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The first exchange over Nathula
Merger As An Item Number?

The “merger” that has been in the offing for so long has finally materialised. Sikkim Sangram Parishad and its President, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, are finally acceptable to the Cong [l] high-command. With this development, Cong [l] makes it back to the State Assembly on the wings of an alliance. Mr. Bhandari gets the boost that he required urgently to infuse some vigour into his supporters in a buildup to his fifth bid at power from the outside in the Assembly elections slated for end-2004. Although the decision comes too close to the Cong [l]’s Sikkim in-charge, Salman Khursheed’s visit to the State, the state unit has managed to salvage some pride. It had remained insistent that the merger could not be given the nod until they were consulted. Mr. Khursheed was here, and consulted and made the announcement within days of his return. All he extracted from his party-men in Sikkim was an “unwritten agreement” that they had no objections to the merger. As for Mr. Bhandari, although he lost face in the run-up to the merger, he has still salvaged some pride in the fact that the merger did eventually happen. Both sides now seem to be in each other’s company.

Now, to get down to the actual business of what the merger has in store for the Sikkimese people. The electorate had refused SSP the mandate to rule. It did, however, entrust it with the watchword of the welfare of the people. Mr. Bhandari could not keep his flock together and was eventually reduced to becoming the lone MLA not sitting on the Assembly. Mr. Khursheed has now to convince the Sikkimese people that they can be a good Opposition, but the two players will have to show a much better position of the Opposition will have to show a much better face than it has done thus far. After all, apart from supporting what the Assembly mandates, it will also have to play the role of critic to the present Assembly exists. Be that as it may, the new composition of the Opposition will have to show a much better face than it has done thus far. After all, apart from supporting what the Assembly mandates, it will also have to play the role of critic to the present Assembly exists. Be that as it may, the new composition of the Opposition will have to show a much better face.

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A timely tip-off led to the arrest of a suspected ISI agent in Gangtok. A Bangladeshi national, Dilip Kumar Roy had already visited India five times in as many months and was collecting defence related secrets for the Pak secret service.

GANGTOK: Dilip Kumar Roy, 40, has led an interesting life. A Hindu in Bangladesh, he joined the Bangladesh army in 1974, retired as Havaldar Major in 1991 and instead of leading a simple retired life, got recruited into the Inter Services Intelligence [the Pakistan secret service] in 2002. His journey as a spy, which started in Dhaka last year when Farooq Khan, the military attaché at the Pakistan Embassy in Dhaka induced him, ended in a Sikkim Police lockup on 2 August, Saturday, when his inquisitive nature triggered the suspicion of some people he met, who tipped off the cops leading to his arrest.

The first ISI operative to be arrested in Sikkim, Roy had not progressed very high in the game and was being used by the ISI to confirm troop movement and deployment details which they had already received.

“The diary recovered from Roy had details of Indian army deployment in the region. He admitted during interrogation that one of his primary briefs was to confirm the information that the ISI had gathered,” DIG [Range] SD Negi told NOW!

Apart from confirming troop movement in the region, Roy was also commissioned by the Pak intelligence agency to get details on movement and training programmes of army units.

When asked how information on troop movement would help the ISI, Mr. Negi explained that such information was used when planning terrorist attacks in the region. The NJP railway station bomb-blast a couple of years back, it is learnt, was timed to “hit” as many soldiers as possible. Even the bomb, sources in the intelligence agencies reveal, was placed at a spot where the “military bogey” would stop and where most soldiers rested.

Among the “incriminating” evidence recovered from Roy were also a number of addresses and phone numbers. Since he was also expected to develop contacts, Roy, it appears, made it a point to take down contact numbers of everyone he met - even casual acquaintances made on a bus journey. The fact that he was seriously working towards developing moles in the Indian army are borne out by his offer to sponsor the marriage of girl he had met in Sikkim if she married an Indian army personnel.

“Roy was in the process of cultivating contacts and sources in Gangtok and other places in the region. Armed with a friendly disposition, Roy could quickly gain people’s confidence and befriended them,” the DIG [Range] added.

Officials who have interrogated Roy admitted that although he was a minor link in the spy chain, another year and he would have developed into a major player. “This man continuously fooled people into believing something he was not and managed to extract a lot of information from gullible people. Some more time and he would have become very dangerous for national security,” Mr. Negi told NOW!

It is obvious that even though Roy is a minor player, no is taking the ISI threat lightly in Sikkim. While Sikkim Police’s intensified checks at the Rangpo are still subtle, the sandbagged security in army installations here are a more overt reminder of how no one is taking security lightly in Sikkim any more.

Information available thus far suggests that between March to July, Roy had already visited India five times on a Bangladeshi passport. Sources also reveal that he has distant relatives in Kolkata from where he would head for Sikkim and make forays into Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Birgunj and Gangtok. It is learnt that although Roy has visited Gangtok twice [once in June and then again on the day of his arrest], he never stayed over in Sikkim, heading back the same day both times.

