

Editorial

Oct. 15 retrospection

The merger of Manipur to the Indian Union in October 15, 1949 after the controversial signing of the merger agreement between Maharajah Bodhachandra and the representatives of the Indian Union on September 21 of the same year at Shillong is the root of all mayhem in the present state of Manipur.

For years people of the state have been witnessing several rebel groups observing October 15 as "Black Day" by freezing all wakes of live under the spell of general strike or total shut down. Already armed opposition groups operating in the region had already called total shut down in the region resisting the merger of the erstwhile kingdom to the Indian Union.

The rebels do have their cause in calling the day general strike or total shut down and most surprising thing is the irresponsible attitude of both the state and central government to the calls made on this day. The silence of both the state and central government seems to be a clear indication on the righteousness to the call of the rebel or else why shouldn't there be any statement from the government authority regarding the reasons that the rebels had put forward justifying their cause.

A stitch in time save River Nine - the saying should be well think upon. For someone who wanted to go deep into the genesis of all this chaos arisen out of the conflict we certainly do have reason to blame the Central government authority for all the present state of our state.

In his book "Open Secret", Maloy Krishna Dhar, the then joint director of the SIB, an intelligent agency had categorically stated the political and economic condition of the state. As according to him he had submitted reports on why the youths especially the Meitei had frustration to the merger of the erstwhile kingdom to the Indian Union terming it as ignorance from the part of the Union government authority. It was in the late 60s that intelligent agency had understood and further cautioned the Union leadership about the possible raise of a separatist movement as an outcome of negligence and proper understanding about the problem of the state.

Points here we wanted every guardian of the country's constituency is the need of special attention to the problem of the state. A mere policy for awarding rehabilitation package to some of the rebel groups and signing of peace deal or cease fire is not a lasting solution. Rather it would bring major problem to the state.

A wrong is a wrong, and a right is always right. What is wrong in correcting the wrongs? India now is emerging as a super power and it is not wrong to speculate in the possible interference of external force to distort the country's unity. The only means to strengthen the ties of the country's unity is through proper clarification on what had been committed before. It was a fact that people in the state believed that merger of Manipur with the Indian Union was illegal - a resolution adopted by a peoples' convention held at GM Hall Imphal in 1993.

Now the mindset of the youth had changed a lot, no individuals are fool enough to be driven by some cheap provocative propaganda. So it is better the government accept what has happened before and should sort out the conflict with proper understanding. After all, rebels waging war are also human beings.

Paryatan Parv: An occasion to further explore the rich diversity of India

Instead of going in for routine tourist places, it is high time Indians explored the nook and corners of our beautiful country; rather than staying at hotels, living with people to learn about the traditions and customs

By : Nivedita Khandekar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in one of his recent 'Mann ki Baat' had urged the people to discover the wonders of #IncredibleIndia. Taking on the cue, the Ministry of Tourism has organised the 'Paryatan Parv', which is being touted as "a celebration of India's rich tourist heritage".

The Union Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with other central ministries, various state governments and stakeholders is currently organising 'Paryatan Parv' across India from October 5-25, 2017 drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing our cultural diversity and reinforcing the principle of 'Tourism for All'.

It is a wonderful coincidence that the 'Paryatan Parv', a celebration in the festival loving country such as ours, is happening during the peak festive season, also a time when many people take out time to tour various parts of India. But for various reasons, people continue to visit the more popular, more exploited sites rather than exploring newer, lesser known places. Instead of going in for routine tourist places, it is high time Indians explored the nook and corners of our beautiful country; rather than staying at hotels, living with people to learn about the traditions and customs.

The 'Paryatan Parv' seems to offer this opportunity. Two things from the comprehensive government plan that stood out for me are the interstate engagement matrix under the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' scheme and the guidelines for CBSE affiliated schools to visit heritage monuments among other programmes for getting students interested in cultural and traditional diversity of India.

The idea that school students should visit monuments is not a new one, albeit linking it with the paradigm of 'tourism and studies' gives it a new twist. Imagine a class learning about the conquest by Chhatrapati Shivaji sitting at a fort

in Maharashtra? Or imagine, learning about what Akbar did sitting at the Agra fort? The heritage monuments are a treasure trove of information. They offer not just lessons in history but also in that era's architecture and traditional practices. What better way to understand it than an actual visit?

India is lucky, it is endowed with more than 3500 monuments of national importance (that are taken care of by the Archaeological Survey of India) and almost 10,000 other monuments that are taken care of by different state governments.

Similarly, imagine, people from Kerala engaging with those from Himachal Pradesh. Or for that matter, people from Madhya Pradesh meeting and seeking to know more about those from Nagaland and Manipur. What a beautiful concept, if implemented well!! After all, didn't Adi Shankaracharya formulate the concept of char dhams in four corners of India and envisaged people visiting 12 jyotirlingas in various parts of the country?

If not for pilgrimage, but for knowing the rich traditions and culture of our vast land, people should engage with those from other states, further the better. This is exactly what the Tourism Ministry through 'Paryatan Parv' can harp on - envisaging through this exchange that "the knowledge of the language, culture, traditions and practices of different states will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between one another, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India."

Rising domestic tourism: 'Namaste!' has been India's identity across the world. India has attracted tourists from all over the world and not just now but since ages. While foreign-tourists' arrival brings in the much-needed foreign currency, and hence are given a priority, it is equally important to ensure domestic tourists are not neglected.

As per Tourism Ministry's Annual Report for 2016-17, domestic tourism continues to be an important contributor for the tourism sector in India. As per the data furnished by the state/UT governments and other information available with the Ministry of Tourism, the domestic tourist visits during the year 2015 were 1432 million as compared to 1282.8 million in 2014, registering a growth of 11.63% over 2014.

