

Gangtok, Aug 8: (IPR) The Government will make slight modification in the existing laws to punish drug peddlers and drug abusers in the State. Whereas the laws to punish drug peddlers will be made more severe and stringent, drug or substance abuse will no more be treated as an offence but rather an illness which needs treatment or therapy. This announcement was made by Chief Minister Shri Pawan Chamling while addressing the concluding day of the State level Tendong Lho Rum Faat Celebration at Sarmasa garden near Ranipool today. He urged the gathering to be aware of the menace and encourage people especially the youth who fall into substance abuse to come forward to seek treatment. He said he is trying to contact bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt to come to Sikkim and inspire the Sikkimese youth to overcome addiction.

The Chief Minister also informed the gathering that Sikkim has surpassed Kerala to become the State with highest literacy rate. He attributed this to the huge impetus laid by the Government on human resource development. Speaking in the context of education in the State, the Chief Minister stated that human development is the real development and the results of the Government's endeavour are visible.

The Chief Minister expressed happiness to be part of the celebration of this important festival of the Lepcha community. He said that the Lepchas are the oldest tribes in Sikkim and their history is actually the history of Sikkim. Lepchas are the main source of the early history of Sikkim, he added. He stated that the respect for the Lepchas, now identifiable as primitive tribe, is reflected in the numerous developmental initiatives of the Government for the social, cultural, economical and intellectual upliftment of the Lepcha community in Sikkim. He said that the Government is committed in its ideology to fulfill the needs and aspirations of all section of the population. Chief Minister Shri Chamling underlined some of the key initiatives of the Government for the development of the Lepcha community such as declaration of Lepchas as Primitive Tribe, institution of Primitive Tribe Board, introduction of Lepcha Language at University level, and various other infrastructural developments focused on the Lepcha community.

The Chief Minister expressed displeasure at the slow pace of work in the 'Stairway to Heaven' project in Daramdin, West Sikkim. He urged the concerned Department to expedite the work and ensure early completion. He added that the project, once complete, would be the first of its kind in the world.

The Chief Minister also informed that the Government has sanctioned 83 crores towards the construction of Mantam Bridge in Dzongu. He said it is the biggest bridge being built by the Government and would have facility for bungy jumping

and other tourism attractions.

He further informed that the Government is building over the river Rongyang which will connect Sakyong and Pentam.

Speaking on tourism, the Chief Minister stated that excess tourists from the Capital and towns should be diverted to the villages in order to sustain tourism in the State. He urged the Lepcha youth to take the responsibility and create homestays and other tourist attractions especially in places like Dzongu.

The Chief Minister also urged the youth belonging to Lepcha community to avail of the Chief Minister's Startup Scheme to start their own entrepreneurial venture.

The Chief Minister also shared that there has been a paradigm shift in developmental parameters in the State in the last twenty four years. He shared that Sikkim is the 3rd best State in India, first in the North East, the per capita income has increased from Rs. 9000/- to Rs. 2,93,000/-, the GSDP has increased 5155 times, and today Sikkim has the highest literacy rate.

The Chief Minister came down heavily on irresponsible statements made by certain sections targeting the HPV vaccine initiative of the Government. He stated that over 150 countries have already administered the HPV vaccine on adolescent girls for prevention of Cervical Cancer, and Sikkim is the first State in the country to launch it. He said the Government is following the Australian model which is reportedly the best. He added that the Government is committed in its resolve to serve the people better and ensure for them a healthy, happy and fulfilling life.

Earlier, on his arrival to the venue, the Chief Minister visited the altar of Tendong hill and also offered prayers amidst chanting by bongthings.

The program began with welcome address by President, Tendong Lho Rum Faat Celebration Committee Shri Dawcho Lepcha followed by brief introduction on historical significance of Tendong Lho Rum Faat by Ren Chopel Lepcha. The program was also addressed by Shri N.T. Lepcha, President Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum. The Hon'ble Chief Minister was also felicitated during the occasion by the Organising Committee.

A book titled 'Introduction of Linguistics and Phonetics of Lepcha Language Vol. No. 2' by Ren Saldong Lepcha was released on the occasion by the Chief Minister.

Ren Tar Tshering Lepcha was awarded the prestigious Tendong Award in recognition of his lifelong dedication and commitment for the development of the Lepcha community.

Likewise, the General G.B. Mainwaring Lepcha Literary Award was presented to Ren Saldong Lepcha honouring his outstanding achievement in the field of Lepcha language and literature.

The Mayal Marnue Award was presented to Ren Norzang Lepcha for his visionary and committed role in Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association.

Ren Norden Lepcha was felicitated on the occasion for his valuable contribution to Lepcha music.

The chief guest also presented certificates and mementoes to the best three dance troupes which participated in the three-day festival. The three troupes namely Mayal Lyang Lepcha Development Board, West Bengal, Sonamati Memorial Government School Khamdong and Ringhim Senior Secondary School presented the ethnic dances and added colour and festivity to the event.



