixteen ru-

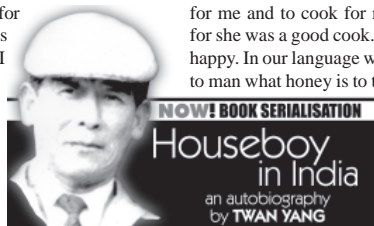
A woman is to a man what honey is to a bee

pees a month. Sometimes we went to the cinema, and from time to time I still had to buy more things for the house. So my wages went, and as a rule I would have no money left for the last four or five days of the month.

Though married life is very pleasant, yet I learned that it is very hard to live with a woman. For though it is very happy that a wife gives every comfort to the husband, yet the husband feels like a prisoner. On one hand, now that I was a husband, I had become very poor, on the other hand, the people now say that I

was no longer a loafer but properly married and I had a wife whom I could tell to work for me and to cook for me whatever I like, for she was a good cook. This made me very happy. In our language we say that woman is to man what honey is to the bee. My life was

altogether changed. Formerly when I was not married I was free to do whatever I liked, but that meant going too often to the pictures and being in the company of bad boys, and spending much money and saving nothing, and having no visitors in my little godown: that is, no really good people. But now after my mar-



Artist, filmmaker, keen photographer, columnist with international magazines... It's hard to pin Twan Yang down. Born to a Chinese father and Tibetan mother, he grew up in Kalimpong and worked in Sikkim. NOW! serializes Twan Yang's autobiography, Houseboy in India...

NOW! BOOK SERIALISATION
Houseboy
in India
an autobiography
by TWAN YANG

-to be continued

Ranka slide carves out 300 mtrs of hillside

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: Neighbouring Ranka was hit by a landslide which caused substantial damage to public and private property there on the night of 14 May, last Friday.

The fall of mud and stones from about a height of 300 metres dam-

aged a PWD land bridge causing diversion of water, informs the DC [East] K. Srinivas. Apart from this, eight houses were damaged, 3 of them badly so.

"The people have been relocated in the homes of the locals. Normally in such situations we provide shelter to those affected in nearby government schools or other

public places. But in the absence of any such facility in this particular locality we have asked the local residents to provide temporary shelter to the ones whose houses have been damaged," the DC informed.

He also revealed that the people of the affected area will be provided with relief materials including food, water and electricity. They

will also be provided with cash relief depending on the scale of damages suffered, he added.

"For those whose houses have been damaged Rs. 10,000 as cash relief will be granted while those whose livestock such as cows have been killed will be given Rs. 3000," the DC informed. A temporary diversion route for the pas-

sage of vehicles has already been put in place.

Apart from this the DC, who is also the chairman of the Disaster Management Committee has already sanctioned Rs. 60,000 as an immediate relief measure. The newly elected area MLA Nimthit Lepcha also visited the spot along with officials from the DC's office, it is learnt.

CONGRATULATIONS FROM THE GOVERNOR, THANKS FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: Sikkim celebrated the 29th anniversary of the State Day yesterday, Sunday, May 16 at Community Hall.

Congratulating the people on the conduction of peaceful polls, the chief guest, Governor V Rama Rao said it showed that the people of the state had full faith in democracy and this had increased the responsibility of the government. He said the recognition of Sikkim by China as an integral part of India was a big event and a victory for democracy.

Now that the new government had received such a handsome mandate from the people, it should focus on priority areas like food, health and employment.

The function was attended by Chief Minister Pawan Chamling,



At the State Day celebrations. [left to right, front row] Speaker Kalawati Subba, Governor V Rama Rao, CM Pawan Chamling and former CMs Sanchaman Limboo and BB Gooroong

the newly elected MLAs, Secretaries and other senior officials along with students and the general public.

Patriotic songs and cultural dances formed part of the day's celebrations.

Although the Chief Minister

did not address the gathering, in a special message he extended his greetings to the people of the state. Expressing his deep gratitude to the people of Sikkim for conferring a massive mandate to the Sikkim Democratic Front he said that he and his party have accepted the people's verdict with respect and humility.

The chief minister has also appealed to the people of Sikkim to work unitedly for the progress and prosperity of the state and transfer it to a place where every citizen could enjoy equality, democratic values and justice. He said that the path was difficult and the work hard but the state was determined to march on, hand in hand with the rest of the country.

Reel life action

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: A man from West Sikkim had a strange experience the other day. In the capital on some work, he went to see a movie at Denzong cinema hall and before he knew it he was attacked by a stranger.

