

Vice President arrives, begins Sikkim tour

Gangtok, 28 Oct: Vice President of India, Hameed Ansari, touched down at Libing Helipad at around 11.30 this morning to a grand welcome. He was received by the Governor, BP Singh, and Chief Minister Pawan Chamling accompanied by the State's top brass. Cabinet Ministers and MLAs, everyone had gathered at the helipad to welcome the Vice President on his first visit to Sikkim.

The Vice President is here on a three days visit packed with events and special visits, which include the Golden Jubilee celebrations of High Court of Sikkim, and event during which he will address a seminar on "Right to Education with Special Reference to Sikkim and its Impact on Legal Awareness Campaign" scheduled to be held on Thursday at Chintan Bhawan here.

The Vice President, who is putting up at the Raj Bhawan, visited the Lingdum Monastery in Ranka, around 15 Kms drive from Gangtok this afternoon, where he was accorded a grand traditional welcome and interacted with monk representatives. Through his interaction with the monks, the Vice President got an overview of the Sangha way to life.

From here, the Vice President proceeded to the under-construction Cultural Village also at Ranka. His convey then proceeded to the Ban Jhakri Falls where he inspected the renewable energy sources used to run the park.

The second day of the Vice President's visit shall see him address the High court Seminar mentioned earlier, which will be also attended by the Chief Justice of Sikkim, Justice AH Saikia.

Before this, the Vice President will visit the Sikkim Orchid Limited farm in Assam-Lingzey in East Sikkim.

His day's tour programme also includes a visit to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology where he is scheduled to release DVDs and audio CDs on Monastic Chants and a video documentation of Sikkim's monastic mask dances.

The second day of his visit ends with a colourful cultural programme at Tashi Namgyal Academy and a dinner hosted by the Chief Minister at samman Bhawan.

On his third day in Sikkim, the Vice President is scheduled to lay the foundation stone of the proposed sevoke Rangpo rail-link. Railways Minister, Mamta Banerjee, is also expected to attend the inauguration at Rangpo.

The Vice President will fly out to Bagdogra from Rangpo and then proceed onwards to New Delhi the same day.

ACT withdraws relay Hunger strike as a confidence Building measure

Gangtok, 04 Oct: The Affected Citizens of Teesta [ACT] withdrew its relay hunger strike underway at BL House here on 27 September as a gesture towards confidence building following an offer for ‘table talk’ to resolve the hydel protest led by ACT. The relay hunger strike had been underway since 20 June, 2007.

In a press release issued on 27 September, the ACT general secretary informs that the decision was taken after two days of deliberation over an official letter received from the Chief Secretary on 19 September in reply to the letter sent by ACT dated 21 August, 2009, in which ACT had raised several issues and had placed demands pertaining to its hydel protest.

The letter from the State government, among other things, contained an offer for table talk towards solving of the issue with “much more concrete assurance”, the release informs. The letter also requested ACT to withdraw the relay hunger strike.

After two days of discussion and deliberation at BL House [the venue of the relay hunger strike], ACT, on 27 September, decided to withdraw its hunger strike as “a confidence building step towards further initiative for solving the issue with the government”.

“It was also noted in the meeting that the awareness that has been created nationally and internationally about the hydel issue in Sikkim by the hunger strike has to be a great extent served the purpose of the movement and also has been instrumental in stopping of several unnecessary and harmful hydel projects in the State including four in Dzongu and in keeping others pending. It also has shown the path to other groups that are sprouting in the state to raise their voice against harmful hydro projects”, the ACT general secretary adds.

Although the relay hunger strike has been withdrawn, ACT has announced plans to continue maintaining a camp at BL House while also keeping options open to continue its protest, including legal resources, “until the issue is resolved in total.”