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First With The News

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BDOs-in-training introduced to thematic maps on Sikkim's natural resources

PURAN TAMANG

JORETHANG, 28 Nov: The Sikkim State Council of Science & Technology, organised a day-long workshop on "National Natural Resource Information System" for the newly appointed Block Development Officers and NGO representatives at the conference hall of the State Institute for Rural development (SIRD), Karfector here today. The workshop was facilitated by the Department of Space, Government of India.

Minister for Science & Technology, SB Subedi, the chief guest for the programme today, informed that the remote sensing applications centre, with scientists of the Department of Space, had prepared comprehensive thematic maps on the natural resources of Sikkim and that this database would be of great help for future planning in Sikkim.

He further said that the State government was working towards the overall development of each individual of the State with full stress on the people of rural areas and that the recently opened Block Administrative Centres in all parts of the State aimed at providing better and more efficient services at the grass root level.

He further expressed hope that the Block Development Officers [BDOs] would benefit from the workshop and also urged the participants to apply the information on natural resources for planning development in their respective jurisdictions.

Mr. Subedi further appreciated the steps taken by some NGOs which had come forward to undertake the responsibilities of running Village Resource Centres (VRCs) and asked the concerned departments to promote to pg4

State notification accords Primitive Tribe Group status on Lepchas



STATE GOVT'S PROPOSAL BEING EXAMINED, KYNDIAH TELLS RAJYA SABHA

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 Nov: A notification issued by the Parliamentary Affairs Department on 18 November, 2006, has accorded official recognition to the Lepcha community of the State as a Primitive Tribe Group. With this,

the process of securing this status at the national level has moved to the next level and also perhaps explains why a delegation of Lepcha elders, led by the Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum, is camped in New Delhi, calling on Central leaders pressing for Primitive Tribe Group

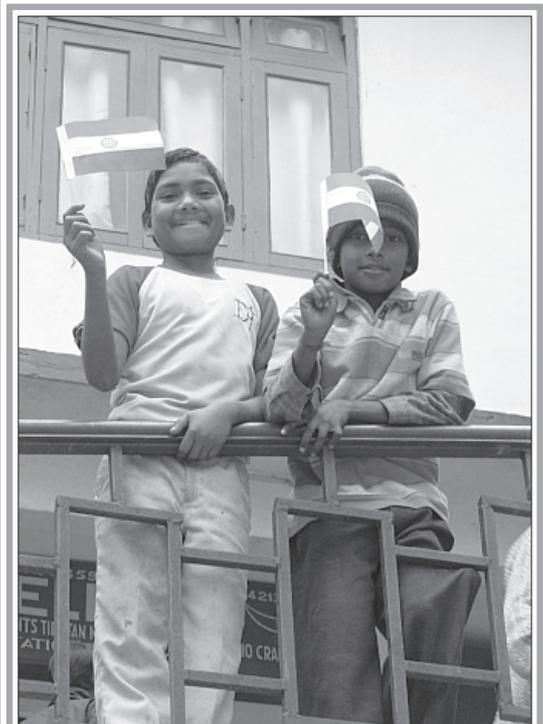
Status for their community. The notification follows from the resolution endorsing Primitive Tribe Group status on Lepchas passed by the Sikkim Assembly in 2005 and resolving to lobby for such recognition with New Delhi. The notification states that the State government

"...hereby recognises and declares the Lepcha Community of the state as the Primitive Tribe Group in the state of Sikkim".

In this regard, it would be pertinent to point out that the Chief Minister had recently written to the Centre a few days before leaving for New

Delhi, reminding the Centre of the State's commitment to acquire Primitive Tribe Group status for the Lepcha and requesting the same.

The 18 November notification states that the Lepchas, one of the three ethnic communities of the state turn to pg2



BHARAT'S FUTURE NIRMATAS
 Young enthusiasts outside the venue of the Bharat Nirman Public Information Campaign which concluded at Old Children's Park today. While the details of Bharat Nirman schemes shared inside might have been beyond them, patriotism obviously was not.

Govt moves SLP in defence of Rule 4(4) in apex Court

RANJIT SINGH

GANGTOK, 28 Nov: There might not be a Durbar Gazette notification of the Sikkim Government Establishment Rules, 1974, with the State government because it appears that it was never issued, but the legal minds in the State government are certain that even without such a notification, the Rules are very much a legal deed and enforceable as any other protected Old Law in the State.

In this regard, a Special Leave Petition (SLP) has been filed in the Supreme Court by the State government, which, it is informed, challenges the or-

THE RULE WAS NEVER UNDER THREAT OF GETTING REVOKED, ASSURE OFFICIALS

ders of the High Court of Sikkim especially those dated 23 June, 2006 and 04 May 2006 in writ petition no. 43 of 2005. The SLP is yet to come up for hearing.