Local police received a written complaint from Biney Bishwa of Kyongsa, West Sikkim alleging that on 16 May when he was in the movie hall, he was attacked by an unknown person by a torch on his forehead and sustained injuries.

After investigation the victim was sent for medical examination to STNM hospital.

The case is still being investigated by the police.

FROM 100 TO 70,000 IN 24 YEARS BSNL OBSERVES WORLD TELECOM DAY

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: The first telecom service in Sikkim was introduced in 1960. Used primarily by the royal family, it was a "Number Please" system where the user had to go through the operator for the connection rather than dialing the telephone number directly. There were only two digit numbers in Sikkim at the time [now Sikkim has 5-digit telephone numbers]. In 1980 this system was modified and connections were given to 100 subscribers.

As late as 1991, only 200 people had telephones in the state. It was only in 1998 that the number of connections increased dramatically to 3000. This was mainly in Gangtok, followed by Namchi.

With mobile services being launched in October 2000, Sikkim today has the highest coverage area in the country. There are 70,000 connections in the state with more than a hundred personnel working in the telecom department.

To acknowledge and appreciate this fact, BSNL Sikkim celebrated

in grand manner the World Telecom Day today. The function, which comprised of a cultural programme, debates and competitions had former DGP, Sikkim Police, Vice Chancellor, SMIT, LC Amamathan as chief guest.

Every 17th of May, telecommunication administrations all over the world celebrate the World Telecommunication Day to commemorate the foundation of the International Telecommunication Union, a specialized telecommunication agency for the United Nations.

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SIBLAC congratulates Sonia, reminds her of Cong commitment to SIBLAC demands

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: The Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee [SIBLAC] has congratulated Sonia Gandhi on being elected the leader of Congress Parliamentary Committee. A press release informs that in a message faxed to her today, SIBLAC has called the remarkable victory of the Congress party and its allies a "tribute to the democratic and secular aspirations of people all across the nation".

Making reference to the election of a Congress candidate from the Sangha constituency, SIBLAC reminded Mrs. Gandhi of her party's support to Delimitation of Assembly constituencies.

The message also mentioned that the AICCI, in its letter to the Convenors of SIBLAC, had assured to extend "wholehearted support and cooperation to the fulfillment of objectives of Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee which intra-alia includes restoration of original definition of "Bhutia", amendment of Representation of People (Amendment) Act, 1980 and the delimitation of 12 BL reserved constituencies to ensure genuine representation of BL people in the Sikkim Assembly."

The organization has also wished the best to the newly elected members of Sikkim Legislative Assembly in their service of the Sikkimese people.

ONLY IN SIKKIM...

Sikkim unique in its doubts over EVMs, says CEO as he responds to Cong queries

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: The Chief Election Officer, TT Dorjee provided a detailed rejoinder to the questions concerning the electronic voting machines placed before him by SPCC [I] president Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who, on 15 May, had submitted a letter to the CEO seeking verification regarding certain EVM related questions. The questions in the letter specifically pertained to the number of EVMs sent to Sikkim, the number used during the polls and those kept in reserve. Apart from these, questions were also raised on the matter of the storage and security of the EVMs.

Speaking to NOW!, the CEO disclosed: "The EVMs were brought to Sikkim in two batches. The first of 450 came in late 2002. The second batch of 750 EVMs came in February this year. These 750 EVMs, which were brought in from Manipur, were used in the Assembly elections held there earlier."

Tashi Bhutia of the Election Department had gone over to Imphal and brought the EVMs to Sikkim "under guard," the CEO informs.

According to the CEO, Bharat Electronics Limited [BHEL] and Electronic Corporation of India Limited [ECIL] are the only two

manufacturers of electronic voting machines in India.

"The ones used in Sikkim all came from ECIL as the Election Commission was of the view that each state should use only one model," says the CEO. He further informs that once the 450 new EVMs had come in, they were all stored, while the 750 from Manipur had a cleansing operation.

"We got engineers of ECIL to come over to Sikkim and had them inspect, test check and erase any previous data stored in the machines," he elaborated. All the machines were then given serial numbers which were recorded and subsequently kept under security.

"A total of 749 EVMs were slated to be used in the elections in Sikkim, two for each polling booth and another 51 for the Sangha Electoral College," the CEO informs. Incidentally there were a total of 349 polling booths in the state. It is further learnt that at the four uncontested assembly constituencies the EVMs for the assembly polls were "not released at all." The rest of the EVMs were kept at the District Headquarters.

The CEO also says that there are no reserve EVMs provided to the constituencies.

