



INDIA NEWS

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General (Retd.) JJ Singh, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Visits Singapore



General (Retd.) JJ Singh addresses ISAS workshop

General (Retd.) Joginder Jaswant Singh, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, delivered the keynote address at a workshop on 'Connecting India to ASEAN: Opportunities and Challenges in India's North East' held at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore on March 20, 2013.

The workshop sought to explore opportunities to facilitate research and studies on the region, with a view to better understanding the challenges faced by the region, as well as opportunities for trade and development. The workshop brought together scholars and those involved in policy debates from India and Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, Bangladesh and stakeholders like Japan. Key areas of discussion were geo-political issues, perception of



Enhanced air services agreement between India and Singapore



The Buddhist trail



Surajkund Crafts Mela



Orchha



Governor Singh visits the Institute of Technical Education (ITE)

people in the Northeast region, and opportunities for development of border trade and tourism. In the overall context of greater engagement with Southeast Asia, major governmental planning and policies with regard to the economic developments of Northeast India were also discussed.

In his address, Governor Singh highlighted the socio-economic development of Arunachal Pradesh. He encouraged people to people contact through opening up of economic corridors with main thrust on increasing tourism to Buddhist religious places and services and infrastructure development.

Governor JJ Singh also visited the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College West on 22nd March 2013. ITE is a principal provider of career and technical education and principal authority in developing national occupational skills certification and standards to enhance Singapore's workforce competitiveness.

Dr Yek Tiew Ming, Principal of ITE College West made a presentation on the ITE to Governor Singh who was extremely appreciative of the work done by the ITE in the field of skills education.

He said that skills development is an important area of focus for the Indian Government in the context of a growing India with a young population.

Governor Singh was taken through details of the collaborative project between the ITE and the DTTE, Government of NCT Delhi, aiming to set up a world class Skills Development Centre at Delhi. The Governor was keen on exploring the possibilities of intensifying skill development initiatives in the State of Arunachal Pradesh.

On 23rd March, High Commissioner of India Dr TCA Raghavan released Governor JJ Singh's autobiography: "A Soldier's General".

Published by Harper-Collins India, the book is an account of General JJ Singh's life as a third generation soldier who rose to become the 22nd chief of the Indian Army. The event was organised at the Indigo Blue Art Gallery by the India Club.



Release of Governor JJ Singh's book, 'A Soldier's General'



Enhanced Air Services Agreement

Mr Ajit Singh, Minister of Civil Aviation, India, visited Singapore from 2nd to 4th of April 2013 at the invitation of the Singapore government for a discussion with the Singapore Transport Minister to strengthen mutual ties in the aviation sector between the two countries. During his stay in Singapore, the Minister had a meeting with Minister of Transport, Mr Lui Tuck Yew, and discussed matters relating to cooperation in transport and aviation between the two countries. The meetings concluded with the signing of a revised MOU on air services between the two countries.

Mr Singh also called on the Second Minister for Trade and Industry, Mr. S. Iswaran during which both Ministers discussed furthering the cooperation between the two countries in multiple areas such as better air connectivity, agriculture and financing of infrastructure. The minister and his delegation also held meetings with a team from Singapore Airlines led by the CEO as well as a team from Changi Airport Group led by their CEO.

A delegation from the Ministry of Civil Aviation led by Dr Prabhat Kumar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation was also in Singapore from 1st to 4th of April 2013 for the Air Services Consultations

between MOCA and Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, CAAS. The CAAS delegation was led by Mr Yap Ong Heng, Director-General (CAAS). Both sides held detailed discussions and agreed to rationalise and increase the seat capacity between the two countries. As part of the enhancement of the agreement, both countries also agreed to meet regularly to review air services matters.

Currently, eight carriers operate over 430 flights every week between Singapore and 12 cities in India. The carriers that are currently operating between the two countries are - Air India, Air India Express, Drukair, IndiGo, Jet Airways, SilkAir, Singapore Airlines and Tiger Airways. They fly to the Indian cities of Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chennai,

Coimbatore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Tiruchirapalli, Trivandrum and Visakhapatnam from Singapore. The enhancement will see airlines being able to offer more flights between India and Singapore, which is expected to bring down prices across sectors and ease congestion on packed flights, both from and to Singapore.

India has given unrestricted flying rights for 18 destinations in India to all the ASEAN countries, including Singapore. The 18 points are Patna, Lucknow, Guwahati, Gaya, Varanasi, Bhubaneswar, Khajuraho, Aurangabad, Goa, Jaipur, Port Blair, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Calicut, Amritsar, Vishakhapatnam, Ahmadabad, Tiruchirapally.