To begin with, the State government is taking the stand that an issue already decided by the Supreme Court cannot be raised again by the High Court; besides, the State is also challenging the jurisdiction of the High Court here on the issue of Rule 4(4).

In the orders mentioned above, the High Court had raised questions over the legality of the Rule, noting that this

was a very important question and raised questions as to whether there was any order or proclamation made by the Chogyal "...besides non publication of said law in the Sikkim Darbar Gazette..."

Regarding this sensitive and sentimental subject, the State government intends to prompt the High Court on a few points of history and is seeking to bring the issue up for hearing in the High Court. Sources inform that the first point in the matter is that the question of Rule 4(4) is not relevant to the petition currently

being heard by the Court.

The State contends that neither the petitioner, nor the respondents, ever brought up the issue of the Rule even though the High Court recorded that it was brought up by the State respondents.

The second contention of the State is that even if this is an issue, the High Court has no jurisdiction over it and inversely, the jurisdiction of the High Court does not cover this issue.

Sources inform that as per Article 141 of the Constitution turn to pg2

STDA opens branch office in Mangan

DEEPAK SHARMA

MANGAN, 28 Nov: The Sikkim Truck Drivers' Association opened a branch office for North District at Tshana House here on 26 November.

The inauguration was followed by a meeting attended by former Sports Secretary, Sonam Gyamtsho, as the chief guest, along with President STDA, NB Chhetri, Working President, Mingma

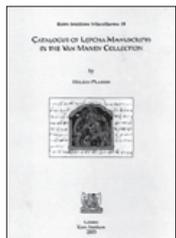
Sherpa, General Secretary, Dipendra Kumar, advisors and PI KP Nepal.

The meeting formed a committee for the management of the Mangan Branch Office with Lobzang Lepcha as the President, M Subba as the Vice President, Tsheten Bhutia as General Secretary and S Gyamtsho, Jigmee Lachenpa, Samdup Lepcha, Peutok Kazi, Srinath Prasad and Sonam Dadul as the turn to pg2

Book cataloguing largest collection of Lepcha manuscripts released

MARK TURIN reviews a new book that offers new insights into Lepcha language and literature...

This catalogue offers a detailed description of the 182 Lepcha manuscripts in the van Manen Collection, presently kept in the library of the Kern Institute of Leiden University. Johan van Manen [1877-1943], a now largely forgotten Dutch scholar, was involved in scientific exploration throughout his professional life and collected a wealth of material pertaining



Plaisier, Heleen. 2003. *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*. Kern Institute-Miscellaneous 11. Leiden: Kern Institute. Paperback, 260 pages. 72 facsimiles. ISBN: 90-9017656-X. Price: €30 Euro.

to Tibetology and Oriental Studies. For 16 years he served as General Secretary of the [later, Royal] Asian Society of Bengal, and has been referred to as the "founder of Tibetology in the Netherlands" by Professor Yang Enhong [JIAS Newsletter, No. 19]. This collection of manuscripts written in the Lepcha language is by far the largest of its kind in the world. By identifying these manuscripts, and describing their contents and external features, this catalogue renders a unique collection accessible to the wider public.

Lepcha is an endangered

language of the Tibeto-Burman language family, and is spoken by upwards of 50,000 people in Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal in India, the Ilam district of Nepal and in south-western Bhutan. Unlike most other tribal languages spoken in the Himalayas, the Lepcha people call themselves *Róng* or *Róngkup* 'children of the *Róng*', or *Mituncu Róngkup Rungkup* 'children of the *Róng* and of God' in full, and they refer to their language as *Róng-róng*.

According to Lepcha tradition, the script was invented by the Lepcha scholar Thikung Men Salóng, believed to be a contemporary of the patron saint of Sikkim, Lama Latsün Chempo (also known as Lhasün Namkha Jimi, 1597-1654). The codification of the written language was probably motivated by the religious activities of Buddhist missionaries. The Lepcha literary tradition can be dated back to the eighteenth century, when the Lepcha script was devised during the reign of the third chögel of Sikkim, Chádo 'Namgá' (1700-1716). The first twenty pages of

the catalogue focus on fonts, Lepcha orthography and the Lepcha alphabet, revealing the academic background of the author, Heleen Plaisier, who has been investigating the language and culture of the Lepchas since 1994. The first two chapters provide a particularly useful and level-headed overview of the competing orthographic conventions and linguistic theories held by the various scholars who have studied Lepcha, both indigenous and foreign.

