

International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking Observed at Gangtok.

Gangtok, June 26: (IPR) The International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking was observed in the capital today in a function organized at Chintan Bhawan under the joint aegis of Social Justice Empowerment & Welfare Department and SAATHI. The Hon'ble Minister for Roads & Bridges and the Cultural Affairs & Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim, Shri. G.M Gurung was the Chief Guest for the day.

Hon'ble Minister for Health Care, Human Services & Family Welfare Department and the Information & Public Relations Department, Shri A.K Ghatani; Hon'ble Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) Shri P.D Rai; Hon'ble Minister for Social Justice Empowerment and Welfare Department, Smt. Tulsi Devi; Hon'ble M.L.A, Gangtok, Shri Pintso Chopel Lepcha, Hon'ble Mayor, Gangtok Municipal Corporation (GMC) Shri. Shakti Singh Choudhary; Hon'ble Deputy Mayor (GMC), Ms. Lashey Doma Bhutia; OBC Board Commissioner, Shri T. N Sharma; Hon'ble Secretary for Social Justice, Empowerment & Welfare Department, Ms. Sarala Rai, Heads of Departments, officials, staff, representatives of various NGOs, students along with the press and media were present at the event.

Shri G.M Gurung addressed the gathering stating that drug/substance abuse was a serious and grave issue that we all need to deal with. He made light-hearted parallels to his childhood, giving the students examples from his early years but driving home the point that one shouldn't waste away his life on drugs and harmful substances because no matter where one comes from, he/she can always go to great heights if the mind and body is healthy. He even took a moment and made everyone stand up, placing their hands on their hearts and asked all to realize that every breath, every heart beat was precious because we have only one life to live. He asked all the people gathered there to value their lives and use their freedom with a good balance of authority and responsibility both. He advised the students to work hard for perseverance was the key to success. He also spoke on the importance of personal and family relationships and the roles of parents in shaping a child's future. He ended his note, urging the students to never hold back, work with determination and to sensibly be in control of their own lives.

Shri A.K Ghatani spoke on the harmful effects of drugs and its direct impact on the abuser's family and the society at large. Keeping the theme in mind, he stressed the students to "Listen First" to their own hearts and not to waste away by indulging on toxic substances. He also asked all the departments and NGOs to work collectively in curbing away and fighting the drug and illicit trafficking of harmful substances.

Smt. Tulsi Devi Rai spoke with zeal and provided some information on the factors related to drug and substance abuse. Based on studies conducted by experts in the field, she enlightened the gathering that unemployment and poverty were actually not the reasons for depression leading to drug abuse, disturbed state of mind and suicide. She stated that we have to work on our coping skills with the help of family, friends and peers instead of looking to justify our behavioral disorder. She cited examples of America

and the former President, Barack Obama, explaining that he developed the country and took America to even greater heights because of the support and involvement of the public, particularly the youth. She asked the students to realize the difference between being literate and educated. She advised them to develop their personality with confidence and to never fear from dreaming big and achieving their goals.

Hon'ble MP (Lok Sabha) kept his speech succinct, stating that addiction was a behavioral disorder and we need to correct our behaviour. He emphasized that every life was precious therefore losing even one child to drug abuse and suicide was a tragedy. He then informed all that a Centre for Addiction Medicine at Chuwatar, Singtam was inaugurated yesterday and stated with confidence that it would function with a proper eco-system to meet the desired results in fighting addiction.

Principal Director (HC,HS&FW) gave a presentation on the Mental Health Program of the State and their achievements while Additional SP (East) Shri Tshering Namgyal spoke on the police department's role in combating the drug problem in Sikkim and highlighted the important points of the Sikkim Anti Drugs Act (SADA). He also spoke about cases registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

Dr. Satyadeep Chettri spoke on the Sikkim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India (SAATHI) programme, which was established in 2013. SAATHI works on a peer education based model to deal with issues of substance abuse at various Government Schools of Sikkim and it has been taken under the Chief Minister Youth Empowerment & Self Reliant Mission. He gave example of Iceland, explaining how a sparsely populated country could evolve excellently if the focus shifted from punishment to remedies. He invited all, especially the professionals and experts to come forward with their suggestions and solutions as SAATHI was still under the learning process.

Mr. Udai C Rai from Serenity Home and Ms. M Lepcha from Ashi Foundation also addressed the audience on the work and survey done by their respective centres.

Later there was a rally flag off from Chintan Bhawan via Kazi Road to M.G Marg (Tourism Information Centre).

The programme ended with a cultural performance at M.G Marg where students from Tadong Senior Secondary School, Bojoghari Government Senior Secondary School and Rongyek Government Secondary School and members from Sikkim Rehabilitation & Detoxification Society, Nimtar 32 No, Freedom Facility, Serenity Home, Drishya, Jeewan Marg, Jagriti (Ashi Foundation) presented songs and dance as well as yoga demonstration.