PM Attends BRICS Summit in Durban

During the fifth BRICS Summit, held in Durban, South Africa on March 25-28, the five-nation grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa took the first step towards promoting trade in local currency, and agreed to work towards creating a new development bank on the lines of the World Bank.



The development banks of the five countries signed a master agreement on extending credit in local currency and the BRICS multi-lateral letter of credit confirmation facility agreement. The master agreement aims to reduce the demand for fully convertible currencies for transactions among BRICS nations, reducing transaction costs of intra-BRICS trade.

Trade between the BRICS countries has been growing briskly at 28 percent over the last few years, but at USD 230 billion, remains well below the potential of the five economic powerhouses. With the new measures, the BRICS leadership is

hopeful that the target for Intra-BRICS trade of USD 500 billion by 2015 can be achieved.

In his statement at the Plenary session, Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh identified the foremost challenge facing the BRICS nations as the persisting weaknesses in the global economy, the financial crisis overhang and the inevitable long term structural changes in the post-2008 world. Recognizing that BRICS countries would be key drivers of global economic growth, he called for sustaining growth by harnessing the opportunities for expanding trade and investment ties between BRICS countries.

At the close of the summit, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh noted in his statement to the media that the BRICS had come a long way since the inaugural summit in 2009. The 5th BRICS summit encompassed a wide range of issues including global economic developments, peace and security, reforms of political and economic institutions of global governance, international trade, sustainable development and food and energy security. The Indian PM called the discussions at the summit in these and other matters 'fruitful'.

During the summit, the Indian Prime Minister also had a 45-minute meeting

with Chinese President Xi Jinping. This was the first structured high-level contact between the two countries since the change of leadership in China.

The two leaders discussed all issues, including the boundary and Chinese dams along the Brahmaputra River. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Dr Singh said India values its ties with China. "The bilateral relationship with China is of great importance. As Prime Minister of India, it has been my great privilege to interact regularly with the Chinese relationship over the last decade. I hope to intensify such dialogue and communications with you and the new leadership of China to put our relations on an even higher growth trajectory," Dr Singh said.





Holi Hai!

COLOURFUL TRADITIONS OF A COLOURFUL FESTIVAL

Holi, the Indian festival of colours, is celebrated with colourful good humour in India and the Indian diaspora the world over. Holi marks the end of the cold, gloomy winter and welcomes the advent of the fresh, bright colours of spring. As with most Indian festivals, Holi is celebrated slightly differently in different parts of the country. There are also different legends associated with the festival.

However the most widely known legend is the burning of the she-demon Holika,

while her nephew Prahlad, seated in her lap, is miraculously untouched by the flames, saved by his unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu.

The death of Holika is celebrated on the eve of Holi, called Holika Dahan. Huge public bonfires are lit and people gather and dance around them till late into the night. Despite the mostly Hindu mythology associated with Holi, it is probably the least religious of the Hindu festivals and with its happy tone of frivolity and fun, is celebrated by Indians

across all religions and social classes.

Holi is a fun, playful festival, with friends and family members of all ages joining in the celebrations, exchanging greetings and applying colour on each other. It is arguably the favourite festival of children and young people, many of whom take to roaming around their neighborhoods, splashing unsuspecting passers by with 'pichkaris' of coloured water and water balloons. This tradition is associated with Lord Krishna's naughty pranks, where he would splash Radha and her friends with water.

The many sweets and festival foods aside, the most fun part of Holi is that everyone is allowed (in moderation, of course) to partake of the sweet, delicious, intoxicating drink known as Bhaang. It is consumed either directly as a drink, or hidden in other goodies and sweet treats, by young and old alike

Bhaang lowers inhibitions and has even been known to turn sworn enemies into best friends, if only for that day! A common refrain heard around Holi is 'Bura na maano, Holi hain!' (Don't take offense, it's Holi!)





Search for a Divine Soul

A JOURNEY FOLLOWING THE BUDDHA FROM HIS BIRTHPLACE TO HIS FINAL RESTING PLACE

Lumbini

To reach Lumbini in Nepal, one drives through patches of sugarcane, bitter gourd vines trained on poles and ropes and large groves of carefully cultivated mangoes on the Indian side of the border. This continues till Sonauli, a kilometre from the Nepalese border. Lumbini's broad roads wind through avenues of flowering trees, thickest of

bamboo and lily ponds. The ambience of the lush forest, at the foot of the towering Himalayas, had been retained. But all around, temples rise, capturing the architecture of the many lands in which people revere this holy place – India, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal, China.