The description of the catalogue itself opens with a brief turn to pg2

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FIRST WITH THE NEWS

Reinforce Lepcha Individuality

Now that Primitive Tribe Group status for the Lepchas of Sikkim appears within grasp, there will be those who will suggest that this move will fragment the Sikkimese society. Such a reaction would be too myopic. It has taken Sikkim upwards of three centuries to realize that the Lepchas have been dealt a raw deal and too much tokenism and that the time has come to accord them an individual and unique status. To begin with, they will no longer be the hyphenated half in an arrangement that has not worked very well for them so far. There is no denying this fact, because, should the Primitive Tribe Group status come through, it would be an admission of the fact that they need to be brought at par with the rest of the communities which populate the Scheduled Tribes list, something that recognition as STs alone has been unable to secure. With exclusive access to special benefits, there is no reason why PTG status should not benefit the Lepchas immensely. The only thing that could hold them back would be the glorification of backwardness that has been successfully imposed on them for too long. It is this shutting out of the outside world that has constricted the confidence of the community, members of which, till a century ago were celebrated for their expansive traditional knowledge base and picked from among several contesting communities to accompany British explorations stretching from South East Asia to Congo. The community elders should use the PTG status to return this pride and recognition to the Lepchas.

STDA opens branch office...

Contd from pg1

Committee Advisors.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Chhetri emphasised on the many vehicles from outside North Sikkim plying in the district and urged the local drivers and truck owners to unite and employ only people from the North to help in the progress of the place.

Stating that the branch office had been opened to benefit the local truck drivers and owners of North Sikkim, he suggested that truck owners issue pay cards to their drivers and deduct a part of the salaries which should be deposited in the bank on their behalf for future security.

He also added that on Sundays, the SK-03 vehicles should be kept off the roads so that the drivers could rest and vehicles receive maintenance and servicing.

Vehicle owner P Kazi stressed upon the importance of co-ordination between the drivers and the truck owners. Mr. Nepal said that the members should appeal to the government for a parking space in the area to be allocated to them.

In conclusion, Mr. Gyamtso congratulated STDA and suggested that the renewal of the driver's license and the blue books be done at the district level by the concerned department.

WINTER FOODS – THOSE BRIGHT DELIGHTS FOR COLD DAYS

Winter's here, and in contrast to the Sun having hidden itself behind the clouds, winter foods have revealed themselves in plenty at vegetable and fruit stalls across the State. The 'Sikkim Belly' will be pampered even as the bodies catch a chill. There is after all a silver lining behind every cloud.

Winter is that time of the year when the local markets are flooded with an abundance of fruits and vegetables which are hard to come by during the warmer months. Be it the humble mustard leaves or 'raaya saag', which takes a rather handsome form in the cold with giant-sized, crispy green leaves, just asking to be stir-fried with pork chunks, or the elusive squash roots or 'iskus ko jara', which is ready to be dug only when the temperatures shoot down.

Then there is the utterly delicious 'Laapchey Kaulo' or the smaller avocados, which can be sighted at almost every corner of the town now, being sold by old ladies bundled up in shawls beckoning passer-bys to the fruit spread out before them on tarpaulin strips. Besides being a major hit among the people in general, of late, these avocados have become the favourite pastime of the office goers, who seem to have found absolute solace in the five-minute minutes required to roll the fruit against a hard surface in order to soften it and then tear off the flesh from its skins, strictly to be performed with the front incisors. Since, to relish this fruit requires some patience and a little hard work, what better way than to do it during after lunch hours, when there is hardly much work on the desks and plenty of time to catch up on the latest gossip? If you happen to step into one of the offices at the mentioned time, you are most likely to catch somebody in the act, with a bag full of the round green fruits tucked away safely under the desk.

Incidentally, these avocados, which grow wild in the forests of North Sikkim, Assam Lingzey in East Sikkim and in Ben in South Sikkim, bear fruit only once every three-four years. So once this season is over, you will probably see them only in 2009!

And then, there is the most popular flavour of the season, which is actually a major contributor in accentuating the characteristic holiday mood of the winter times. What can one do when there is no school to attend and long official holidays to enjoy? Well, for one, you could simply sit on your terrace under the languorous winter sun and spend hours at end, relishing the good old 'suntalas', also known as the Sikkim Mandarin oranges.

