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VOL VI ISSUE NO 162

PAGES 12

SILIGURI • SUNDAY • SEPTEMBER 30, 2018

Rs 3.00

BJP open to alliance with all parties other than SDF in Sikkim in 2019

SUJAL PRADHAN

GEYZING, SEP 29/--/ The ruling Sikkim Democratic Front has failed to live up to the expectations of the people of West Sikkim in terms of development and public welfare activities, president of BJP Sikkim unit D. B. Chauhan said in a news conference in the Press Club of West Sikkim on Friday. West Sikkim was lagging behind in many sectors in terms of development, he said. According to him, in 2019 people would vote for a change in Sikkim.

Chauhan said that in the 2019 Sikkim assembly poll, BJP would fight the election with agendas solely based on 'development of Sikkim'. His party would field the strong candidates having clean image and connexion with common Sikkimese. He said the door was open for political parties of the state other than

SDF to opt for an alliance with BJP in the assembly poll. "We are eager if proposal for alliance with other political party is made. Allied force would definitely have the upper hand", he said. "The people are desperate for change as they seem to be tired of 24 years old SDF's government which has done nothing for ensuring sustainable development of the state. The people have realized that piglets, chickens and pressure cookers do not signify development", Chauhan added. He maintained that in order to bring Sikkim on the track of development BJP could be a reliable option. Expressing concern over different issues pertaining to West Sikkim, Chauhan said that the condition of roads were pathetic in many places in the district. Blaming the state government for poor conditions of roads, Chauhan stated that it is dis-



BJP leaders addressing a news conference in West Sikkim --- Shekhar Khawas

appointing to see the State Government not taking any initiative to improve the conditions of roads. He also lamented about poor health facilities in the district hospital, Geyzing. He said that

failure of the SDF government in making provision for better health based facilities in the district hospital was evident from the fact that even a normal case got referred to other hospitals

outside the district. Chauhan said the party had prepared a detailed reports of problems, necessities and grievances related to West Sikkim and sent it to the BJP high command.



Pawan Chamling being handed over the award --- EOI Photo

Eco-friendly policies win Sikkim award in tourism

GANGTOK, SEP 29/--/ Eco-friendly policies and rapid increase in home-stay are the two reasons that have won for Sikkim the national award as the best State for comprehensive development of tourism, said an IPR release on Saturday. Home-stay had made the way for sustainable community-based tourism in less developed

areas while eco-friendly policies had lent new vigour to the virgin Himalayan wilderness aht draped the mountains of Sikkim. The award was handed over to Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Chamling by State Tourism Minister Ugen Gyatso, Additional Chief Secretary S. C. Gupta and Tourism Secretary C. P. Dhakal.

IN BRIEF

IAF rescues 234 people from HP

JAMMU: The Indian Air Force (IAF) have rescued 234 people, including 58 children, from high altitude areas of Himachal Pradesh after recent flash floods made parts of the state inaccessible, a defence spokesman said Friday. Apart from the IAF operations, 96 people have been rescued on foot by the Army. The Army detachments are also clearing the roads from debris to enable vehicular movement. Landslides and snowslides in the past one week have trapped vehicles along the strategic Leh-Manali axis in Himachal Pradesh. PTI

Sushma Swaraj leaves SAARC foreign ministers meeting mid-way

NEW YORK: In a snub to Pakistan, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj left a meeting of the SAARC foreign ministers early, which was attended by her Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi amidst fresh chill in bilateral ties. After making her statement, she left the meeting early, prompting criticism from Qureshi who later told reporters: "No I didn't have any talk with her (Swaraj). On the positive gesture, I can say she left the meeting mid-way. May be she was not feeling well." PTI

India, Nepal agree to lay pipeline to supply LPG to Nepal

KATHMANDU SEP 29/--/ India and Nepal have agreed to explore the possibilities of laying pipelines for supply of liquified petroleum gas and natural gas to fertilizer plants and industries in the land-locked Himalayan nation, India's Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said Friday. Pradhan arrived in Kathmandu on Friday on a two-day visit and held discussions with various authorities. "Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) will work together on these projects," Pradhan told reporters after the conclusion of a bilateral meeting with Nepal's Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supply Matrika Prasad Yadav. During the meeting both the leaders comprehensively reviewed the bilateral energy cooperation and agreed to complete pipeline work from Motihari in India