Although Roy always entered India legally, he would immediately start posing as an Indian national once he had cleared the immigration check-post at Kolkata. Being a Hindu and fluent in Hindi also helped Roy avoid suspicion. From posing as an ex-Indian army personnel to an NGO worker, Roy is reported to have used many covers to ferret out information from gullible people.

Roy’s arrest and his subsequent interrogation have also revealed more details on how ISI recruits spies for the “human intelligence” network it is building in the Sikkim corridor. Under interrogation, Roy is reported to have squealed the name of a Bangladesh National Party activist who also runs an NGO in Bangladesh, as the person who introduced him to Farooq Khan, the ISI operative in the Pakistan embassy in Dhaka. Farooq is also suspected to be the main “linkman” between extremist organisation in the northeast and ISI bosses in Pakistan.

Roy, who is being jointly interrogated by several agencies at present, might not make any grand revelations about ISI activities in the region, but could provide crucial leads on its style of operating and areas of interest in the region. He has been booked under Sections 3 and 9 of the Official Secrets Act, 1922, read with Section 120B of the IPC and is currently under police custody.
HINDI-CHINI BHAIRU BHAIRU AGAIN

The first exchange over Nathula

by TINA RAI

NATHULA: “Come here, do not be afraid, we are all brothers,” said Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, extending his hand in a friendly gesture to a Chinese soldier across the barbed wire that marks the Indo-China border at Nathula. After a warm handshake, Mr. Chamling proceeded to take off his wristwatch [always a popular gift with Chinese] and gifted it to the People’s Liberation Army soldier. The soldier accepted the watch and gifted the CM [a non-smoker] a pack of cigarettes in return. With this, in a way, trade returned to Nathula after a gap of almost forty years.

On his first official visit to Nathula, Mr. Chamling was seen in very high spirits. And, he had reason to be happy. Nathula is very unlike a border outpost. There are no Wagah-like histories of aggression on display here. In fact, the only hostile motif at the Indo-Chinese border is the barbed wire there. In fact when the press members reached the spot ahead of the CM’s entourage, there were no Chinese personnel on duty on the other side.

Later, two rather shy, young Chinese soldiers made their way to the fence and posed for photographs with the hordes of VIPs, officials and journalists who had descended on Nathula on 1 August.

All this took place under the watchful eyes of the Indian army personnel, who were seen conversing with the Chinese soldiers in fluent Chinese. Judging by the friendly atmosphere that exists here, it’s almost hard to believe that the two countries have actually fought a war against each other in the past.

NATHULA: “This is the time to make a suggestion to the Centre to ensure that infrastructural development in Sikkim is comprehensive and thorough.”

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From the CAG Report

The repair specialists

GANGTOK: How long would you leave your vehicle with the mechanic when you put it in for a complete overhaul? A month, maybe two at the most. If you are someone who will start missing your drive within a month of two, then make sure that it does not end up at the Jalipool workshop of the Transport Department. The CAG Report claims has resulted in a revenue loss of almost a crore.

Since the Department does not consider it necessary to stipulate deadlines, auditors adopted the standards fixed by the Association of State Road Transport Undertakings (which stipulates a maximum of 22 days for major engine repairs of heavy vehicles) to evaluate the efficiency [!] of the workshop.

The CAG Report for 1994-95 and an Inspection Report in October 1999 had already pointed out this lackadaisical attitude and its fallouts.

The CAG Report now observes that such “abnormal hold-up” at the workshop “in excess of industry norms” adversely affected the fleet deployment and resulted in an estimated revenue loss of Rs. 99.63 lakhs to the State exchequer.

In its defence, the Department argued that the delays occurred due to “non-availability” of skilled manpower and “overage” of vehicles. It also pointed out that stipulated 22-day deadline is for engine and gearbox overhauling while the workshop at Jalipool also undertook complete renovation of body and repainting jobs too.

The casual approach of the Department is even more confusing when seen in light of the fact that this is not the first time the issue is being raised. The CAG Report for 1994-95 and an Inspection Report in October 1999 had already pointed out this lackadaisical attitude and its fallouts.

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Court gives Bhandari and co. “benefit of the doubt” acquits them in Employment Exchange case

GANGTOK: Former Chief Minister and Opposition Sikkim Sangram Parishad president, Nar Bahadur Bhandari and fifteen other politicians booked for breaching Section 144 and rioting in the tumultuous week of 1997 which saw protests against the extension of central employment exchange act to Sikkim have been acquitted by the Chief Judicial Magistrate [West].

The judgement order gives Mr. Bhandari and co. the “benefit of the doubt” in the charges framed against them in the role they played in leading the sometimes violent protest marches against the Act back in 1997.

Apart from Mr. Bhandari, other Opposition leaders booked in the case were Congress leaders Thukchuk Lachungpa, KN Uperti, PD Namgyal, Sikkim Ekta Manch president and former Power Secretary, LP Tewari and former Deputy Chief Minister PT Lucksom and the two SSP MLAs who now sit in the ruling bench, Sonam Dorjee and JK Bhandari.