The characteristically loose-skinned Sikkim Mandarin oranges, one of the main cash crops of the State, have already hit the markets here, announcing the formal arrival of the 'huindo mahina'. The local name 'suntala' is ascribed seemingly so due to its colour which closely resembles that of pure gold. In fact, our neighbours to the



REMUNA RAI makes a round of the vegetable and fruit stalls and finds that just as the Sun hid behind the clouds, winter foods debuted in the local markets. Here she details what is special this year and what the winter produce means not only to local traditions, but also the rural economy...

northeast have established this more assertively. The Chinese obsession with gold as signifying good luck and auspices has codified a special tradition of bearing gifts of mandarin oranges or 'kam' on special occasions as it symbolises gold or wealth.

The first batch of oranges this season, which are the smaller ones being sold at Rs. 5 for ten pieces in the local markets, have been harvested from the older plants in the orchards. The larger fruits, which are more spherical in shape and juicier than the smaller ones, will hit the markets sometime mid-December, the peak season for the fruit. Though some can already be seen dotting the stalls here at the Lal Bazaar, one will have to wait for few

weeks more to lay your hands on the real McCoy.

A local fruit seller at Lal Bazaar informs that the bigger fruits sell at Rs. 2 a piece or a subsidised Rs 5 for three, and that on a 'good day' he can go home with Rs 1000-1500 in his pockets from the sale of this fruit alone.

The oranges being sold at Lal Bazaar at present have made their way here mostly from orchards near 32nd Mile, Makha and Sang-Martam. These places comprise the orange belt for East Sikkim, which covers Central Pendim, West Pendim, Sang-Martam and Yangyang. Apart from these, the larger producers are Rinchenpong, Chumbung, Geyzing and Darandin in the West District.

At a production of approximately 9 metric tonnes each season from an estimated total area of 5,481 hectares, over the years, the Sikkim Mandarin has also worked its way into markets outside the State and Sikkim

Primitive Tribe...

Contd from pg1

and the indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim, have been accorded this status to 'protect and safeguard' the vanishing tribe and to uplift their socio-economic, educational and political status and to give them a distinct identity and special status.

The letter to Central leaders from the Chief Minister in this regard was probably to set the ground for the follow-up visits by the Lepcha delegation. Added to this, the Chief Minister who is currently in New Delhi is also reported to be pursuing the matter with the concerned ministries there.

In fact, the matter also featured in the Rajya Sabha yesterday with Minister for Tribal Affairs, PR Kyndiah, while responding to a question raised by Sikkim's Rajya Sabha MP, OT Lepcha, not only explained the criteria for recognition as a Primitive Tribe Group but also put on record that the proposal from the State Government of Sikkim regarding recognition of the Lepcha tribe as a primitive group was being 'examined' by the Ministry.

Mr. Kyndiah, told the Upper House yesterday that the criteria fixed for declaring a community as a primitive tribal group was based on low level of literacy, declining or stagnant population of the tribe, [primitive] pre-agricultural level of technology and economic backwardness.

A bulk of the Lepcha population in the State lives in remote areas and in small settlements where the soil and the topography are not the best suited for agriculture and more conducive to their primitive tribal ways of living as hunter-gatherers.

NOW! SUDOKU

1	4		6	5	
		1	8	4	
		3	8	1	
2	5	9		1	
	4		3	9	7
	8	7	9		
5	6		4		
7	3		5		2

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION
The aim of Sudoku is to enter a number from 1 through 9 in each cell of a 9x9 grid made up of 3x3 sub-grids, starting with various digits already given in some cells; each row, column, and sub-grid can contain only one instance of each number.

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Christian welfare society conducts AIDS awareness

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 Nov: To create awareness on HIV/AIDS, a day-long Advocacy-cum-Orientation programme was organised here today at the Sikkim Government College auditorium by the United Christian Welfare Society of Sikkim [UCWSS].

Assam Lingzey MLA, Kunga Zangpo Bhutia, was present as the chief guest for the programme organised by UCWSS jointly with the Sikkim State Aids Control Society [SSACS].

In his address, Mr Bhutia said that religious leaders could play a more effective role in combating HIV/AIDS because they evoked more confidence among the people than politicians or bureaucrats.

On the Government's part, Mr. Bhutia assured the audience that under the leadership of the Chief Minister, the government was committed to generate more awareness on HIV/AIDS since information was the best protection in this case.

"In fact, the Chief Minister had directed all MLAs and



Minister to include messages on AIDS and against substance abuse in all our public addresses so that awareness reaches the people from all sides," the MLA revealed.

While commenting on the importance of the day's programme, Deputy Moderator Counselor of EPCS, Rev PS Tingbo, said that the programme was necessary to remind individuals and the society on their responsibilities towards combating HIV/AIDS.