"During the day of polls on 10 May, Sector Magistrates were is-

sued 2 EVMs each for emergency replacement in case any of the machines being used malfunctioned or were mishandled," informs Mr. Dorjee. He adds that the serial numbers of these machines had been taken by the ROs concerned.

"When a machine is to be replaced, the presiding officer mentions it in his report diary giving the reasons as well as the respective serial numbers," informs the CEO. He further says that the Sector Magistrate is handed a receipt from the presiding officer on the replacement.

The CEO further informs that only unused EVMs were used in for the elections. Those used for training and demonstrations along with the reserves were placed under security at their respective District Headquarters and "are being returned to the election department." The machines used in the elections have all been sealed and stored in a strong room; the ones used for the assembly polls would be kept for 6 months while those used for the parliamentary polls are to be stored for 1 year before the data in them is erased.

As soon as the dates of the elections had been announced the election department in Sikkim put in a request with the Election Commission for personnel to provide train-

ing and education on the EVMs to election officials here. As the CEO says, "The EC sent Mr. RK Srivastav, secretary, EC and Mr. Ashish Chakravarty, undersecretary who came here in January this year to provide training and demonstrations."

A demonstration programme for all political parties was held at Chintan Bhawan by the two officials from the EC. This programme, informs the CEO, was attended by the Congress, SDF, BJP and other political parties along with the Zilla Panchayats.

"There were no questions on the competence of the EVMs raised at the demonstration programme," Mr. Dorjee adds. He further informs that nowhere else in India have any doubts been raised on the functioning of EVMs: "Only in Sikkim..."



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94-year-old man oldest member of 14th Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, 17 May: At 94 years, Ramchandra Veerappa of Karnataka will be the oldest Parliamentarian in the 14th Lok Sabha, in which the average age of MPs will be 52.7 years. According to statistics released by the Election Commission today, Veerappa, a BJP candidate who won in Bidar, Karnataka, is the oldest winning candidate in the elections to the 14th Lok Sabha. On the other hand, 26-year-old Sachin Pilot of the Congress is the youngest winning candidate - from Dausa in Rajasthan. The Commission also said there were many candidates who were 25 years old, the minimum age required to contest the Lok Sabha elections.

Left to extend outside support

NEW DELHI, 17 May: The Left parties, with over 60 members in the new Lok Sabha, on Monday decided to lend outside support to a Congress-led government. "We have decided not to join the government," senior Communist Party of India-Marxist leader Somnath Chatterjee said after the party's central committee meeting, where members expressed conflicting views but took a "collective decision".

Those who participated in the two-hour meeting included party general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, senior leaders Jyoti Basu, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Prakash Karat, Sitaram Yechury, V S Achutanandan and M A Babu.

The CPI, meanwhile, said it would join the government only if all the Left parties participated.

"The CPI will not take any unilateral decision on joining the government. The whole Left will either participate together or keep out together," party leader A B Bardhan said after the party's national executive meeting to take a final decision on the issue.

Congratulations
Dr. Pawan
Chamling!



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Panstha, Gangtok, congratulates
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SDF HAS NEVER RESORTED TO PERSONAL ATTACKS ON LEADERS: GOOROONG

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: Following a report in a national daily which quotes the SPCC [I] president, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, as alleging that the SDF party had raised the foreign origin issue of Sonia Gandhi, president, Indian National Congress, during its campaign meetings in the run up to the just concluded elections, BB Gooroong, political advisor to the Chief Minister has issued a strong rejoinder.

"The allegation made is not

Desperate Bhandari raising preposterous allegations, says political advisor on allegations that SDF raised Sonia's foreign origins issue during campaigning

only totally false, preposterous and misleading, but also demonstrates the desperation of Mr. Bhandari in the wake of the humiliating defeat handed to him in the elections," Mr. BB Gooroong responds.

"The SDF has never stooped so low as to indulge in personal attacks on senior national leaders," he adds.

He further says that the SDF

party had "definitely laid bare the misdoings of Mr. Bhandari and his team during their tenure in office," but never cast aspersions on the national leadership of the party.

Responding to the question mark on the dependability of the EVMs put by Mr. Bhandari, Mr. Gooroong branded it as "amusing and childish".

"Such questioning does not be-

have of a senior political leader like him. He should have the humility to accept the people's verdict with respect," he said.

"Moreover, by questioning the functioning of the EVMs in Sikkim, Mr. Bhandari is indirectly casting doubts on the mandate which placed his parent party in power at the Centre," Mr. Gooroong quipped.

