Sikkim holds its first 'Himalayan Yak Festival' at Gnathang Valley near the India–China border

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News

Sikkim's first 'Himalayan Yak Festival' was held in late October 2026 (27–29 Oct; main events from 28 Oct) at Gnathang Valley in Pakyong district, at about 13,500 ft, near the India–China border. It was organised by the State's Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department with 'Sikkim INSPIRES', in collaboration with ATREE and the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment. About 400–500 yaks took part, and herders from Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh attended. Yak products and advances in artificial insemination were displayed. Aims: yak conservation, herders' livelihoods and high-altitude tourism.

Key facts

Venue	Gnathang Valley, Pakyong district, Sikkim (~13,500 ft)
Dates	27–29 Oct 2026 (first edition)
Organiser	Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services Dept, Sikkim + Sikkim INSPIRES
Participation	About 400–500 yaks; herders from Sikkim, Arunachal, Ladakh
Sikkim yaks	'Sikkimese yak' – distinct breed registered by NBAGR; reared by the Dokpa herders

Proposal	A 'Himalayan Pole'/'Yak Pole' to mark the yak's importance (Thupden Lachungpa)

Background

- Science: the domestic yak is Bos grunniens (Poephagus grunniens), family Bovidae, adapted to cold high-altitude areas; it gives milk, meat, fibre and carries loads. ICAR–National Research Centre on Yak was set up in 1989 at Dirang, West Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh.
- Challenges: shrinking grazing land, unpredictable weather, and falling yak numbers as young people move to other jobs. Gnathang–Machong MLA Pamin Lepcha hopes the festival becomes an annual event.
- Polity: Sikkim became India's 22nd State through the 36th Amendment (1975); Article 371F contains special provisions for Sikkim.
- History & geography: in the Anglo-Tibetan war of 1888, British and Tibetan forces clashed at Gnathong on 22 May 1888. The Doklam plateau is about 35 km away; Pakyong district was carved out of East Sikkim in 2021.

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu too has a hill pastoral tradition like yak herding – the Toda tribe of the Nilgiris are traditional buffalo herders, and their life and rituals centre on the buffalo. The news itself has no direct Tamil Nadu link.

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