

The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority under the aegis of National Legal Services Authority and in coordination with District Legal Services Authority, East organized a ***Mega Legal Awareness and Outreach Programme*** on 29th April, 2023 at Government Senior Secondary School, Rangpo, Pakyong District on NALSA (Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Schemes) Scheme, 2015 and NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganized Sector) Scheme, 2015.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Biswanath Somadder, Chief Justice, High Court of Sikkim & Patron-in-Chief, Sikkim SLSA was the Chief Guest and Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA was the Guest of Honour.

Judicial Officers, District Collector and Additional Superintendent of Police, Pakyong district, Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Sub-Divisional Police Officer of Rangpo, President and Councilors from Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, Senior Panel Advocate of Sikkim SLSA, President, Executive and other members of the BAR Association of Sikkim, Panel Advocates of Sikkim SLSA, Officers from Rangpo Police Station, officers from Government departments, Para Legal Volunteers, Panchayats, Principal, teachers and students of Government Senior Secondary School Rangpo, labourers and workers from the unorganized sector and the residents of Rangpo and neighbouring areas attended the function.

Hon'ble the Chief Justice informed in his address that the primary role of Legal Services Institution is to provide easy '*Access to Justice*' and ensure that the marginalized sections of the society should have equal access to justice. He emphasized that proper implementation of NALSA (Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Schemes) Scheme, 2015 by the Legal Services Authority and State administration will help bring about social and economic justice in the society. His Lordship also commended and lauded the 'quiet' work done by the Legal Services Authority, right from the grass-root level to the highest official in ensuring that rights of people are not denied and they have access to justice without any discrimination.

Hon'ble Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA in her address apprised the gathering about Zero FIR (*First Information Report*) and its relevance. That the nearest Police Station (*PS*) can be approached with their complaints and it is the duty of the police to register the case without issuing a number and in the event that the case falls outside the jurisdiction of PS, the complaint should be transferred to the jurisdictional PS. Her Ladyship informed that Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (*POCSO Act*) debar the press and media from disclosing the identity of survivors of sexual assault which is an offence and such exposure can lead to penalty. It was further informed that the POCSO is a gender neutral Act,

however, consensual sexual acts by children under 18 years of age can invite penalty under the Act.

While addressing the issue of suicide, it was informed that the suicide rate in Sikkim is still very high and to mitigate it, people can avail the services rendered through the Suicide Crisis Centre helpline: **03592-202111/18003453225** which is manned by the Counselors from Freedom Facility, Gangtok coordinated by a senior Psychologist of STNM hospital. Her Ladyship also informed that any child related issue can be reported in the child helpline number **1098**.

Steps taken by SSSA for the assistance of senior citizens was explained. Caution against ignoring mental health issues was issued.

Resource Person, Mr. Tenzing T. Kaleon, CEO-cum-Special Secretary, SRLM, Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim informed that rations are being made available for the economically disadvantaged sections of the society by the State Government at subsidized rates. To implement the fundamental right of every citizen to have proper shelter, necessary steps are taken under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana under which 1500 houses are being constructed in Sikkim. It was also apprised that 52,000 households have benefited under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) Scheme in Sikkim which is a poverty alleviation project implemented by the Central Ministry of Rural Department which focuses on promoting self-employment amongst economically backward sections of society. He also spoke on the National Mental Health Programme which ensures the availability and accessibility of mental healthcare particularly to the vulnerable and underprivileged sections of the society.

Resource Person, Mr. D.S. Kunwar, Special Labour Commissioner, Department of Labour, Government of Sikkim deliberated on the various provisions contained under Buildings and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996 and Employees State Insurance Act, 1948. It was emphasized that vocational training is imparted to the family members of the workers along with free legal aid facilities. The Department of Labour is also conducting awareness programmes on HIV/AIDS and other social issues for the workers and their family members in addition to medical camps and free health check-up *melas*. He also disseminated the benefits provided under the welfare schemes for maternity, marriage, minor injuries sustained in the course of employment, funeral, medical assistance, partial/permanent disability sustained in the course of employment and natural death occurred other than in the course of employment. The labourers were informed about the Labour Court established at Gangtok which will adjudicate industrial complaints/disputes and ensure welfare amenities and reliefs to all sections of workers through enforcement of labour laws.

The welcome address was delivered by Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLSA and the vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. K.W. Bhutia, Principal District & Sessions Judge & Chairperson, DLSA, East.

Stalls were set up by the Education Department, Food & Civil Supplies Department, Women & Child Development Department, Social Welfare Department, Department of Labour and Rural Development Department and information on the welfare schemes were made available. The labourers and workers who attended the programme successfully registered themselves on the e-Shram portal to enable them to access all new government schemes and facilities. Further, they can avail the benefits such as pension after 60 years, death insurance and financial aid in case of incapacity.

Students of various schools gave power point presentations on the scholarships made available by the Education Department. Further, on the spot assistance was given to the public by the Panel Advocates and Para Legal Volunteers through the Legal Aid Clinic set up at SLSA for availing the various schemes of the Government. A free health camp was also set up by Sikkim SLSA where free services were rendered by the doctors and staff of Primary Health Centre of Rangpo and Mobile Village Clinic, a joint effort of the pharmaceutical companies in Sikkim. Medicines were distributed free of cost.