(Bihar) to Amlekhgunj in Nepal at the earliest. In 2015, the two governments had signed an agreement to lay a 69-km Motihari-Amlekhgunj. Nepal is now seeking extension of the natural gas and LPG pipelines along the same route. India is currently building the oil pipeline between Motihari and Amlekhgunj that will ensure smooth, cost-effective and environment-friendly supply of petroleum products to Nepal. So far, a 17-km stretch of the 36.2-km section of the pipeline, which lies on the Nepal side, has been over, according to the NOC. The gas pipeline will result in savings of around Rs2 billion annually for Nepal by eliminating tanker trucks. Diesel and cooking gas accounted for 80 percent of the total fuel import bill of Rs 170 billion last fiscal, the Kathmandu Post reported. Earlier, Pradhan called on Nepal's acting Prime Minister

Ishwor Pokharel and discussed progress of the petroleum products pipeline and other oil and gas projects being carried out by India. He also met Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and discussed bilateral issues. Pradhan also met Nepal's Minister for Education, Science and mTechnology Girirajmani Pokharel and discussed areas of cooperation in Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. He also paid a courtesy call to President Bidya Devi Bhandari. The Minister visited famous Hindu shrine Pashupatinath and offered prayers in the evening. "He will also visit the site identified for proposed Skill Development Centre in Dhanushadham," Indian embassy sources said. Before wrapping up his visit, Pradhan is scheduled to visit Amlekhgunj to see the progress made in the Motihari-Amlekhgunj oil pipeline project. PTI

India, China discuss measures for effective management of borders

BEIJING, SEP 29/--/ India and China on Thursday held a meeting of a key border mechanism to discuss ways to "effectively manage" border areas as well as confidence building measures (CBMs) to enhance mutual trust. The 12th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was held at Chengdu in the Sichuan region of China, according to a statement released by the Indian Embassy. The WMCC was established in 2012 as an institutional mechanism for consultation and coordination for management of India-China border areas amid the tensions between the two nations due to allegations of incursions by Chinese troops. Thursday's meeting took place amid "rapid" increase in military exchanges between the two nations after the informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, putting behind tensions arising after last year's 73-day standoff at Doklam. At the meet-

ing "both sides reviewed the situation along the India-China border areas. They discussed ways to effectively manage border areas in accordance with the strategic guidance provided by the leaders of the two countries at the Wuhan Summit," the statement said. They also "explored various confidence building measures with a view to further enhance mutual trust and understanding," it said. The Indian side emphasized that the peace and tranquility in the India-China border areas is an important prerequisite for smooth development of their bilateral relations, it said. India and China share 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC). The two countries so far have held 20 rounds of Special Representatives talks to resolve the border dispute. The 21st round is due to be held this year. The WMCC mechanism headed by senior officials has also become a major platform between the two countries to exchange views on strengthening com-

munication and cooperation, including between the border security personnel. Ahead of the meeting India's Ambassador to China, Gautam Bambawale said that India-China military exchanges grew rapidly after the Wuhan summit. "After Wuhan, our military exchanges have not merely resumed but grown rapidly. Our military commanders are now talking to each other more frankly and more candidly than ever before," he said. Chinese Defence Minister Gen Wei Fenghe had visited India last month during which he met Modi and held talks with his Indian counterpart, Nirmala Sitharaman. The Chinese Defence Ministry had said after Gen Wei's visit that both countries were discussing a new version of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on defence exchanges and cooperation to improve on the 2006 agreement besides establishing a direct confidential phone line between the two defence ministries and strengthening communications at all levels. PTI

171 species of butterfly recorded in Lower Subansiri of Arunachal

ITANAGAR, SEP 29/--/ As many as 171 species of butterfly have been catalogued in Yazali area of Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh during the fifth Ziro Butterfly meet. Some of the rare species spotted during the two-day meet, organized by an NGO NgunuZiro, include White Dragontail, Veined Jay, Bispot, Black Prince, Large Yeoman, Tiger Hopper, Red Base, Jzebel, Grey Pansy and Chocolate Tiger, the NGO said in a press statement. The meet's recommendations include submission of proposals to the gov-



