

Editorial

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Good initiative; but Irabot may still shed tears in heaven

The announcement to observe the Birth Anniversary of Hijam Irabot as state function by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh from today is a sign of good gesture which proves that Lamyamba Hijam Irabot is still an indomitable leader of the state. Notwithstanding with the fact that Hijam Irabot is a leftist ideologue leader who had sacrificed his life for the cause of the deprived section of the people of the state, N. Biren Singh government's recognition to the leader despite that BJP is a Right wing political force, perhaps showed that - Right or left , no matter all respect the sincerity, sacrifices and essence of patriotism of Hijam Irabot. His government's promises to erect a statue of the leader at Irabot Square near the state Assembly is worth appreciating. Today, would have been the happiest moment of the people if only the present government acts by thinking like Hijam Irabot.

Well a classless society with the proletariat on the forefront was the dream of our great Leader Hijam Irabot. For the cause the leader had waged a political war against the British colonial rule and then later against feudalistic nature of the Majarajah and the ruling capitalist class of Manipur. What makes different from this pioneer leader and the so call leaders of our days is that he was not lured by the prospect of the royal prerogatives and official facilities including the prestigious post of membership to the Sardar Panchayat Court that was being offered to him for having married princess Khomdonsana.

To Hijam Irabot, the war was not only against the external force which had colonized the nation state but it was rather against all forms of oppression and suppression committed under the feudalistic character of the system. He dreamt of a nation where every citizen has the right to live with dignity. His work for promotion of the culture, sports, literature and journalism is a reflection of his love towards this erstwhile nation state.

All his life the great leader had work for the cause of the people sacrificing every comfort of live. To convert his dreamt into reality he spearheaded various political movement starting from the grass hood level. He was the man behind the formation of students' federation, peasant union, women's organization and progressive party.

For his active role to bring about a reformed state, he was sent to prison many a times during the British colonial era. Later after the British left the nation state, Hijam Irabot was once again declared as a terrorist as his activities continued to be a threat to the Maharajah himself as well as the ruling capitalist.

In recognition to the activities of this all time leader, the state is celebrating his Birth Anniversary across the state. Earlier it was the Communist Party of India (CPI) which took main initiative in organizing the day to commemorate the leader's birthday but today its glad that the state government is observing as a state function.

But one think we in the Imphal Times would like to remind is that, would the person who had sacrifices every comfort of life would be happy to see us celebrating the day without fulfilling any of his dream. Will our leader be happy if he sees the conditions of the peasant community or the working class people of this state? Children of the peasants and middle class family who could not afford to send their children outside the state for higher studies are on agitation. Armed police are turning the Highest temple of learning - the Manipur University as War field.

This is the state of our state. There is no doubt that our great leader Hijam Irabot would certainly shed tears in heaven seeing the reality.

A Road Trip to Myanmar – the Land of Golden Pagodas-2

By- Maheshwar Gurumayum

A visit to the Manipuris settling at Yangon was an emotional one. Many of the Meiteis settled there have now problem in speaking Manipuri and also they were unable to recall their family surname. When asked if they want to visit Manipur, they express their willingness to visit Manipur some day and visit Govindajee Temple, Loktak etc to name a few. Indeed it was quite emotional to witness how they were still maintaining our tradition, although they were far away from Manipur.

Yangon has the highest number of colonial era buildings of all South East Asia. Buildings built in Victorian and Neoclassical style during the British occupation of Yangon in late 19th century still stand tall. Owing to its isolation from the rest of the world during its prolonged military rule, the building remained as it was before.

After our trip to the National Races village, we return back to our Hotel located at Botahtaung. We began making plans for the night and decided to visit China town which is just a few minutes away from our Hotel. This particular China Town of Yangon was created during the British rule. It is flanked by Maha Bandoola Road and the Strand Road.

After about 10 minutes by taxi, we finally reached the vibrant China Town. China town is a haven of fruits, vegetables, fish and street food. Small makeshift shops are erected in each narrow alleys after sunset. Here too, I remember about our very own Night Plaza started by our government. If we can arrange something like the way being done here in China Town instead of blocking roads and adding to the already worsening woes of the traffic, it would be a lot better. Here in China Town, no elaborate arrangements are made for all these setup like the way it is done in our night plaza. Also, our Night plaza is not public friendly as many Gun-wielding state forces are seen loitering around and create a sense of uneasiness in the minds of the public. Also, during my entire stay in Myanmar except for a few occasions I could not see any gun-wielding security personnel in the street as opposite to ours, where security personnel proudly display their guns in public. We need to check this if we want to create a tourist friendly atmosphere otherwise the mere sight of guns is a huge deterrent for outsiders. Now back to China town, we settled on a roadside eatery after much loitering around. We chose to have local cuisines and beer for the night. It was dirt cheap and affordable as opposed to our Night Plaza, where the price is sky high. I don't blame the stall owners in our Night Plaza for the high prices, it is quite understandable that they are charging a high price owing to the exorbitant deposit fees imposed by the Government for each stall. Many other tourists can be seen having a good time at most of the street.

One cannot leave Yangon without visiting Inya Lake, an artificial lake built by the British as water reservoir to provide water supply to Yangon and the area surrounding Inya Lake is one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in Yangon. It include properties of Aung San Suu Kyi and US embassy to name a few. The lake has been in the news for many reasons, for instance Aung San Suu Kyi's lakeside residence and Rangoon University of the student-led 8-8-1988 national uprising. During its peak Pro Democracy movement, students marching towards Payay Road were confronted by security force near Inya Lake and many were either beaten to death or drowned in the lake.