The protests, which were threatening to run out of control, ended with a lathi-charge near Paljor Stadium. After the voices of dissent simmered down under the lathi blows of Sikkim Police and RAF, the State Government too withdrew the extension of the Act and booked the opposition leaders.

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SIBLAC invokes guardian deities to sustain BL unity

Kabi-Longtsok prayers a curtain-raiser to SIBLAC’s Delhi yatra

a NOW REPORT
KABI-LONGTSOK: “Vested interests have been trying to divide the Bhutias and Lepchas and by invoking the guardian deities and the ancestors through this prayer, we hope to re-establish the bonds of blood-brotherhood that the two communities swore centuries ago,” said Tenzin C’wang, spokesperson for SIBLAC which organised a Sol-kha at Kabi-Longtsok on 3 August, Sunday.

The prayers at Kabi, conducted jointly by Bonhtings and monks, invoked the guardian deities of Sikkim and the ancestors, in a bid to buttress the BL unity, which SIBLAC fears is fragmenting under the influence of those who view it as a threat.

Mr. C’wang insisted that even though Lepcha organisations had withdrawn support from SIBLAC, the apex committee continued to enjoy the support of a sizeable number of Lepchas in Sikkim who are unhappy with their organisation’s continued silence on issues concerning the ethnic minority group of Sikkim.

Owing to the road conditions, the prayer meet at Kabi drew fewer people than expected, but the invocations went off well in the bright weather that held throughout. Among those present for the prayer were SIBLAC office-bearers including its convenor Tsering Tashi Bhutia and Nima Lepcha, SPCC [I] President, Namkha Gyaltse and former Ambassador, Karma Topden.

Talking to NOW!, Mr. C’wang added that the prayers were a “curtain-raiser” to the departure of SIBLAC members to Delhi [scheduled for later this month] where they plan to hold a series of sit-ins and dharnas in a bid to spread awareness about and win support for their demands.

The latest list of SIBLAC’s 4-point resolution includes a demand for commensurate increase in seats reserved for BLs [up from 12 to 17] should the State Government’s demand for increasing the Assembly strength to 40 get accepted. It has also demanded that the reservation formula of the Assembly seats be followed even at the panchayat level and also replicated in reservations for higher studies and employment opportunities. In its fourth demand, SIBLAC calls for such a delimitation that ensures that BL voters are in majority in BL constituencies.

The gathering at Kabi-Longtsok for the SIBLAC-sponsored Sol-kha (above), right A Lepcha Bonhting from Dzongu invokes the guardian deities and spirits of the ancestors to bless the Bhutia-Lepcha tryst of blood brotherhood.

The prayer meet ended with SIBLAC members undertaking an oath to “continue” with their struggle for BL “survival.”

SANGRAM’S CONVERSION TO CONGRESS COMES THROUGH

High-command compensates Arunachal with Sikkim, Sangram's conversion now wear Cong colours

a NOW REPORT
GANGTOK: A fax-message scrolled into the Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee late on Saturday night announcing the Congress high-command’s “in-principle” clearance of the SSP-Congress merger which has been pending for some two years now.

After months of vacillating over the issue, the Congress high command finally decided on it within a week of Salman Khursheed’s [Special Invitee CWC and party in-charge for Meghalaya, Tipra and Sikkim] Sikkim visit.

The announcement took everyone by surprise in light of Mr. Khursheed’s comments in Sikkim where he suggested that the merger would not be decided in haste. In fact, in conversation with NOW!, Mr. Khursheed even hinted that a lot more thought needed to be applied to the proposal since Mr. Bhandari came with a “lot of excess baggage”.

“Mrs. Gandhi’s popularity is at a high at present, we would not want to do anything that points fingers at her,” he said.

All these considerations now appear a thing of the past. A formal announcement on the merger is expected on 7 August, by which time the SSP President accompanied by his supporters will reach Delhi. The merger, an SSP leader confirmed is “unconditional.”
Ecotourism lessons from Sikkim

Naga tour operators learn the tricks of the ecotourism trade from Sikkim experts

by SARIKAN ATREYA

GANGTOK: Tsanchingla Irlong can hardly wait to go home in Mokokchung, Nagaland. The young tour operator is eager to put into practice the training she received here during her two-week stay. She is confident that the training would give the much-needed impetus to the nascent tourism industry in her State.

“I have learnt so much. Nagaland is similar to Sikkim in so many ways. I learnt a great deal. I hope to use my experience here to contribute to the development of my State, through tourism, which I hope will in turn contribute to the development of our common community,” she told NOW!

She is not alone.

Thirty enthusiasts like her from Nagaland share the same feeling. They were part of the two-week Rural Tourism Guides Training programme conducted by the Ecotourism & Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), which was held from 19 July to 2 August and sponsored by the Government of Nagaland.

This was the second such training programme conducted by ECOSS for trainees from Nagaland. The first training programme was aimed at improving the basic skills of the guides, and train them in responsible rural eco-tourism practices, which they can implement in their State,” Renzin Lepcha, executive secretary, ECOSS and the main facilitator of the training programme said.