The Sacred Forest is the most revered spot in Lumbini. According to tradition,

this is the place where the Prince Siddharth was born. The stepped pool in Pushkarni, in which the Mahamaya (the Prince's mother) bathed before she gave birth to her son, is a short distance away, spanned by festoons of Tibetan prayer flags.

Bodh Gaya

It is not known where Gautam Buddha was for the first 36 years of his life as a hermit, but it is known that he sat under a spreading fig tree, and discovered and sharpened his insight into the Law of Causation – saying that human desires cause their own misery. The place of his enlightenment is called Bodh Gaya. Here the erstwhile Prince Gautam Siddharth became the Enlightened One, the Buddha.

A town of resplendent temples, Bodh Gaya, has an atmosphere of deep sanctity. The sounds of chants, prayers and temple bells fill the air. As in all pilgrim towns the world over, there are pockets that seem to commercialise the religion. However the towering stature of



Maitreya temple at Lumbini



Buddha statue at the Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya

the Mahabodhi Temple, its butter lamps, streams of praying and prostrating devotees speaking a myriad tongues and the magnetism of the speaking Bodhi tree, suffuse even the most blatant of trading activities with a gentle aura of other worldliness.

Sarnath

The serenity at Sarnath, the birthplace of Buddhism, is enchanting. Its trees and lawns are dotted with the ruins of many monasteries and reliquaries. Monks and other devotees in saffron, yellow, grey, black, brown and strawberry-coloured robes walk around the monuments slowly and reverentially. None of the monuments are living temples today. Within the grounds, the spot where the Buddha delivered his first message is marked by the great Dhamek Stupa.

From here, the tolerant and gentle message of the Buddha spread like wildfire among the people disillusioned by excessive ritualism and prohibitions. Most importantly, Buddha practiced

what he preached. He travelled across northern India, accepting whatever food was offered to him.

Kaushambi

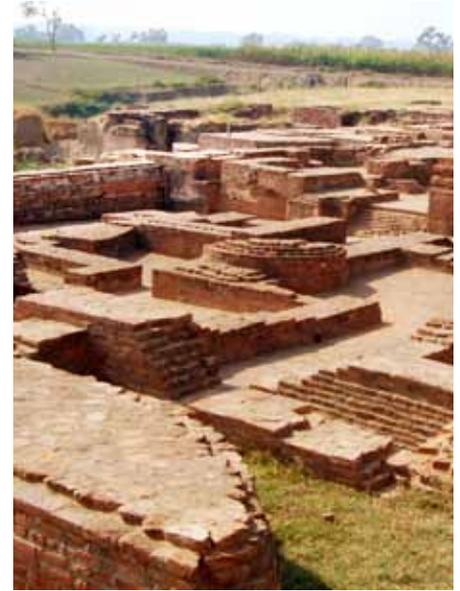


Buddha stupa at Sarnath

Another place that had been favoured by the Buddha was Kaushambi. In those distant days, it was one of the most important cities in India. The former residential sector, with an Ashokan Pillar at its heart, is clearly demarcated from the riverine port area, which has brick wharves and warehouses. The monastic and palace sectors are also easily discernible. It is also fairly certain that the Buddha rested in the Ghositarama monastery at this site.

Kushinagar

The name of the final resting place of the Buddha was a town called Kushinagar. After Buddhism declined in the surrounding area, the location of Kushinagar was almost forgotten. Today, thanks to the good work of