Well on a brighter side, there is a park adjacent to the lake and the



park is most well known as a romantic dating area for the university students. How I wish to date out there, just joking!

Also, we got a chance to catch a glimpse of the various commercial activities conducted on the Port of Yangon River. One can see large cargo carrier ships sailing on the river.

Our next stop is the Indian Embassy, where we are to meet Sweta Singh, First Secretary (Eco & Com) & Head of Chancery at Indian Embassy at Yangon, Myanmar. During our interaction with Sweta Singh, we got to know that Government of India is negotiating for a Motor Vehicles Agreement with Myanmar for facilitating movement of vehicles across the two countries. This is huge, thinking if we were able to cruise into Myanmar with our own vehicle, without the need of hiring tourist vehicles. Act East Policy Convenor, RK Shivchandra also stressed on the financial problem faced by Myanmarese pilgrims while visiting Bodhi Gaya. After having a brief formal interaction and of course, a mandatory group photo we departed for our Hotel.

The next day, we are to meet the good people from Myanmar Press Council at a Hotel in Yangon. During the interaction, IPR Director H Balkrishna said that this tour was organized with an objective to build better media relationship between Manipur and Myanmar. He also said special short term journalism courses can be undertaken by Myanmar students free of cost at the State institute of journalism in Imphal. Also, Balkrishna invited media, cultural troupes etc from Myanmar to take part in the upcoming Sangai Festival 2018. After having luncheon together with the members of Myanmarese media fraternity, we bade goodbye to our host.

And now we are ready to bade farewell to Yangon and move towards Shan state and to Inle Lake. Shan state borders China, Laos and Thailand and is the largest of all states and regions in the country. The state got its name from the Shan people, one of the ethnic groups that inhabit the area. Most of the Shan state is hilly plateau, very similar to our land. The bumpy roads, red-dirt road cut through the countryside, sunflowers in full bloom in vast expanse of field, the rural Myanmar that I want to

experience. Power lines made of tree trunk, people washing clothes in small pond or canal, similar to what we witness out here in rural area can be seen. People seem to be in touch with Mother Nature and living in complete harmony. The housing style are very similar to ours, also the gate designed using bamboo poles is very much similar to the kind of gates we can see out here in rural areas. Studying this part of Myanmar may provide many clues to our roots and genesis instead of arguing theoretically. Finally reached our hotel called Nyaungshwe Paradise located at Nyaungshwe. After freshening up, we readied for our journey to Inle Lake.

Inle is a freshwater lake located in the Nyaungshwe Township of Taunggyi District of Shan State, part of Shan Hills in Myanmar (Burma) and is the second largest lake in Myanmar. The lake has been designated as a protected Ramsar site since September 2018. It is a fantastic place to visit, all away from the hustle and bustle of urban city. The scenery was awesome and the uniqueness of the lake is the way of life of the inhabitants of the lake. Most of the people dwelling in the lake are devout Buddhists, and live in houses made of wood and woven bamboo on stilts; are largely self-sufficient farmers. The entire lake area falls under Nyaung Shwe township. Transportation on the lake is mainly by traditional boat or boats fitted with single cylinder diesel engine. Most distinctive feature of rowing practiced here, is where the local fishermen standing at the stern on one leg and wrapping the other leg around the oar. It is said that this style of rowing evolved out of necessity as it is difficult to see the reeds and floating plants while sitting and is more convenient to view the reeds and other water plants.

This standing rowing style is said to be practiced by men only whereas women folks row in the usual style using oar with their hands and sitting cross legged at the stern. Apart from fishing, one can view the large number of gardens that float on the surface of the lake growing fruits and vegetables. The floating garden beds are formed by extensive manual labor. The farmers collect weeds from the deeper parts of the lake and make them into floating beds in their garden areas, fixed by bamboo poles. These gardens are incredibly fertile. It is

very similar to our very own Loktak Lake and the Phumdis, whereas Phumdis are naturally floating mass of matted vegetation, organic debris, and soil.

One can witness many floating restaurants on the lake. To me, the lake seems like some town that has been flooded over time. Also, one cannot miss the galore of pagodas and stupa on the lake. Old stone pagodas as old as 1000 centuries are nestled together behind the restaurant where we had our lunch. Weaving is one of the main cottage industry of Inle Lake. A unique silk from the stems of lotus plant is produced only at Inle lake and is said to be used for weaving special robes for Buddha images called Lotus Robe. Inle lungyi, high quality hand woven silk fabrics with distinctive design is produced here.

We also had the opportunity to witness one of the artisans making silk from the stems of Lotus plant. I would say our very Loktak lake is nowhere near when compared to this lake of Myanmar as a tourist destination. In reality Loktak lake doesn't have much to offer. The only thing that people find Loktak fascinating is the tag of the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, the abode of the Sangai/Brow Antlered Deer and the floating Phumdis. Our policy makers only boast of having Loktak Lake in theory whereas nothing much prominent have been done to promote or improve the lake and making it more attractive. I see no point in focusing on the lake only during Sangai Festival. Many things still need to be done if we want to bring up Loktak Lake to the very status of Inle Lake.

We missed one great opportunity to visit the Paduung women (also known as the long neck women) who wear brass coils around their arms, legs and necks as it was getting late. We missed many other places to visit while we were at Inle Lake owing to our tight schedule. I would definitely love to return here to visit the remaining places that I missed out this time. After staying a night at Hotel Paradise, we started our journey back to Mandalay. It was tiring ride as our Bus was going very slow. But it was good on the other hand, as it was a golden opportunity to view and cherish the countryside view.

Reached Mandalay and retired for the night as it was late, no sightseeing or shopping for the day.



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