Mr. Lepcha is of the opinion that such training programmes will immensely contribute to the development of ecotourism of the entire region and will also help in marketing Sikkim as an ecotourism destination, with the focus on village life.

TAAS upbeat about Nathula, concerned over mushrooming of ‘unauthorised’ operators

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK: Although not yet opened for tourism, the announcement that Nathula will be opened for tourism, the announcement that Nathula will be opened for tourism, was held here in June, earlier this year.

Tsanchingla and her team-mates got first-hand experience of village tourism management through the exhaustive training programme, which included field trips, and dwelt upon subjects like role of rural guides, village home-stays, arrival and departure briefing techniques, customer service interpretation, marketing, medical and first aid, hygiene and sanitation, garbage and trash management etc.

“This training programme was aimed at improving the basic skills of the guides, and train them in responsible rural eco-tourism practices, which they can implement in their State,” Renzin Lepcha, executive secretary, ECOSS and the main facilitator of the training programme said.

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The first field trip took the Nagas guides to Pasatanga in Assam Lingzey. Lodged in Nepalese households, this was their first experience in village home-stays.

Next, they headed to Dzongu for a one-on-one with the Lepchas of the region. The first stop was at Namphaiang, where the participants visited the traditional Lepcha house.

Dzongu village in Upper Dzongu played host to the visiting Nagas delegation, kicking off the Tingvong village home-stay project. The villagers put up a colourful cultural show for the visitors, show-casing their traditional songs and dances. A friendly football match was also held between the Nagas and the hosts.

“It has been an eye-opener for me in many ways. There are so many things about village home-stays, which we can replicate in our own villages in Nagaland. It is all about involving the local community in such income-generating schemes which will supplement their traditional sources of income and preserve their culture, tradition and the environment at the same time,” felt Tsanchingla.

The rest of their itinerary consisted of visits to the Martarm Resort and Kewzing, where they were introduced to village home-stays. In Kewzing, they were treated to traditional Sikkimese Bhutia hospitality and culture. The last leg of their training took them to Legship for river rafting and then to Namchi, where the valedictory function was held on 1 August, last Friday.

“At the end of the day, its all about sustainable development. Sikkim is better in the way in ecotourism and sustainable development efforts of the country. We hope to follow in the same steps,” summed up Tsanchingla.
Tendong-Lho-Rum-Faat - the ancient festival

Lepcha youth promise grand celebrations

In the wake of a heavy earthquake which damaged the lakes, the legend goes that Parilbu [King Serpent] and Tutfo guided the two new rivers to their confluence at Pozok [now Peshok].

Unfortunately, the rivers flooded Mayel Lyang [Sikkim]. The Lepchas residing near Mt. Tendong, to save their lives climbed up to its peak and prayed to Ib-Bu-Rum [the almighty God]. It is believed that a Kohomfo [a Partridge] appeared and offered prayers with Mongcheebeb [brewed millet] and another earthquake shook the earth, creating new rivers to their confluence at the northern zone of Mayel Lyang which forced the flood waters to flow southwards, thus saving the Lepchas from the great deluge.

The Lepchas residing near Mt. Tendong have deep religious significance for the Lepchas. Tendong will conduct prayers at Mt. Tendong, to save their lives climbed up to its peak and prayed to Ib-Bu-Rum [the almighty God]. It is believed that a Kohomfo [a Partridge] appeared and offered prayers with Mongcheebeb [brewed millet] and another earthquake shook the earth, creating new rivers to their confluence at the northern zone of Mayel Lyang which forced the flood waters to flow southwards, thus saving the Lepchas from the great deluge.

Since that time, the Lepchas have observed the “Tendong Lho Rum Faat” or worship of Mt. Tendong. Till a few years back the festival was celebrated privately at homes, but now, not only is it a State holiday, but the celebrations continue to grow larger in scale. This year, Lepcha representatives are expected from all the districts of Sikkim, as well as from Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Nepal and Bhutan.

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WHO CARES???

I care and you should care too... A major mobile service provider is having a roll in Sikkim by charging more than 50 per cent as service and administrative charges on every recharge.

It surprises me how people here are so indifferent to this day-light robbery, specially since a majority of the people of Sikkim have been to metropolitan cities where their service providers charge approximately 10 per cent of every recharge as their administrative charges. Hutch, Airtel, Spice and many of the service providers in Delhi do not deduct more than 10 per cent as service charge.

I wonder why the mobile service provider we are straddled with charging more than 50% on every recharge voucher where the customers end up paying Rs. 300 for a recharge of just Rs. 143 of talk time.

And, it is not as if the services are anything to write home about. The messaging service from one service provider to another, for example, takes a day and at times maybe more to get through.

Staying connected, which is a necessity, has become a luxury with mobile phones frequently in “network search” mode. It’s time the company explained this policy which seems to be reserved exclusively for this region.