Newar Sangathan reiterates commitment to SDF policies

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: In a meeting held yesterday, the Sikkim Newar Sangathan has "wholeheartedly congratulated" the SDF party and particularly its President Pawan Chamling on securing absolute majority in the 7th State Assembly Elections.

In a resolution passed on the occasion, the Sangathan declared that the overwhelming victory in the 2004 elections was a victory of the poor and the suppressed people of Sikkim, who had given their mandate for the third consecutive term to Mr. Chamling and SDF.

A press release issued by the Sangathan also adds that the victory reflected the pro-poor policies, achievements and programmes of the SDF government in the last nine years, which helped to benefit people particularly the rural based poor and downtrodden.

The Sangathan also decided to give full support to all the policies and programmes of the SDF government in future. The SNS has also thanked the voters of Gangtok for supporting the SDF candidate, NK Pradhan and ensuring his victory by a huge margin.

The Sangathan has also wished a long and healthy life to Chief Minister Pawan Chamling and prays that all his dreams for the welfare of Sikkim are fulfilled.

Arundhati Roy warns Sonia that the campaign against her is not over

NEW DELHI, 17 May: Novelist Arundhati Roy rejoices that Sonia Gandhi, who "doesn't play the princess," humbled the men who berated her and warns she will face a "blatant game" from a corporate world unmoved by the electoral verdict of India's poor.

Roy said she had been "exhaling slowly" since Gandhi triumphed over all polls and a smear campaign by the ruling Hindu nationalists to become the frontrunner as India's prime minister heading a left-of-centre coalition.

"I'm always very happy with people who are slightly unsure of themselves. She has taken so many risks, and yet she's so unsure of herself and careful," Roy is quoted as saying in an AFP report. "She doesn't play the princess."

But Roy warned that Gandhi had a tough road ahead against an establishment which the novelist believes firmly sided with the right-wing.

Roy noted that much of the media attention since Prime Minister



Atal Behari Vajpayee's shock defeat had focused on the wild fluctuations of the Sensex, the benchmark index of the Bombay Stock Exchange.

"It's almost like a set-up," Roy said. "It's as though you're mocking the electorate and bludgeoning this government by saying, 'Are you aware that the Sensex has fallen? Are you going to pull back on reforms?' So they're forced to say no."

"It's a blatant game. If you look

at the television coverage, I keep on seeing them calling people from the stock market. But I haven't seen one farmer asked, 'Why did you vote for this government?'"

"The kind of inequality between rural and urban areas was higher than it has been in the past 50 years or more, and obviously it was a vote to change those economic policies which the corporate world including the corporate media simply doesn't want to see," Roy said.

Sonia has travelled more than 60,000 kilometers since the end of last year in a bid to prove wrong the government's slogan that India was "shining".

Awkward with the media and speaking in still stilted Hindi, Gan-

dhi endured ferocious personal insults during the campaign by right-wing firebrands who questioned how a foreigner by birth could understand India.

"There's something as a writer and a novelist that one likes about this narrative," Roy said.

"You have bloodthirsty people like Bal Thackeray and Modi and had on the opposite end a person who was just the antithesis of everything. And yet even still, people preferred that to them."

"I must say perversely I even like the idea that having run this absolutely venal campaign against her personally as a 'foreigner', people ignored it."

turn to pg 6

Lepcha Assc. sees "clear verdict" against communal groupings in SDFs victory

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 May: Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum [Sikkim Lepcha Association] has wholeheartedly congratulated the Chief Minister Pawan Chamling for leading the Sikkim Democratic Front Party to an unprecedented landslide victory in the 7th Assembly elections as well as the lone Lok Sabha Seat. The Association has extended best wishes to all the MLAs who have been elected from the ruling SDF party.

In a press release, the association calls the landslide victory a clear verdict of the people of Sikkim against "nefarious designs

perpetrated by a desperate opposition that was hell-bent on disrupting the social fabric of the state," adding that the poor and the downtrodden had "once again risen to the occasion and reposed their unwavering faith on the leadership of Pawan Chamling and his ideologies. The ugly head of casteism and communalism had been well and truly beaten to submission."

Saying that the Lepcha Association represents the entire community, it wishes their "beloved leadership and the elected candidates for carrying forward the dreams and inspirations of Dr. Chamling to make Sikkim a dream destination in the entire nation."

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Kutse Shegu

The 49th Day Kutse Shegu of our beloved mother, late Mrs. Yang Doma Bhutia [Yundu], who left for her heavenly abode on 7 April falls on **25 May**. [The Kutse Shegu date in another weekly paper has been mistakenly printed please ignore that date, the correct date is 25 May].

