

## Traffic snarls transform Gangtok into 'Jamtok'

SUJAL PRADHAN

**GANGTOK, OCT 11/--** The capital town of Sikkim has been witnessing huge traffic snarls for the past few days, so much so that in the Facebook fraternity Gangtok has already been renamed as Jamtok. For, after all, traffic jams are the talk of the town for the past few days.

It has been more than three days now that long traffic jams are continuing on the National Highway 10 on the approach to Gangtok town from early in the morning till the evening. Last Monday, traffic jams broke all records with the tail end of the queue of vehicles waiting bumper-to-bumper to enter Gangtok town reaching 32



A traffic snarl in Gangtok --- Shekhar Khauas

Number on the national highway, a good 20 kms away from the heart of the town.

People who have to travel are suffering miserably. They have their own stories to share of their travails. The prolonged traffic snarls have given a stick to the opposition parties to assail the government with. "Today it took me nearly three hours to reach Deorali from Ranipool which is just 10 kms away," wrote Sikkim Minister Morcha president P. S. Golay in his Facebook post on Wednesday. He was on his way to Deorali to address a meeting of lawyers. "This shows the unplanned traffic management system and the lacks of

alternative road links."

Vice president of Hamro Sikkim Party Baichung Bhutia has also raised the issue of traffic jams, saying traffic in Gangtok has become quite chaotic lately, with impossible traffic jams making life unbearable for regular citizens and deadly for sick people and emergency workers. The problem is there but there seems to be no move from the authorities to set it right. Baichung shares in Facebook, the ace footballer has commented in his Facebook post. The mess has been made all the more difficult by the burgeoning number of 'VIP' vehicles with pilot cars powering their ways through the traffic jams and in the process adding to the chaos.

In a way, Gangtok is suffering from the same malady plaguing other hill towns in eastern India, like Shillong, Kohima and nearer home Darjeeling. While the number of vehicles hitting the roads are going up there is no addition to the road space. Hill towns have an inherent disadvantage; it is difficult to construct new roads because of the difficulties of construction on the slopes.

There are more than 60,000 registered motor vehicles in Sikkim and more than 70 per cent of them ply on roads in and around Gangtok town. And, as per Government sources, on an average between 15 and 20 new vehicles are registered in the Motor Vehicles Department every day. The India Bypass Road set up to divert the traffic of heavy vehicles and army vehicles was the only major addition to road space that had been constructed many years ago.

Meanwhile, the social media is filled with the hashtag #Gangtok becoming #Jamtok. People have also offering their own solutions on how to control the traffic jams. Some has suggested that the 'odd-even' formula should be tried out, with vehicles with odd and even number plates hitting the streets on alternate days. The other is that there is more car pool so that the rush of vehicles in the office hours is reduced. The other is that people should opt more for public transport so that the number of private vehicles are less on the road.

What worries people more is that with the busy tourist season now about to begin and with Pakyong airport commissioned and the neighbouring hills of Darjeeling witnessing a period of political stability, more tourists are likely to descend on Gangtok town within a week or so and the traffic jams may grow into super traffic snarls.

## Darjeeling Chowrasta decked up for nine-day puja festivities

ROI CORRESPONDENT

**DARJEELING, OCT 11/--** People of Kolkata escaping from the sweltering heat to the cool climate of Darjeeling in the coming few days may take heart; they are not going to miss the flavour of the puja festivities either. On Wednesday, the Gorkha Jannukti Morcha inaugurated nine-day-long Durga puja programme in Chowrasta, beginning with the ritual of 'ghosthapa'.

In the hills, Durga puja starts a day after Mahalaya that was on October 8 this year, and goes on till Maha Navami, that is on October 18. On Saptami, that is October 16, there will be the 'Phulpati' programme, collection of flowers from different temples in a palanquin and offering it in the primary Durga puja venue. The festival is also known as 'Shobha Yatra'. This would be followed by 'Maar', the ritual of sacrifices on October 18 and ultimately the 'Dashain festival' the next day.

On Dashain family members visit their elders with gifts and delicacies to seek their blessings. Elders apply 'tika', made out of a mixture of rice grain and curd, to junior members of the family and also offer token amounts, all followed with a sumptuous meal.

Gorkha National Liberation Front leader Subash Ghising would organize Durga puja during his days when he was the chairman of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. But, he stopped the practice after raising the issue of sixth schedule



The Durga idol at Chowrasta. Binoy Tamang is in the foreground --- Pranab Chhetri

when he wanted tribal status for the people of the hills. Gorkha Jannukti Morcha leader Bimal Gurung who is now on the run from the police also in his days did not organize Durga puja; though local residents, and especially the Bengali community in the hills, have been celebrating the Durga puja festival.

