

## **Corruption stumbling block in NREGS in nation: Chief Justice Saika Seminar on NREGS with special reference to Sikkim by High Court**

**Gangtok, October 31:**

Highlighting corruption as a major stumbling block towards the implementation of NREGS in the nation, Sikkim High Court Chief Justice Aftab H Saika opined that the judiciary has a lot to do help to realize the objectives of the Act enacted in 2005 by the Parliament.

Legislations are made but questions remain when it comes to the implementation part and corruption is a major stumbling block to the laudable and ambitious legislative of NREGS, said the Chief Justice while inaugurating the day long seminar on 'implementation of NREGS in the Northeast with special reference to Sikkim'.

The seminar is in the series of activities being organized by the High Court as part of its year long golden jubilee celebrations.

Today's seminar was organized at the auditorium hall of Tashi Namgyal Academy here at Gangtok.

In his inaugural speech, the Chief Justice said that checks and balances have to be put in the NREGS and the judiciary must introspect as to what extend it can assist in the properly implementation of the Act. He also extended full help from the High Court of Sikkim in this regard.

Speaking on the occasion, Lok Sabha member PD Rai pointed out the challenges of timely payment and use of the

labourers into productive work in the NREGS. Monitoring of the works done is also a challenge where the role of social auditing is very important, he said.

Rai said that the NREGS is an ACT passed by the Parliament to provide livelihood security to the poor people in the rural areas and hence, there is a huge difference between NREGS and other flagship programmes of the Union government.

State Rural Development Minister CB Karki said that NREGS is a unique safety net for the poor people in the country and there is a need to translate the objectives of the ACT into a reality. He said that the NREGS has completed 3 years of implementation in Sikkim and has now been universalized in all the GPUs of the State.

Karki said that around 52,000 household in rural Sikkim had participated in the programme in the year 2008-09 and a sum of Rs. 25 crores were released in payment stimulating the rural economy. Transparency has also been maintained with payments through banks and post offices and regular social auditing by reputed NGOs, he said.

The NREGS has helped in strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institution, said the minister pointing the lack of timely payment of wages and proper maintenance of document as the challenges faced by Sikkim in the implementation of the national programme.

Earlier, High Court Judge Justice AP Subba presented the welcome address where he highlighted the constitutional and legal aspects of the NREGS.

High Court Judge Justice SP Wangdi presented the vote of thanks.

Later in the afternoon the working session of the seminar was held which was participated by Rural Development secretary AK Ganeriwala, Chief Judicial Magistrate (East & North) Lakchung Sherpa, Sikkim University assistant professor Binu Sundas, advocate Laxmi Chakraborty and Sikkim University assistant professor Dr Satya Brata Singh followed by an open house discussion.

## **Sikkim observes 'Rashtiya Sahkalp Diwas'**

**Gangtok, October 31:** The State Government observed 'Rashtriya Sankalp Diwas' with full solemnity joining the rest of the nation today to commemorate the death anniversary of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

A solemn function was held here at Chintan which was attended by Governor BP Singh, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, legislatures and a host of senior government officials.

The function started with the rendering of patriotic songs by students from TNHSS and Middle Camp school.

In his address, the Governor pointed out that the late Prime Minister had a special place in her hearts for Sikkim and she had visited Sikkim on three occasions in 1952, 1956 and 1958. She was very fond of Sikkim, said the Governor.

The Chief Minister while remembering Indira Gandhi as a stalwart of the country urged upon the students to follow the path of positive thinking. He said that violence is a product of hatred and the hate feelings can be done away only through positive thoughts.

Chamling called upon the students to have a competitive streak in their studies to overcome challenges of future. He also appealed the students to value the gift of peace and tranquility of Sikkim. We all should ensure that this peace is preserved through our dedication and determination to create a new progressive State of Sikkim, he said.

## **‘GREEN BONUS’ ANNOUNCED FOR SIKKIM**

**Gangtok, October 31:** Sikkim Joined the exclusive list of five Himalayan States which will be getting ‘green bonus’ from next fiscal for conserving forests that act as carbon sinks.

The Centre plans to release green dividends and a green bonus to the Himalayan states from the next financial year as a compensatory measure for protecting their ecology, Union Environment & Forests Minister Jairam Ramesh said yesterday on the concluding day of the two day meet at Shimla on the environment of the five Himalayan States- Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh Uttarkhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

ML Arrawatia, Science & Technology department had represented Sikkim in the meet.

Green bonus was one of the points raised by the hilly States during the meet requesting the Centre to provide sufficient funds to the State Governments for protection measures of the Himalayan environment, said Arrawatia over phone from New Delhi to SIKKIM EXPRESS.

According to news reports, the Union Environment & Forest Minister Ramesh said that the 13<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission will be deciding the amount of the 'green bonus' for the Himalayan States including Sikkim.

The commission is expected to submit its report by December and it would be left to the States to distribute the 'green bonus' to the stakeholders.

"We may start with a small amount to begin with," Ramesh said while announcing the 'green bonus'. "My concept is that the states which are conserving ecology...should be compensated", he added.

The Sikkim Science & Technology secretary said that the initiatives taken by the Sikkim government for protection of environment was well appreciated by the participants during the conclave.

In his presentation during the meet, Arrawatia pointed out to the delegates that Sikkim has already set up a glacier study and climate change commission and research work is already in progress. A climate change council under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister has already been set up in Sikkim.

Arrawatia also informed about the implementation of environment cess in Sikkim and State Green Mission besides highlighting about the '10 Minutes to Greenary'

initiative taken by Sikkim government early this year to commemorate Early Day.

The initiatives taken by Sikkim government were very well appreciated and the environment protection model of Sikkim found good response, told Arrawatia over phone.

The Environment Minister in August had estimated that forests, which cover 25 percent of the country's area, could absorb up to 11 percent of India's green house gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

The 'green bonus' is also expected to strengthen India's proposal of seeking funds from the rich countries for conserving forests under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) at the Copenhagen climate change conference in December.

Till now, the mechanism enables developing countries to get fund for offsetting green house gas emissions through use of cleaner technologies.

Mr. Ramesh further said that the Centre was also considering taking the snow-covered areas above 4,000 meters attitude out of the definition of forest land which would benefit all the 12 Himalayan states.

On the conclusion of the meet yesterday, a Shimla Declaration was signed by five Himalayan states which was released by Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal who said the Himalayan states had resolved to jointly face the challenge of climate change and sustainable development.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Ramesh Pokharyal said: "Out of 9,000 glaciers in the Himalayas, as many as 1,439 are in our state. Global warming is melting glaciers speedily, threatening flora and fauna of the Himalayans.

There is a need for change in lifestyle of the people, reduce emission of greenhouse gases and increase green cover to compensate the damages.'

Jammu and Kashmir's Environment and Forest Minister Mian Altaf Ahmed expressed concern over the climate change, which was adversely affecting the horticulture in his state.

Sunita Narain, director of the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, said that the environment had emerged as global political issue, which needed to be taken in right spirit for the benefit of all.