All friends, relatives and well wishers, are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at residence at Tibet Road (above LCC Computers) Gangtok.

We wish to thank all those who stood by us during the time of bereavement and regret our inability to thank them individually.

Karma Tashi Bhutia (Son); Passang Doma Lachungpa (Daughter in Law); Gomphu Tsering Bhutia (Son); Rinzing Tsomo Bhutia (Daughter in Law); Tashi Namgyal Bhutia (Son)

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Kutse Shegu

The 49th Day Shegu of our beloved father Late Tenzing Bhutia who left for his heavenly abode on 28.3.04 falls on Saturday, 15 May. All friends, relatives and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Tadong, near Maskey Petrol pump. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us at the time of our bereavement.

*Karma Tsering Bhutia, Dy.SP (Son)
Ninje Tsering Bhutia (Daughter)
Karma Doma (Daughter-in-law); Karma Gyaltsen (Son-in-law)*

KAUN BANEGA MANTRI?

No sooner have the elections gotten over than confabulations on who will become a minister in the new government has started. Remember this time only 12 from the 31 MLA's can hold ministerial posts. Who will be the lucky 12? Speculation on this is rising everyday and the subject is a popular topic for discussion everywhere. 20 of the present MLA's are carried forward from the last elections and many of them were ministers. Obviously some will have to be dropped. Who will they be? How many of the new youthful faces will be accommodated. How many Bhutias and how many Lepchas? Will we see the first Sherpa minister in the cabinet this time? Answers to all these questions will be clear on the 21st when the government will be sworn in. The delicate balancing act that will have to be played out in the state will be no less than the mighty coalition drama that is going on at the centre. But reactions will definitely be muted, considering the party owes its overwhelming victory to its chief in command, who is now master of all he surveys.

TIME TO THINK!

"Where the mind is without fear". That presumably must be the place where a local journo must be hid-

ing. His post election disappearance, leaving behind bewildered office staff is completely at odds with his pre election bombast. The 'Shocking' victory of a party, he had always claimed was bad for the state has left him stunned. "How could I have been so wrong? Why could I not read the writing on the wall?" he must surely be asking himself repeatedly. The inability to correctly gauge public opinion



IT'S THE EVM'S FAULT

State Congress Chief Nar Bahadur Bhandari is beginning to sound as petulant as Sushma Swaraj. Both refuse to accept their crushing defeat graciously. While the latter is indulging in melodrama to keep attention away from the fact of having been handed a rout, Mr. Bhandari is still leading delegations to the governor about post poll violence and making noises about the EVM's been rigged in favour of the SDF party. Please Sir, get real. People have made it clear they don't want you. From anywhere. However hard and cruel a verdict that may be, you have to accept it. For those interested in statistics, even if you count the votes he got from both the constituencies, they still add up to less than what either of his two opponents racked up individually.

THE NEXT MELA

Talking about the EVM no one is too happy with them. The whole point of a secret ballot is defeated by the exact calculations it gives out at the end of the whole election drama, pinpointing to the T which area voted for whom. Although, the SDF party is too happy about its sweeping victory to bother about it, one can imagine what would have happened if the reverse had been true. As it is the joke doing the rounds is that after all the Loan Melas and Janata Melas, now it's the time for the Victimization Mela!

could be due to the fact that he has been in the state for a very short time and like any pseudo intellectual could only see things from a minority vs. majority point of view. Playing this minority card he has done more harm than good for the community. Now, why am I going on about him? Mostly, because of irritation for the sermons he keeps giving on the role of the press.

Anyways, let bygones be bygones...

Roy warns Sonia...

Contd from pg 5

"Especially coming from this country and from Gujarat — Gujaratis in England are fighting to be called English, all over the world Indians are demanding citizenship. So how can you behave in such a jingoistic manner here?"

Roy said she once considered Sonia "God's gift to the BJP" which rose to prominence on a platform of Hindutva, or "Hinduness."

"I used to think she was such a soft target, that in this whole climate of nationalism, Indianism and Hindutva, she was such an unlikely leader of the opposition. But just imagine, even being such a soft target it's come to this."

Roy has been prolific in her criticism of past governments' policies, particularly their crackdowns on separatists in Kashmir and northeast India, their growing alignment with the United States and the 13-year push to leave the predominantly agriculture economy to market forces.

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Holland of the East – Kalimpong?