-a disgruntled customer

All of the statements in this present reality		Tai reiterated that transfers are conducted only during the winter vacations between December to early February. He, however, admitted that at times, mid-session transfers were also forced by administrative reasons or on requests from teachers who request transfers on “health grounds.”

While these explanations might hold while clearing files, they are lost on students at Middle-Camp who have lost more than a month of classes. Chemistry classes resumed for them on 3 August, but that is hardly any consolation since the subject is being taught by the Biology teacher [!] When NOW! visited the school, the students poured out more grievances.

“We had no text books for Maths, Social Science and Science till the first week of June. We were already lagging behind and now they have taken away the teacher,” they complained.

“It is a wrong policy of the department of relieving teachers in the mid session because of this our children are suffering,” exclaimed one angry parent.

Their irritation with the Department should not last much longer since the Assistant Director assured that they were in the process of arranging a replacement posting. It is, however, learnt that only one more science teacher will be provided for the Middle-Camp school since a Secondary School gets only two science teachers as per rules. How they got three earlier, even the Department does not seem to know.

The woes for the students are, however, not completely over. Reports suggest that a faculty member at the school is unhappy that while two teachers were transferred out when they requested, his application for a transfer has not been cleared thus far.

Fraud and irregularities at Sikkim Manipal University

Academics is supposed to be the main activity of Sikkim Manipal University. But behind the scenes, there are many dark corners. This University is hiding a host of fraudulent activities designed to fool the Government of Sikkim, the Medical Council of India and the public.

During the MCI inspections, plane-loads of faculty from the Manipal medical colleges in Manipal and Mangalore are transported overnight to Sikkim so that adequate faculty can be shown to the unsuspecting inspectors. This “mobile” faculty has been brought for the last six inspections. The SMU records are falsified, staff attendance records are created.

Even more alarming is the falsification of patient records to show MCI high occupancy in the Central Referral Hospital teaching hospital. The staff nurses are forced to create false figures for each ward for the whole year. Fake patients are made to occupy some of the beds during the MCI inspections. The average daily inpatient is 35-40, but the counterfeit records show them at about 200.

SMU has taken Rs. 30 crores from the Sikkim government and has put up such a shabby building, which is incomplete in parts and requires extensive repair and maintenance. Not only that, SMU has failed to install the superspeciality equipment for cardiology heart patients as promised in the agreement. On the other hand, the Manipal hospitals in Bangalore and Pokhara are state-of-the-art institutions. SMU is reportedly trying to squeeze more money out of the government for the hospital.

Now the latest Manipal trick is to reserve 33 per cent seats for NRIs and foreign students to make even more money. This, in light of the fact that the central government seats for Sikkimese students have been reduced. These lost seats have not been made up at SMU and even if this is done, the Sikkimese students will have to pay much higher fees than at other government medical colleges in India. It is high-time the government and people of Sikkim wake up to the devious strategies of the Manipal group.

All of the statements in this letter can be verified from SMU and other records. If the MCI finds out about the inspection tomfoolery played by Manipal, the college will be derecognized and the future of the students is in great danger.

A concerned Parent

Middle-Camp Secondary School
Students suffer through teacher transfers

a NOW REPORT

MIDDLE-CAMP, Singtam: The class X students of Middle Camp Secondary School are an unhappy lot. They also know the exact date when their woes began - 5 July, 2003 when two science teachers from the school were transferred out. A month down the line, they still await replacements.

Everytime the students had to sit through a Chemistry class without a teacher they were reminded of how inconsiderate those issuing such orders can be. “How can they transfer a teacher in the middle of an academic session,” questioned one student while talking to NOW! They might not be aware of the Education Department’s expressed policy decision not to transfer teachers mid-session, but are bright enough to see that marching orders after a session has started are unfair on the students.

The Assistant Director, Education Department, KT Wangchuk, points out that the transfers in question were ordered on the request of the concerned teachers themselves.

Additional Secretary DT Bhutia reiterated that transfers are conducted only during the winter vacations between December to early February. He, however, admitted that at times, mid-session transfers were also forced by administrative reasons or on requests from teachers who request transfers on “health grounds.”

While these explanations might hold while clearing files, they are lost on students at Middle-Camp who have lost more than a month of classes. Chemistry classes resumed for them on 3 August, but that is hardly any consolation since the subject is being taught by the Biology teacher [!]

When NOW! visited the school, the students poured out more grievances.

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Their irritation with the Department should not last much longer since the Assistant Director assured that they were in the process of arranging a replacement posting. It is, however, learnt that only one more science teacher will be provided for the Middle-Camp school since a Secondary School gets only two science teachers as per rules. How they got three earlier, even the Department does not seem to know.

The woes for the students are, however, not completely over. Reports suggest that a faculty member at the school is unhappy that while two teachers were transferred out when they requested, his application for a transfer has not been cleared thus far.

Sikkim Manipal University responds

No falsification of records at SMU

In a reply to the accusations made on Manipal Medical College and hospital, the Dean, RP Singh said:

“I do not want to comment on any of the allegations made. All the MCI inspections have taken place before my tenure, which started on July 3 2003.

