

The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority in coordination with the District Legal Services Authority, Gangtok, organised a Legal Awareness Programme for inmates of State Central Prison, Rongyek, Gangtok, Sikkim on 9th November, 2022 (*Wednesday*) on the occasion of National Legal Services Day and "*Haq_humara_bhi_to_hai@75*" campaign launched by the National Legal Services Authority for providing basic legal assistance to persons confined in prisons. The Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim and Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA, was the Chief Guest on the occasion.

The Chief Guest addressed the gathering on the provisions of the Sikkim Anti Drugs Act, 2006 (SADA), the growing concern of substance abuse and steps taken by the Sikkim SLSA to help de-addiction and whole person recovery of incarcerated substance abusers by obtaining the voluntary services of NGOs running Rehabilitation Centres, to counsel them at the Jail Premises. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 and concerns of mental health of UTPs and convicts was also highlighted while steps taken by the Sikkim SLSA to mitigate the problem by ensuring that a Psychiatrist and Psychologists are on call for counseling were also emphasised. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO, 2012) was discussed at length. The availability of free legal aid from the Sikkim SLSA from the stage of remand of accused persons, up to the various Appellate Fora were also explained.

Resource Person Shri S. S. Hamal, Learned Senior Advocate, High Court of Sikkim and Senior Panel Advocate of Sikkim SLSA, spoke in detail on the Rights of the Arrested Persons at the time of detention and incarceration, the benefits of Plea Bargaining and free legal aid and services.

A short film named '**Naya Mancheyy**' produced by Sikkim SLISA concerning substance abuse was also released by Her Ladyship at the campaign.

In-depth Mental Health Counselling was provided to 26 convicts (Male – 25 and Female - 01) by Dr. C. L. Pradhan and Dr. Bibhushan Dahal, Psychiatrists and Mrs. Nancy Palmu Chankapa and Ms. Archana Chettri, Clinical Psychologists from the New STNM Multi Speciality Hospital from 10.30 a.m. till 05.00 p.m. in the State Jail Premises where mental well being exercises were also demonstrated.

The welcome address was delivered by Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLISA and the vote of thanks proposed by Mr. Sharab Tonyot, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Prison), State Central Prison, Rongyek. The programme concluded with an active interaction and queries by the inmates. The Hon'ble Chief Guest later inspected the prison premises.

The programme also had the presence of Mrs. K. C. Barphungpa, Learned Principal District & Sessions Judge/Chairperson, District Legal Services Authority, Gangtok, Learned Judicial Officers from the East District, Mrs. Matilda Isaacs, Consultant, Sikkim SLISA, Prison Authorities, Officers and staff of Sikkim SLISA and Press and Media.