KARAN SHAH

KALIMPONG, 17May: The "Prize Distribution Ceremony" of the much talked about and unique "Garden Competition-Spring 2004", organized by the Kalimpong Horticulture Society was held today, 17 May, at the "Disha Hall".

The garden competition, a four day horticultural contest, (from 14th to 18th April), was unique in the sense that the judges had to visit the gardens of the contestants where their various flowers and other types of flora were exhibited.

The occasion had Shri Hangu Subba, Vice- Chairman, and DGAHC, as the chief guest.

"This concept of a Garden contest is to be maintained, because flowers are always a part of one's life. We will put in huge efforts, so that; the place can one day be termed as the "Holland of the East", said Mr. M S Foning, the President of the KHS. Commenting on the irregularity of the contest, which took place after a gap a four years, Mr. Foning said, "Due to financial constraints, we had a break of four years, but we will make sure that it continues from now onwards".

Though there were no overall

standings, the positions were based categorically.

There were a total of nine categories for the competition, ranging from schools to commercial and religious establishments.

While the restaurant "Fresh Bite" stood first in "Commercial Establishments", it was the "St Josephs Convent", from the "Educational Institution" category. The "Silver Oaks" and "Pine View Nursery" were foremost in the "Hotels and Nursery" category respectively.

The Kalimpong Sub-Divisional Hospital and the Tourist Guest House at Delo were awarded with the "Best Effort" Prize.

Surprisingly the Kalimpong Police Station had also participated in the contest, though they didn't come up with any prize.

"It is known that Kalimpong is the only place, in the whole of the North East, from where flowers are exported" said Mr. Manoj Pradhan, the convener of KHS, while Shri Hangu Subba, thanking the society for its efforts said, "We will try our best to get some official help for the society".

Mr. Rajdeep Pradhan, owner of

A show like Anarchy

ANAND OBEROI

GANGTOK: Anarchy started with a dream four years ago. The dreamers were Girish and Urgan armed with ordinary instruments. Then along came Pramod and Yogesh, joining the group. They had only two preoccupations in life at that time - studies and music.

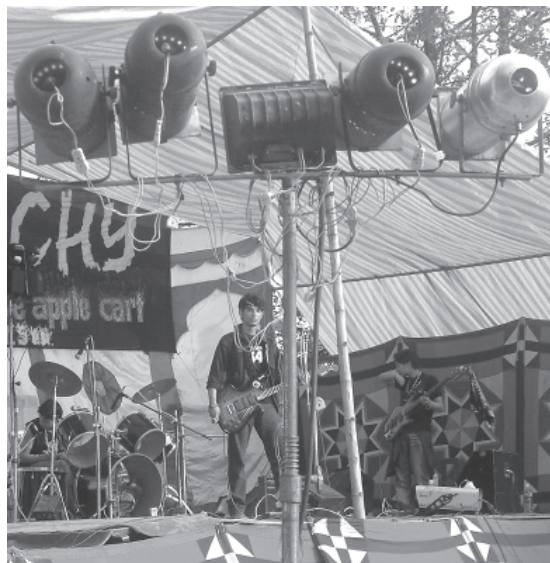
These were four dedicated students and four head bangers as well. The beat master, Yogesh would tap and beat anything he could lay his hands on. Everything from empty plastic cans to jars to buckets would fall prey to his incessant tappings. While he was looking for some more objects to disfigure, his counterpart, Urgan found solace in plucking strings. Anywhere the boys got together, the venue would instantly be ablaze with Girish's vocal-strings and Yogesh's combo experiments. Their dedication towards releasing their dream bore fruit when the boys finally acquired decent gadgetry including flaunting quality guitars, pedals, drums etc.

A concert for the cause of charity was organized at the PNGSSS ground on the 16th of May. Anarchy was in full swing and won over many converts. The sound system was outstanding and the Head-Banging continued unabated. The entire PNG Campus was rocked by the collections from Iron Maiden, Megadeath, Sepultura, Metallica and Guns and Roses and impressive self compositions like Don't Smoke and Evil Mother. Once the band had gotten into the groove, there was showmanship galore. Urgan switched places with Girish and captivated the crowd with his extra ordinary antics and his vocals to



Nepali Rock band Robin and Looza.

Anarchy got the crowd up on their feet and crazy too. Pramod and Yogesh also showed brilliant performances with their magical fingers and the extraordinary drumming blasting the crowd and creating a rocking ambience. The evening also saw guest appearances by two upcoming local talents from PNG School during which they



belted out numbers by Avril Lavinge. Feedback, the other band to share the evening with Anarchy was also impressive. The idea of a band designed as a punk outfit captivated the crowds. The concert gained a lot of popularity and was appreciated by everyone who attended it. Everyone seemed to have a great time and a blast throughout.