Tampeting with the records from the MRD section is not easy and the staff there are highly qualified. No falsification of documents and records is possible.

As far as the question of plane-loads of faculty being brought in during the MCI inspections is concerned, the MCI inspections are not lenient. They know their job and do not leave any loopholes. It is not easy to fool them.

During my tenure, I have invited only one Dr. BA Kumar, an Orthopaedic Surgeon, who is considered the best in the country. He performed surgeries and treated patients. He brought his expertise and did a specialised job. Apart from him, there has been no faculty transfer. All these are false accusations.

STNM and Manipal are working hand in hand, our objectives are the same. Eleven consultants from STNM are attending sessions at Manipal and the doctors from Manipal hold regular clinics at STNM. We are working for the same purpose.”

As to told to NOW!

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.
NEDFi hopes to catalyse economic development in Sikkim

**a NOW REPORT**

GANGTOK: The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) is all set to start business in the State. It held its first Business Meet, inaugurated by the Chief Secretary SW Tenzing here on Tuesday.

The Meet, held to interact with the State’s entrepreneurs and “thoroughly” understand Sikkim’s requirements in the finance and investment sectors, saw a good attendance by members of the Business community, the Travel Agents Association of Sikkim, the Sikkim Hotel and Restaurant Association, young entrepreneurs and government officials.

Speaking on the occasion, NEDFi GM, Dr. Deka said that the re-opening of Nathula for trade has provided the State with the much-needed fillip for industrial development. While outlining NEDFi’s various schemes and projects aimed at “catalysing economic development of the North East,” Dr. Deka said that the thrust areas identified by the Corporation for Sikkim included ecotourism, handicrafts and handlooms, aromatic and medicinal plants plantation and processing, food processing and biotechnology, among others.

NEDFi has also commissioned Price-Water Coopers, Kolkata, to prepare a “Pre-Investment Feasibility Study on Industrial Potential for Sikkim” which equips the Corporation with information on development potential of the State. “We come to Sikkim prepared and with an open mind. We hope to contribute to the economic development of the State,” Dr. Deka said.

While emphasising on important role NEDFi can play in Sikkim, the Guest of Honour, Chairman SIDICO, PD Rai, said that there was a need to look into all core issues of human resource development of the State.

“NEDFi could supplement some of the projects and schemes initiated by other financial and banking institutions in the State. The financial institutions and agencies here have always been constrained by inadequate financial resources. With the coming of NEDFi, this gap can be bridged,” he said.

The Chief Secretary, in his address said that Sikkim was a “happening State” and the need of the hour was entrepreneurship building.

NEDFi has a critical role to play in Sikkim. We have the land and the labour and NEDFi can provide the capital. The present gaps in the infrastructure will be filled further aiding the economic growth of the State,” he said.

The CS, however, warned that Sikkim should be “very” of “fly-by-night operators” who target the immense subsidies the State enjoys after it joined the North Eastern Council.

NEDFi was recently awarded the ISO 9000 certificate, making it the first agency of its kind in the North-East to receive one. It plans to focus on small and medium enterprisers in Sikkim. It has appointed Ugen Tashi [a local with banking experience, having worked with IDBI] as the Nodal Officer for Sikkim.

Centre allocates Rs. 17 crores for spices in northeast

**a NOW REPORT**

Cardamom growers in Sikkim get a shot in the arm with the new Central Government scheme which allocates Rs. 17 crores for export-oriented development of spices in the North-Eastern states.

The programme will consider the potential of improving production and productivity of a number of spices grown in this region. The Spices Board also proposes to take up cultivation of large cardamom in these states.

The Board, it is learnt, will support the State governments and NGOs for multiplication of plant materials and maintenance during gestation period subject to a maximum of Rs. 17,500 per hectare. Large cardamom which is grown in Sikkim requires special type of curing chambers to dry and Spices Board proposes to construct 15 community curing houses with a capacity of 1,000 kg each at a total outlay of Rs. 75 lakhs.

The Board has also proposed to being 3,835 ha under organic pepper cultivation in the region at a cost of Rs. 4 crores. Herbal spices such as rosemary, thyme, parsley, oregano, basil etc. are also proposed to be brought under cultivation in 100 ha during the current plan at an outlay of Rs. 30 lakhs.

The Board proposes to give 25 per cent of the cost for setting up of vermi-compost units subject to a maximum of Rs. 1,250 per unit. About 5,000 units at a cost of Rs. 62 lakhs will be set up during the Plan period, it is learnt.

