

The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority in coordination with District Legal Services Authority, Gyalshing organized a *Mega Legal Awareness and Outreach Programme* on (i) 24th September, 2022 at Government Senior Secondary School, Uttarey, Maneybong Block, Gyalshing District and on (ii) 25th September, 2022 at S.L. Dow Gyatsho Kazi Senior Secondary School, Mangalbaria, Soreng District, on the topics NALSA (Legal Services for Differently Abled Children) Scheme, 2021, NALSA (Legal Services to Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) Scheme, 2015, NALSA (Legal Services to Senior Citizens) Scheme, 2016, NALSA (Child Friendly Legal Services to Children and their Protection) Scheme, 2015, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, Sikkim Anti Drugs Act, 2006, etc.

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

During the inaugural session, Hon'ble the Chief Justice stated that access to justice which is the motto of the legal services authority movement across the nation will fall flat unless we are able to ensure that whatever is being discussed today translates into ground reality. Highlighting the National Legal Services Authority schemes, his Lordship stressed that focus should not only be on implementation of the schemes but the persons involved including caregivers should be sensitized on the object and purpose of the scheme to ensure proper implementation at the grass root level.

While addressing the gathering, Hon'ble Justice Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA informed on empowering the public through sensitization, particularly, the people living in rural and remote areas and they should be informed about availability of free legal services and their legal rights. In keeping with the theme topics of the day, she provided detailed description on every NALSA Scheme and work carried out by the Sikkim SLSA under each of the schemes for the benefit of people of Sikkim including setting up separate geriatric wards and beds in the New STNM Hospital and District Hospitals and creation of a separate room in hospitals for examination of victims involved in POCSO cases.

Speaking on Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, 2012, her Ladyship informed that the provisions of the Act are very stringent and the punishments severe and urged the audience, especially students, to gather adequate knowledge about the POCSO Act, 2012. The teachers and parents were also requested to be vigilant of any incident of sexual abuse or assault on children. With regard, to Sikkim Anti Drugs Act, 2006, and the growing concern of drug and substance abuse, her Ladyship advised the parents and teachers to be attentive towards a child who shows changes in their behavior such as losing focus in studies, seclusion, eating disorder, etc. She urged the community to come forth in accepting the victims of drug abuse and help them in healing instead of stigmatizing them.

It was informed that upon the initiation of Sikkim SLSA, Drug De-addiction and Rehabilitation Centre was inaugurated recently at Kitchudumra, Namchi District, that provides assistance to drug users such as free counselling, medication and rehabilitation.

Resource Person Special Secretary, Social Justice & Welfare Department Shri Suman Gurung informed on the welfare schemes of the State/Central government as provided by the Ministry of Minorities and Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Special Secretary, Women & Child Development Department, Mrs. Jyotshna Karthak focused on the welfare schemes of the State/Central Government for senior citizens and children including differently abled. She also highlighted on the scholarship schemes provided by the department. The Superintendent of Police, Anti Human Trafficking Unit, Sikkim Police Ms. Dhan Maya Subba updated the gathering about the rising crimes on human trafficking. Citing the examples of various cases, she alerted school students especially girl students to be more cautious. She also suggested the students to make right use of mobile phones. Senior Psychiatrist, District Hospital Gyalshing, Dr. Kunzang Bhutia explained the types of mental illness and provided information on the symptoms and treatment of mental illness.

The welcome address was delivered by Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLSA and the vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Sonam P. Bhutia, District & Sessions Judge & Chairperson DLSA, Gyalshing and in-charge of Soreng District.

Later, the Chief Guest, Guest of Honour and the distinguished guests inspected the stalls set up by the various state government departments including health camp set up by the District Hospital, Gyalshing for the public of Uttarey and Mangalbaria. A large number of people availed the services made available at the stalls set up at the above two venues.

The programme was also attended by the former Managing Director SIDICO, Officers of the Registry of the Hon'ble High Court of Sikkim, Ld. Judicial Officers, District Magistrate, Superintendent of Police, Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Officers from the State Government, Bar Members of Gyalshing & Soreng and public of the two areas.