

**Gangtok, May 17: (IPR)** Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, Ms Leena Nair, IAS, held a meeting with the State Chief Secretary and senior officers of the State Government in the office of the Chief Secretary this morning, in connection with the inclusion of eleven left out communities of Sikkim in the list of Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Secretary Social Justice, Empowerment & Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, Ms Sarala Rai, IAS, gave a detailed account of the initiatives undertaken by the State Government for inclusion of eleven left out communities in the list of STs and the way forward. She apprised the visiting Secretary about the special provisions for Sikkim under Article 371 (F). She explained that when Sikkim was merged with India, there were three communities namely Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali who were 'Subjects' of the then King. Subsequently, the Bhutia and Lepcha communities were granted tribal ship, and later a few sub-communities from among the Nepali/Gorkhali constellation like Kaami, Lohar, Damai and Sarki were granted Scheduled Caste (SC) status, while the Limboo and Tamang communities became Scheduled Tribes (ST). She added that this selective action has violated the provision of Equitable Arrangement for ensuring the social and economic advancement of different sections of the population of Sikkim as provided under Article 371 F (g). She further apprised the Secretary that a D.O. Letter No. BC 12016/24/75 - SCTV from Director General, Ministry of Home Affairs Shri O.K. Moorthy was received by the then Chief Secretary which had asked to resubmit proposal for inclusion of the left out communities in the Scheduled Tribe List. The letter mentioned that there are also other tribal communities, for example, Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Tsong, Subba and Rai, and adds that the Sikkim Government may review the case of these communities along with any other communities which may have been left out. This letter was not replied. She stressed that this historical mistake resulting in injustice meted out on the eleven left out communities of Sikkim should be mended, with intervention from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

“There are aberrations, there are apprehensions, but I want to put on record that inclusion of the eleven left out communities in Scheduled Tribe list would protect the identity of Sikkim and Sikkimese people. This demand may be seen from a larger perspective in providing identity and security to the genuine Sikkim Subject Certificate holders from the Nepali Community,” stated Ms Sarala Rai. She requested the Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs on behalf of the State and the people of Sikkim to consider the demand of inclusion of the eleven left out communities of Sikkim in the Scheduled Tribe list.

Secretary, Culture Department Smt Yashoda Bhandari and Special Secretary, SJE&WD Smt D.J. Mukhia also supplemented on the initiatives taken by the State Government in pursuance of the long pending demand.

Secretary, MoTA, Government of India, Ms Leena Nair, IAS, gave patient hearing to the submissions made by the State Government officials and stated that the Ministry will revisit the documents and correspondences made between the State and the Central Government in connection to the demand for inclusion of left out communities in the ST list, and also inquired about the social, economic and cultural identities of the left out communities.

Chief Secretary, Shri A.K. Shrivastava, in his concluding remarks, thanked the Secretary MoTA for her visit to the State and for her keen interest in the long pending demand of the eleven left out communities of Sikkim. He gave a background of the representations made by the State Government to the Central Government citing the special provisions under Article 371 F, which provides for safeguard of the unique identity of the Sikkimese people belonging to every community. He expressed hope that her visit to the State will open up new possibilities and early fulfillment of the legitimate demand of the people of Sikkim.

The meeting was also attended by officials from MoTA, Additional Secretary, SJE&WD Shri K.B. Pradhan, and OSD, Primitive Tribe, Shri T.T. Lepcha