TASHI NAMGYAL ACADEMY

GANGTOK, SIKKIM

**ADMISSION NOTICE**

1. Entrance Test for Admission in Lower Kindergarten for the academic session - 2004 will be conducted on SUNDAY - 2 NOVEMBER 2003 at 9:00 AM
2. Prospectus / Application forms would be available in the school office from 15th September 2003 on payment.
3. For LKG age should be +4 (plus four) years but below 5 years as on 1st January 2004 and student should not have studied in UKG in 2003 session.
4. The last date for submission of application form would be 31 November 2003 by 3 PM along with the following documents:
   (a) Date of Birth Certificate in original and in duplicate copy obtained from the Office of the Chief Registrar of Births and Deaths Department.
   (b) Latest passport and stamp size photographs.
   (c) Registration fee of Rs. 2000/- (Rupees Two Thousand) only (non-refundable) to be deposited in Bank account of Tashi Namgyal Academy, Zero Point Branch, Gangtok. Pay in slip can be obtained from the school office after due verification of application form.
   (d) Attested copy of (parent’s) SSC or certificate of identification from DC’s office.
5. PLEASE NOTE THAT NAME AND DATE OF BIRTH OF THE STUDENT ONCE ENTERED IN THE APPLICATION FORM SHALL NOT BE CHANGED.
6. Mere registration does not give guarantee of admission. It only entitles a student to take the entrance exam on 5 August. The Entrance exam does not let parents to check/compare the scripts, however, it would ensure that the test is fairly and efficiently conducted.
7. Test will be conducted in basic skills of English and Number Works and Viva-voce.
WHEN UNDERDOGS COME UP TOPS

Pachey Primary School does a Lagaan

Gear up cricketers, its trial time

GANGTOK: Sikkim Cricket Association has announced plans to hold trials for selection of players for the 2003-04 season. Interested cricketers who are residing in Sikkim, are invited to attend the above trials for selection in their respective districts. In case of players from outside Sikkim, they are eligible to attend the trials provided they have participated in a domestic tournament of the State. The SCA has called on players to report with their own kits and in proper dress. Players are to bear their own expenses for the trials.

The trials for the Under-15, Under-17 and Under-19 categories will be held in the districts on August 23 and 24.

Contact Persons:
North- Sonam Palden Bhutia, Phone: 234819/9434171250.
East- Lakha Chetti, 224527/9832046921
South- Bikash Pradhan/ Pavitra Sharma, 257075/276499/257089
West- Kaish Thendup Bhutia, 255693/9434178337

INCENTIVES BACKLOG TO BE CLEARED ON 1-DAY

Deptt. of Sports & Youth Affairs gets serious about awarding achievers; new policy offers Rs. 1 crore for Olympic gold

a NOW REPORT

PAKYONG: The 15 August celebrations this year will see many sports-persons from the state get rich cash awards for their performance in the field.

Cash awards for 20 in football, 14 for Taekwondo, 10 in boxing, 5 in table tennis and one each for archery and swimming will be handed out by the Department of Sports and Youth Affairs.

Although cash incentives for good performance have long been the policy, over the years a backlog of payments to deserving candidates had built up. All such cash incentives which are due will be cleared in one sweep this year.

Along with it a new structure for cash incentives will be put into place to further encourage and motivate sports-persons in their pursuit of excellence. And the handouts are generous.

A sum of Rs. 1 crore for an Olympic Gold. And for those who think that is far-fetched, it is still within reach for archer Tarun Deep Rai, our contender for gold in the next Olympics, who has qualified in both the team and individual events for Athens.

A prize in other international games will fetch cash awards worth Rs. 5-15 lakhs. Medals won in national games organised by the Indian Olympic Association get as much as Rs. 2.5 lakhs for individual events and Rs. 20,000-50,000 for team events while medalists in the North East Sports Festivals will get awards ranging from Rs. 5000 to 10,000.

The cash awards will be given only to permanent residents of Sikkim, who represent the State in the notified competitions. A certificate to this effect issued by the SDM/DM of the concerned area must be produced while making the claim. Claims for cash awards should be made within 1 year of winning a medal.

The SCA has called on players to smash into limelight. Players are to bear their own expenses for the trials.

However, it is difficult to get sponsorships, Mr. Bhutia expressed gratitude towards Hari Stores, MG Marg, for sponsoring the trophies for the tournament. The tournament will also be giving the most promising team trophy, the best player trophy and other individual trophies to the players. The trophies for the junior boys are being sponsored by the school itself. According to Mr. Bhutia, the tournament offers a platform for both boys and girls to show their talent and attract sports officials of the state to search for young talent who could then be further groomed.

At the time of going to press, PNGSS beat TNA, in the first match. Pachey School took the game to a penalty shoot out. Here they beat their rivals 4-2.

The unfancied boys from Pachey School were now in the finals. Here they met St. Xavier’s again.

The 30 July finals saw a repeat of the first match. Pachey School won by a resounding 5-0 margin to lift the cup. Coach PW Lepcha could not have been happier. The hard work that he and his boys had put in preparation, showed in the results. The victory made something of Pachey School boys will remember for a long time.

Volleyball tourney for players to smash into limelight

by NIGEL CASHMORE

GANGTOK: The Independence Day Volley Ball Tournament began at Burtuk Junior High School on August 4. Five teams are participating in the Junior Boy’s section. The tournament has been organized by ST Bhutia, Head Master, Burtuk Junior High School.