With peace and normality returning to the hills after the 104-day statehood agitation, the GJM under the leadership of Binoy Tamang had taken a calculated decision to organize Durga puja coinciding with the tourist season. "We welcome the tourists to come and enjoy puja in the hills. Last year,

we could not organize it due to the political turmoil. But this year we have a grand celebration programme lined up," Tamang said.

A 12-foot idol of goddess Durga which has been brought from Kumartuli of Siliguri has been installed in the open air theater in Chowrasta for people to offer prayers and offerings. "We want the tourist to feel like in a home away from home. We have not erected pandals like in the cities. We are conducting the puja in the traditional form. Even the goddess is attired in 'chowbandi-choli' (Nepali dress)," said GJM spokesperson Suraj Sharma, also a member of the puja organizing

committee. In all the nine days, the committee will offer "bhog" to devotees and the general public which will be followed by prayer and bhajansessions. "We will also have cultural programmes in the evening by local artists," Sharma said. The walkway from Keventer's to Chowrasta and the trees around the popular promenade have been decked up with coloured lights, to give the event a touch of joy and festivities. The Nripendra Narayan Bengal Hindu Hall in Darjeeling, the Kalimpong Milan Sangha in Kalimpong and the Raj Rajeshwari Hall in Kurseong are also going to celebrate the pujas in a big way this year.

## Durga puja in plains in the eyes of children of the hills

ROI CORRESPONDENT

**DARJEELING, OCT 11/--** Like in previous years, this year too, 10 children from financially weak backgrounds have received a wonderful puja gift in the form of a free trip to Kolkata where they will not only be getting a chance to visit the different puja pandals there but also judge the best puja among them. Organized for the fourth year now the trip named "Paharer Chokhe Samatatar Puj" (puja of the plains in the eyes of the hills) by the Ramakrishna Mission Nivedita Educational and Cultural Centre (RMNECC) at Darjeeling with the help of the Kolkata based NGO

Concern for Human Welfare, started out for Siliguri on Thursday with the children leaving for Kolkata on Friday from there.

RMNECC secretary Swami Nityasayananda said, "The main aim of this programme is that we want to build a bridge of friendship of the hills with the plains. Apart from that the children that are going are from financially weak background who have not even got an opportunity to visit cities with some of them also not having gone to Siliguri. This will also be a good treat for them."

The 10 children that will be taking this trip belong to nearby areas in Darjeeling



The children who would be visiting Kolkata puja pandals --- Pranab Chhetri

with their age group ranging from 9 years to 17 years. They are all a part of the Ramakrishna Mission run programme of the Gadadhar Abhudaya along with other extracurricular activities. This is a year-long programme with its also being done free of cost.

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## Sikkim prepares for visit of Finance Commission

ROI CORRESPONDENT

**GANGTOK, OCT 11/--** Senior officials of the Sikkim Government are now busy doing the homework in preparation for the visit of the 15th Finance Commission to the State from November 3 to 6. In the course of the visit, the Commission would meet Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, his Cabinet colleagues and senior officials of the State Government. Members of

the Commission would also interact with representatives of all the tiers of the local bodies, both urban and rural, political parties and trade and industry bodies in the State. On Tuesday, a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Secretary A. K. Srivastava was held at Manan Kendra was held, attended by additional chief secretaries, principal secretaries and heads of major departments. The meeting deliberated on the

presentation to be made to the 15th Finance Commission by the State Government. The Finance Commission is the statutory body to recommend on devolution of resources from the Centre to different state governments.

### In Brief

#### Prof Avinash Khare takes over as VC of Sikkim University

**GANGTOK:** Professor Avinash Khare took charge as the third Vice-Chancellor of the Sikkim University from the officiating Vice-Chancellor Professor Jyoti Prakash Tamang on Thursday. Professor Khare is an eminent Astrophysicist and one of the most renowned scientists in the field of Plasma Research. (EOIC)



#### Cyclone Titli: 8 dead in AP, widespread damage in Odisha

**BHUBANESWAR:** Cyclone 'Titli' made landfall on the eastern coast of the country early on Thursday claiming eight lives and wrecking havoc in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh, while causing widespread damage in neighbouring Odisha.

#### 5 Indian workers injured in explosion at iron plant in Nepal

**KATHMANDU:** Five Indian workers were injured in an explosion at an iron plant Wednesday in southern Nepal. All the injured were working as daily wage labourers at the iron plant in Simara Sub-Metropolitan City-2 of Jitpur, Bara. Four of the injured are said to be in critical condition and undergoing treatment at the Birgunj-based Health Care Hospital, PTI

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