This is a huge number as compared to the number of foreign tourist arrival in India (8.03 million) in the same time showing annual growth rate of 4.5% over previous year. The stakeholders, including authorities, in the tourism sector will need to understand the rising trend in case of domestic tourism.

For instance, from about 190.67 million domestic tourists in 1999 to about 1,431.97 million in 2015, the domestic tourism industry has undergone a sea change, seen a whopping 651.02% rise in just 16 years. Perhaps, keeping in mind all such things, the government has already initiated an exercise to formulate a comprehensive revised tourism policy by March 2018.

There was a time when people stepped out only for pilgrimage and tourism only meant luxury pursued by few moneyed people. Today, as more and more common men and women seek to step out and explore various parts of India, domestic tourism has spanned almost all fields beyond pilgrimages. This opens a positive opportunity for the government and all other stakeholders to further explore and exploit the rising sector.

Tourism infrastructure and livelihood

The elaborate planning by the Tourism Ministry and the complimentary programmes chalked out by other central ministries and state governments go on to show the sheer variety that is possible in tourism sector and how it can have an impact on almost all other ministries/fields - Education, Culture, Textiles, Development of North-East India, Rural

Development and even Information & Broadcasting Ministry. Tourism needs stable infrastructure, tourism needs peaceful law and order situation and tourism needs an inviting host. In return, tourism gives much needed livelihood to local population and revenue to the government.

India is known world over for its hospitality and in most parts of India, law and order situation is tourist-friendly. But apart from major metro cities and few of the places on tourist map, the tourism related infrastructure needs lots of improvement. Scores of smaller places first need to be identified for promotion of tourism, the last mile connectivity needs to be ensured, infrastructure for visiting and resident tourists needs to be developed. This includes availability of decent accommodation and food services. Many potential places across India remain oblivious to tourists only because one or more of the above factors do not work in their favour.

The tourism ministry has encouraged and developed a chain of B&B (Bed and Breakfast) homes across urban centres well. But it is now time to concentrate on 'Home Stays' in rural and semi-urban areas. Only such Home Stays can bring in sustainable tourism as against the big-ticket hotel industry that often leads to draining local natural resources. Plus, Home Stays are a better way to interact directly with the local population and to know about their traditions and culture. Home Stays will also improve livelihood opportunities for the locals rather than the hotel industry where profits are pocketed by outsiders.

'Paryatan Parv' can be a good opportunity to identify these weak links. Not just for this time slot, but for a better, sustainable future in tourism.

Nivedita Khandekar is an independent journalist based in Delhi. She writes on environmental and developmental issues. (Courtesy PIB Feature)

National & International News

1 killed in clashes near Pulwama encounter site

PTI Srinagar, Oct 14: A civilian was killed as stone-pelting protestors clashed with security personnel near an encounter site in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district where two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants were gunned down today.

Police claimed that the victim, Gulzar Ahmad Mir, was caught in the cross-fire between the militants and security forces, but some locals alleged that he was killed in the action by security personnel against the protestors. Two militants, including wanted

Lashkar commander Waseem Shah, were killed by security forces this morning at Litter in the district. Soon after the encounter, a group of people started throwing stones at the security forces, eyewitnesses said. They claimed that six persons,

including Mir, were injured in the security forces' action. Mir succumbed to injuries at a hospital here. Four injured persons were taken to a local hospital for treatment and another injured is admitted to a Srinagar hospital, the eyewitnesses claimed.

UN General Assembly President met Indian parliamentarians

PTI United Nations, Oct 14: A delegation of Indian Parliamentarians has met UN General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak and discussed a range of issues, including reform of the world body. The delegation of the Indian

parliamentarians included Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury, senior journalist and MP Swapna Dasgupta and Lok Sabha member Santosh Ahlawat. "They discussed issues related to migration, peace, sustainable development, and United Nations reform," said Brenden Varma,

spokesperson of the UN General Assembly President. Lajcak, during the meeting here, stressed the role of parliamentarians as important channels of communication to the people. He also invited the three parliamentarians to participate in the Parliamentary Hearing on the "global

compact for safe, orderly and regularly migration", to be held in February next year. Commending India's strong commitment to multilateralism and the UN, Lajcak noted that the country is one of the top contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations and the United Nations regular budget.

Public health key concern in banning crackers in Delhi: SC

New Delhi, Oct. 14: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to modify its October 9 order suspending the sale of firecrackers in Delhi NCR till November 1, 2017. The court said it knew that "some people are trying to give a communal tinge to our order... but we will consider that as people expressing their anguish at our order." The court said that its concern primarily was the health of the

masses. The Bench, also comprising of Justice Ashok Bhushan, was hearing firecracker manufacturers and traders hit by the October 9 ban. "Diwali has been celebrated for hundreds of years. Delhi is no exception to the rest of India. There are children who wait for Diwali celebrations," senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the traders,

submitted. Interestingly, the October 9 order only suspended the sale and did not impose any restriction on the bursting of crackers. Mr. Rohatgi even suggested to the court to designate the time and days for bursting crackers. To this, the Bench said "very frankly" it doubted whether the suspension of sales has dampened Deepavali celebrations in the least. "The sales are already

taking place. Crackers are already being burst. It is not anyway going to be cracker-free Diwali," Justice Sikri remarked. The court said it would anyway monitor the post-Deepavali situation after November 1. The suspension was ordered in a bid to test whether a Deepavali without firecrackers this year will have a "positive effect" on the health of citizens and a steadily deteriorating air quality.

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