The opening match of the tournament was between TNA and PNGSS. Another two matches were held on the same day between Tathangchen Secondary School and Modern Secondary School while the last match of the day was between junior boys in which Burtuk Junior High School took on Tathangchen Secondary School.

The tournament is being held after a gap of three years. ST Bhutia who held the last tournament at Penlong in 1999, has now decided to hold the tournament on a more regular basis.

Although it is difficult to get sponsorships, Mr. Bhutia expressed gratitude towards Hari Stores, MG Marg, for sponsoring the trophies for the tournament. The tournament will also be giving the most promising team trophy, the best player trophy and other individual trophies to the players. The trophies for the junior boys are being sponsored by the school itself.

According to Mr. Bhutia, the tournament offers a platform for both boys and girls to show their talent and attract sports officials of the state to search for young talent who could then be further groomed.

At the time of going to press, PNGSS beat TNA, in the second match Tathangchen beat Modern School girls, in another match Burtuk School boys beat Tathangchen School boys.

Sikkim Football Association Independence Day Football Tournament for Chogyal Sir Tashi Namgyal Memorial Cup 2003

 FIXTURE

Pre-Quarter

A
Dzongri Club     v/s (7.8.03, 3PM)
Bhoomj Kempoma Club     v/s (7.8.03, 3PM)

B
Munal Club, NEPAL v/s (8.8.03, 3PM)
Northerners

Quarter Final

C
Sikkim Police XI v/s (9.8.03, 3PM)
WINNER OF ‘A’

D
Himabseet (Kalimpong) v/s (10.8.03, 3PM)
UKFC (Kurseong)

SkM United Sp. Club, v/s (11.8.03, 3PM)
DPSFA, Dungarpur

Semi Final

G
WINNER OF ‘C’ v/s (12.8.03, 3PM)
WINNER OF ‘D’

H
WINNER OF ‘E’ v/s (13.8.03, 3PM)
WINNER OF ‘F’

Final

WINNER OF ‘G’ v/s (15.8.03, 1:45PM)
WINNER OF ‘H’

N.B.: 1. All the matches will be played at Tashi Namgyal Academy Ground, Gangtok.
2. Games will be played as per the rules of the AIFF.
3. SFA Reserves the right to re-schedule the fixture if needed.

MATCH COMMISSIONERS:

7.8.03 Mr. Karma Wangchuk
8.8.03 Mr. Lilai Rai
9.8.03 Mr. C. C. Bhutia
10.8.03 Mr. P. C. Mundra (1st Match)
Mr. Kunzang N. (2nd Match)

MENA ETHEPNA
Hony. Secretary

GEYZING: The Sikkim Under-19 Football Tournament 2003 got underway at Kyongsa Ground, here on 4 August, Monday. The tournament which was earlier slated to start on 2 August has been organised by the Sikkim Football Association and Department of Sports and Youth Affairs.

The inaugural match was played between Khecheopalri Lake Club and Sinolchu Club. The first three matches will be played at Kyongsa Ground while the rest of the matches will be shared between Kyongsa and the Bhachuk Stadium in Namchi.
PHOOLMAYA TAMANG creates history atop peak in Leh

Sikkim’s Phoolmaya Tamang creates history atop peak in Leh

**SPORTS**

The Mountain chooses the Climbers

Phoolmaya Tamang from Sikkim created history along with three other women, when she became part of the first all-women group to scale the virgin Argan Kangri Peak in Ladak. The nine member all-woman team was led by Rita Gombu Marwah.

Four team members, including Phoolmaya, scaled the peak after a three week long expedition, hitting the summit on 20 July at 7.45 am. The climb was the Indian Mountaineering Foundation’s (IMF) official commemoration of the golden jubilee of Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay’s conquest of Mt. Everest. Though at 6,789 metres Argan Kangri does not count among the highest peaks, it has its share of perils.

On the selection of the eventual summiteers, senior team member Tanya Banerjee-Bey said, “The mountain chooses the climbers. In this case, we decided that four of us should go to the summit - those four who settled in best with the conditions”.

Phoolmaya, is an instructor at Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute, and was one of the representatives of Sikkim at the golden jubilee celebrations of the ascent of Mt. Everest. The first mountain she climbed was Lake Khangtse in North Sikkim, after which there was no looking back. Up in the mountains she says she becomes a completely different person. “Up there all that matters is the will to reach the top”.

Phoolmaya, who recently went up to 7,467 metres along the 8849 Mt. Everest, said, “Almost everything went according to plan. It was a bit difficult in stretches because sometimes the ascent was as steep as 75 degrees. But the team did everything in a coordinated way and that’s why it worked.” After a lull in mountaineering activity in Sikkim, there seems to be a sudden deluge of achievements by Sikkimese climbers. Phoolmaya’s colleague at SGMI, Nadre Sherpa summited Everest for the second time recently and is slated to be part of an Indian expedition to K2 in Pakistan next year.

A file photo of Phoolmaya Tamang at the Everest base camp