All in all, the concert was a great success with the jam-packed PNG Campus of Head-Bangers all around having a very good time.

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Suicide car bomb kills Iraqi leader

BAGHDAD, 17 May: A suicide car bomb has killed the head of Iraq's Governing Council, dealing a major blow to the U.S. coalition battling a Shi'ite insurgency and a growing prisoner abuse scandal.

Abdul Zahra Othman Mohammad, a Shi'ite Muslim also known as Izzedin Salim, was in the last car of a Governing Council convoy waiting at a checkpoint to enter the "Green Zone" coalition headquarters in central Baghdad when the car bomb exploded.

The attack on Monday underlined the vulnerability of the Baghdad administration just six weeks before the U.S.-led occupiers are set to hand over sovereignty to Iraqis, though officials insisted violence would not derail the political process.

At least six people were killed as the blast tore through the crush of cars and pedestrians waiting to get into the heavily guarded compound of Saddam Hussein's former palaces, blowing bodies apart and melting the asphalt.

"The other members escaped unharmed. They managed to get through the checkpoint before the explosion. Salim was still waiting to enter," Deputy Foreign Minister Hamed al-Bayati said.

He said it was too soon to say if the attack was aimed specifically at the councillors, gathering for a meeting of the 25-member body which is headquartered in the Green Zone.

More than a dozen vehicles were destroyed, including minibuses from which doctors wearing masks and rubber gloves pulled burnt bodies.

"There were a lot of cars and people on foot standing there, and then this massive explosion," said Raad Mukhlis, a security guard at a nearby residential compound. "I saw body parts and martyrs everywhere."

Holland of the East...

Contd from pg 6

"Fresh Bite" who claimed the first position in "Commercial Establishments" said, "Such competitions, will not only add enthusiasm among the general masses, but it will also promote Kalimpong, from the tourism perspective. The town has always been known for its

unique flowers, but such competitions will always add to the overall standards".

Incidentally, Kalimpong has been titled "The Green House" for its ability to produce all kinds of plants, ranging from desert accustomed "Cactuses" to the frosty "Orchids", including all the seasonal plants and flowers.

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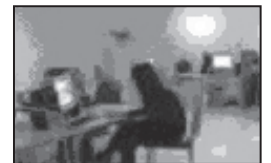
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today in History

18th May

- 1756:** England declares war on France
- 1804:** Napoleon becomes Emperor of France
- 1830:** Edwin Budding of England signs an agreement for manufacture of his invention, the lawn mower.
- 1860:** Abraham Lincoln nominated for president
- 1872:** Born, Bertrand Russell England, mathematician/philosopher [Nobel 1950]
- 1918:** Born, Pope John Paul II 264th Roman Catholic pope (1978-)
- 1951:** UN moves HQ to New York City
- 1965:** Gene Roddenberry suggests 16 names including Kirk for Star Trek Capt
- 1974:** India becomes 6th nation to explode an atomic bomb

'WE ARE THE FUTURE' BENEFIT CONCERT HELD

ROME: Nearly two decades after music greats gathered to record the hit song "We are the World" to benefit Africa's hungry, the next generation of celebrities came together Sunday for a follow-up "We are the Future" concert to benefit children in war zones.

The concert, which opened as the sun set over Rome's Circus Maximus and continued after midnight, started with a performance by the garbage-can-clanging percussion group Stomp and featured dozens of acts from around the world.

Oprah Winfrey welcomed the tens of thousands of people to the event and reminded them that it was occurring just weeks after the world marked the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, "where it seemed the world turned its back."

"But that's all changing tonight because we are all here," she said.



Alicia Keys performs at the 'We Are The Future' music concert in Rome's Circo Massimo, Sunday, 16 May, 2004.

"We are all here to stand up for the children."

Musicians Alicia Keys, Andrea Bocelli and Carlos Santana performed live over the course of the evening, and Norah Jones sang in a prerecorded video. Israeli, Palestinian, Pakistani, Colombian and South African artists joined actress Angelina Jolie, model Naomi Campbell and actress Natassja Kinski, who were presenters.

Quincy Jones, who produced the 1985 "We are the World" recording, organized Sunday's five-plus hour concert, which will raise money for

child care centers in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Rwanda and the West Bank.