The technical session was conducted by Project Director, SSACS, Dr RL Sharma. Similarly, Director of Anugyalaya Diocese Social

Service, Darjeeling, Roshan Rai also highlighted that HIV/AIDS was a social problem, which compromised the development of the country.

The programme, which was conducted by the Assistant General Secretary of UCWSS, Rev Robin Chhetri, had started with an opening prayer by Rev Emmanuel Zurib.

Pastor Dzongmit Pakhrin placed the vote of thanks and the programme concluded with a closing prayer by Rev Samuel Lepcha and benediction by President of UCWSS, Rev Joseph Tamang.

Govt moves SLP in defence of Rule 4[4]...

Contd from pg1

tion, a matter once settled by the Supreme Court cannot be put up again for question by High Courts even in the light of new grounds – in this case, the High Court contending that the question of producing the royal proclamation before the apex court had not arisen.

In fact, it is also informed that the apex court has already decided even on this particular issue three times over and now with the SLP pending, it will be the fourth time that the same arguments have reached it.

The first instance was the State of Sikkim vs Surendra Prasad Sharma in which Rule 4(4) was upheld as valid by the apex court.

The second instance was when Satyendra Roy, then a compounder with the Health Department, approached the High Court on the same matter. At that time, sources inform that something 'unthinkable' happened with the then DoP Secretary being

cross-examined by the High Court on the matter. It had been admitted by the Secretary that the original Sikkim Government Service Rules did not bear any signature or initials of anybody.

Even at that time, the High Court had observed, inform sources, that this particular question of legality of the Rules had not been raised in the Supreme Court and allowed an amendment by the petitioner to be placed before the apex court.

At that time too the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of Rule 4[4].

Then followed a petition filed by one Ashok Singh in the apex court on the same issue which met with the same fate. Officials feel that history is now repeating itself with the High Court again raising the same issue already settled by the apex court.

It is admitted by the State government that there is no notification of the above mentioned rules. But, during these tense and confusion-

laden days, many 'laws' were made by way of instructions, directions, rules or royal proclamation and these were then enforced as any other law of the land.

To go back to history, the Sikkim Government Establishment Rules were framed by a committee headed by the then Establishment Department [now known as the DoP] Secretary and two other members on the recommendation of the then Chief Executive Officer, BS Das in 1974. The Chief Executive Officer had been made the head of administration in Sikkim by the Government of Sikkim Act of 1974.

It is contended that many such rules and laws were framed by the Chief Executive Officer. Given that background and precedence, the absence of a royal proclamation or a Durbar Gazette are no threat to the status of Rule 4[4], the officials are convinced; especially since the Supreme Court has already upheld this argument.

Book cataloguing largest collection...

Contd from pg1

introduction to the history of Lepcha literature and an overview of the contents of the different texts in the collection, followed by a commentary on the physical features of the manuscripts and related items in the van Manen Collection. These helpful schematic sketches are all that exist for the majority of the texts in the collection, thus providing an invaluable point of departure for further scholarship. Plaisier offers meticulous descriptions of the structural features of manuscripts, including helpful information on their shape and form, remarks on the paper and ink used, the identification of scribes and the date of transcription, the physical condition of the manuscripts and supplementary data on illustrations and labels. In the final portion of the book, comprised of five appendices, the author provides the reader with a comprehensive list of additional works in

Lepcha in the London, Vienna and Gangtok collections.

Plaisier makes an important point regarding the content of the textual corpus of the collection, demonstrating how the "Tibetan influence on Lepcha literature has been much overemphasised".

Lepcha literature has hardly been studied at all, yet it is generally believed that an indigenous Lepcha literature does not exist. This view is based on the fact that many written Lepcha texts are translations, or rather adaptations, of Tibetan Buddhist works. (2003: 37)

Plaisier's point is welcome: Himalayan ethnic groups and their languages and cultures are all too often portrayed as being deviant or archaic branches of one of the 'great' traditions to the north and south, and not as viable cultural entities in their own right. Particularly colourful and intriguing Lepcha tales documented in the manuscripts include 'The Legend of the

Ants' (Number 15), a popular story about the interactions of a holy man and an insect, and 'The Legendary Origin of Tobacco' (Number 16) which deals with the demonic origin of tobacco and the negative consequences which follow from its use and abuse.

In conclusion, the Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts is both beautifully produced and affordable, a combination sadly uncommon in academic publications. The author must also be commended for the manner in which he effortlessly incorporates the Lepcha script alongside her chosen transliteration system, with the result that each salient Lepcha name or term is provided in a graceful Lepcha font. This superb catalogue can be ordered online from IndexBooks <www.indexbooks.net>.

[The writer is Director, Digital Himalaya Project. www.digitalhimalaya.com]