A tiger hopper butterfly (File Photo)

ernment for declaration of 'Kaiser-e-Hind' as a state butterfly and the Talle Wildlife Sanctuary as a butterfly sanctuary,

the statement said. Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Koj Rinya said that the Lower Subansiri district could be developed as

a butterfly hub. She welcomed all to visit the Talle Wildlife Sanctuary where rare butterflies were found. NgunuZiro has been organising Ziro Butterfly Meet every year to spread awareness about the importance of all creatures and to promote conservation effort. Butterfly lovers from Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Assam participated in the meet. The fifth edition of the Ziro Butterfly Meet, concluded on Sunday, was sponsored by the state tourism department. PTI

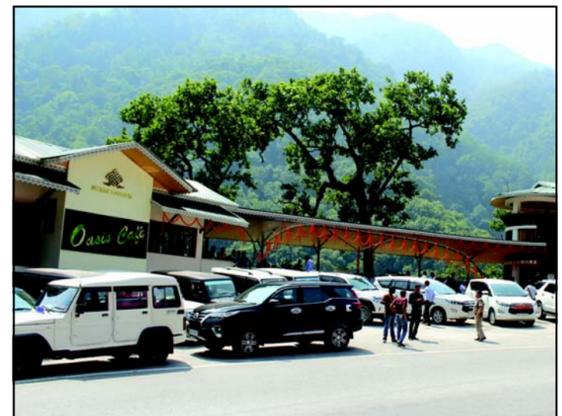
Nepal to award 1,200 MW hydro project to Chinese company

KATHMANDU, SEP 29/--/ Nepal has revived a deal with a Chinese state-owned firm to construct a USD 2.5 billion hydroelectric plant that had been scrapped by the previous government, officials said. Prime Minister K P Oli's government last week decided to hand over the Budhi Gandaki Hydropower Project, to the China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC), reversing the former Sher Bahadur Deuba government's decision to develop the 1200 MW project with internal resources. A Nepal Cabinet meeting last Friday directed the Energy Ministry to initiate the process to award the project to the Chinese developer. As per the Cabinet decision, the ministry has been asked to hold talks with the Gezhouba, pre-

pare a proposal, and strike a deal to execute the USD 2.5 billion reservoir project, the Kathmandu Post reported. Following the government decision, the Energy Ministry will now invite the Chinese company for talks and prepare a draft of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) before signing it, according to multiple sources at the ministry. "The understanding will be signed to execute the project under the engineering, procurement, construction and financing (EPCF) model," said one senior official. This is not the first time that the government has roped in the Chinese developer to develop the Budhi Gandaki project. The Pushpa Kamal Dahal government had, in May 2017, also signed an MoU with the CGGC

to execute the project under the EPCF model. The agreement invited controversy as the project was handed to the Chinese company without initiating a competitive bidding process. However, the Deuba administration scrapped the deal in November last year citing irregularities. After cancelling the agreement with the Chinese company, the then government had plans to build the project using domestic financial resources via the state-owned Nepal Electricity Authority. Subsequently, a committee was formed to explore financing options to build the power plant. The committee had suggested that the government develop the project on its own by providing viability gap funding, covering around one-third

of the project's development cost. The Cabinet during the Deuba administration approved the committee report and agreed to provide the gap funding. But the plan never materialised as the government changed before the decision could be implemented. The new administration under Oli, who had publicly criticised Deuba's decision to scrap the deal with the Chinese company, disowned the previous administration's decision. Landlocked Nepal suffers from massive energy shortages and is compelled to buy power from neighbouring India. Experts have criticized the Oli government's decision to rehire the Chinese company to develop the project without competitive bidding, saying such a move might make the project expensive.



Oasis Café near Rangpo constructed by the Tourism Department that was inaugurated by Sikkim Tourism Minister Ugen T Gyatso Bhutia on Saturday. He also inaugurated the Bakthan waterfall cafeteria at Bakthang. --- Shekhar Khawas