Santana brought a decidedly political message to his act, telling the crowd: "We are the other side of America. We are not Bush!"

The concert was free but proceeds from broadcast rights, donations and related sales will go to fund the centers.

A DVD, a book and a live recording of the concert are also expected to go on sale. The recording is to feature a new song "We are the Future" written and produced by Jones.

FEAR OF IDOLATRY SPARKS WIG BAN

JERUSALEM: An ultra-orthodox Jewish sage has issued a ritual ban against natural hair wigs from India, saying they may have been made from tresses shorn from women during Hindu ceremonies, Israeli newspapers reported on Friday.

Many Orthodox Jewish women, who adhere to rules of modesty by allowing only their husbands to see their natural hair, responded to the ruling by switching to synthetic wigs or hats, the Yedioth Ahronoth and Haaretz dailies reported.

The edict, issued by the spiritual leader of an ultraorthodox sect, said some hair in wigs sold in Israel may have come from women who took part in Hindu haircutting ceremonies, which was tantamount to idol worship.

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SLIPPERY GREASE BANDITS MAKE SLICK GETAWAY

OKLAHOMA CITY: Oklahoma police are looking for grease bandits who made off with 5,000 pounds of used cooking oil and grease from three restaurants.

Police in Edmond, north of Oklahoma City, said on Thursday the grease bandits have hit an area of Mexican, Chinese and steak restaurants over the past three months.

The robbers took the used cooking grease that was stored in large cylinders in the back of the restaurants. The restaurants were planning to sell the grease to a recycling company and the total value of the stolen goods was about \$380.

Glynda Chu, a spokeswoman for the Edmond police said the bandits had a good idea of how to get money in the used grease market, but she thinks it odd that anyone would put so much effort into making off with so much cooking byproduct.

"It would be a big chore to haul that smelly stuff away," Chu said. "They did, however, make a slick getaway."

HOPKINS GEARS UP FOR 'INDIAN' RACE

Anthony Hopkins has committed to star in "The World's Fastest Indian" for director Roger Donaldson ["The Recruit"].

"Indian," which Donaldson also wrote, centers on the life of Burt Munro, a New Zealander who

invented several decades building a 1920 Indian motorcycle. He then traveled to the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, where he set the land-speed world record in the 1970s.

Production on the film, being

developed by indie firm Cameo FJ Entertainment, is set for August in New Zealand and New Mexico. Hopkins' recent credits include "The Human Stain" and "Red Dragon."

THE FUTURE, NOW!

ARIES: Financial position will be very good. You will have the support of your friends and relatives. Auspicious expenses are indicated. You must take care of your mother's health. You may be in a position to purchase a new vehicle. A change in environment will make you happy.

TAURUS: Your new decision on business and career will work for you. Financial position will be good. Employees will be rewarded for their hard work. You may get married. Litigation will be postponed.

GEMINI: There will be some financial strain. Litigation will be postponed. Loans will be reduced. You should not take major decisions. Expansion in business is possible. Understanding with your spouse and business partner will be very good.

CANCER: You will be in a position to settle some personal matters. Industrialists will enjoy a good turnover. Students should work hard to succeed. Expansion in business is indicated. You may benefit through your life partner.

LEO: You may start new business activi-

ties. Business will be brisk. Cash flow will be very good. Worries will be over. Tensions will be reduced.

VIRGO: You may take up a new agency business. Business will be brisk. You will face lesser hostility. Your loans will be sanctioned. You may get multiple lines of business.

LIBRA: Health will be good. You may start new business. Partnerships will work well. Cash flow will be very good. Prosperity is indicated. You will be in a position to release tangled assets. Political life will be very good.

SCORPIO: Those involved in the sugar and textile industries may find improvement. Those in trade and with agencies will benefit from the opportunities coming their way. Expansion in business will take place. You will be more involved in spiritual activities.

SAGITTARIUS: You may face a financial crisis. Those involved in electronics or in

telecommunications will make a good profit. You may take up new computer-related business. Understanding with your life partner will be very good. Export businesses will be a little dull.

CAPRICORN: Financial position will be good. You will be in a position to reduce your loans. You will also release immobilised resources. You will take some major decisions. Litigation will be in your favour.

AQUARIUS: You may find greater improvement and changes in your activities. Support from your younger brother will be there. Political line may give you respect and honour. Health will be good.

PISCES: A religious tour and an official tour are indicated. Support from your superiors and subordinates will continue. A change of environment will cheer you up. Hotel and restaurant businesses will be very successful. Understanding with your life partner will be very good.

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