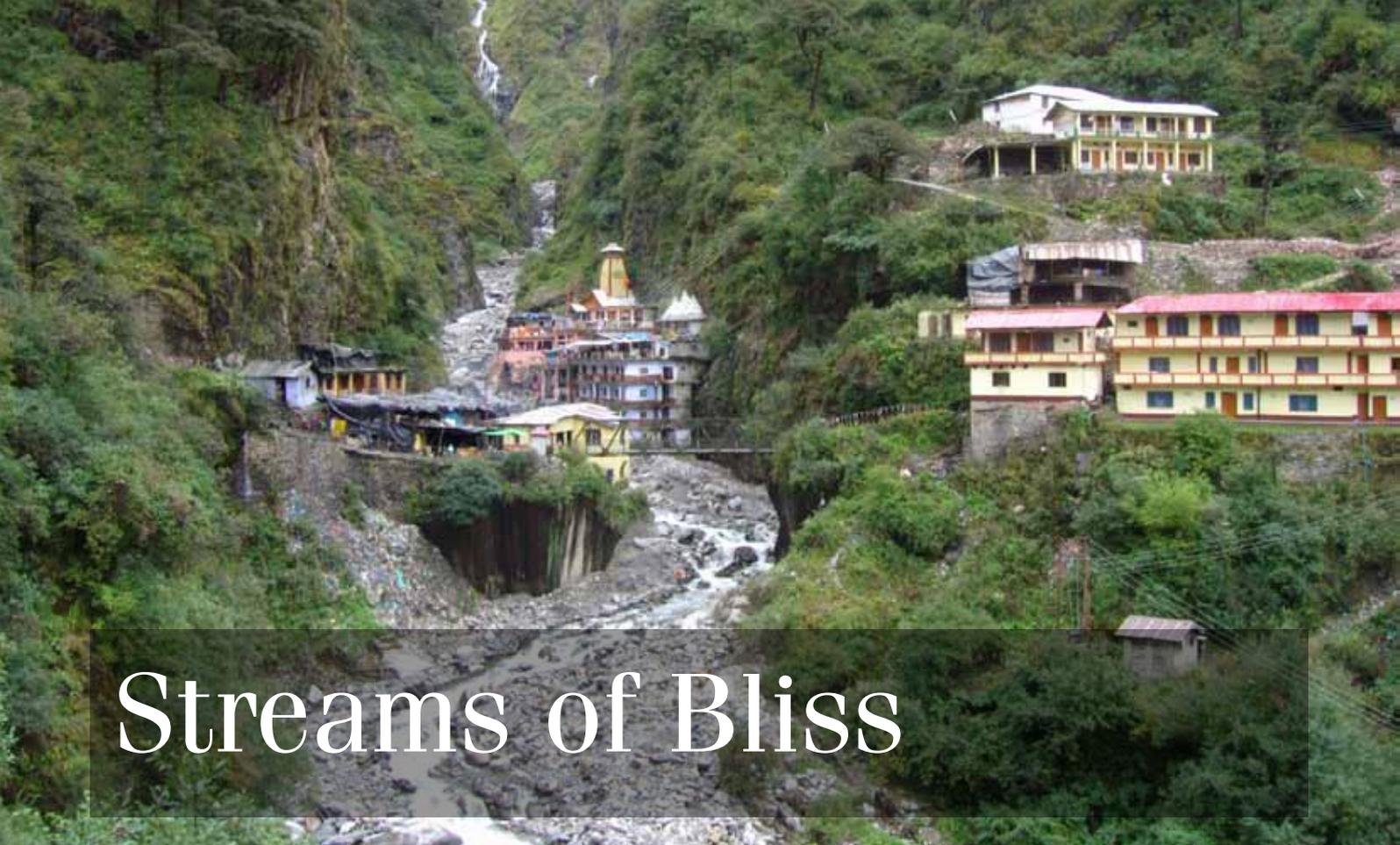


Archaeological excavation at Kaushambi

archaeologists, Kushinagar lives again, it is a green avenue of parks and open spaces around ancient monuments and modern Buddhist temples. The single celled Matha Kaur holds a beautiful image of the Buddha. It apparently stood for many years atop a mound. It is believed that much still lies buried in Kushinagar. As things are today, the most important group of monuments here are clustered around the main reliquary, reportedly the site of Buddhas cremation. In front of this site is the new Mahaparinirvan Temple, which holds a 6.1 metre long reclining statue of the Buddha. The Buddha believed his fellow humans could accomplish anything if they attempted it with a clear heart and mind. This is what this statue conveys so well, with the gentle persuasion of Buddhism.



Buddha statue at the Parinirvana Temple, Kushinagar



Streams of Bliss

As India's rivers travel across the country, by many they are considered goddesses to be worshipped and are the lifeline for multitudes. We take you on a brief journey with two of these revered water bodies.

Ganga

The 2600 km journey of the Ganga has many twists and turns. The river comes into being at Devprayag in Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand. It is here that the holy union of its two main tributaries, Bhagirathi and Alakanada, takes place. Considered to be the main origin of Ganga, the Gangotri is actually the source for the Bhagirathi. The Badrinath shrine represents the origin of its other main tributary, the Alaknanda.

After Devprayag, the Ganga moves towards Rishikesh, famous for its spiritual hermitages, as much as its opportunities for white water rafting for adventure enthusiasts. It is at Hardwar that the river meets the Yamuna, thus being one of the most holy pilgrimages for Hindus. A dip at this confluence is considered auspicious. Allahabad – also known as the Triveni – is the place for the merger of the invisible river Saraswati and the Ganga. From here, the river travels south to Bihar, and

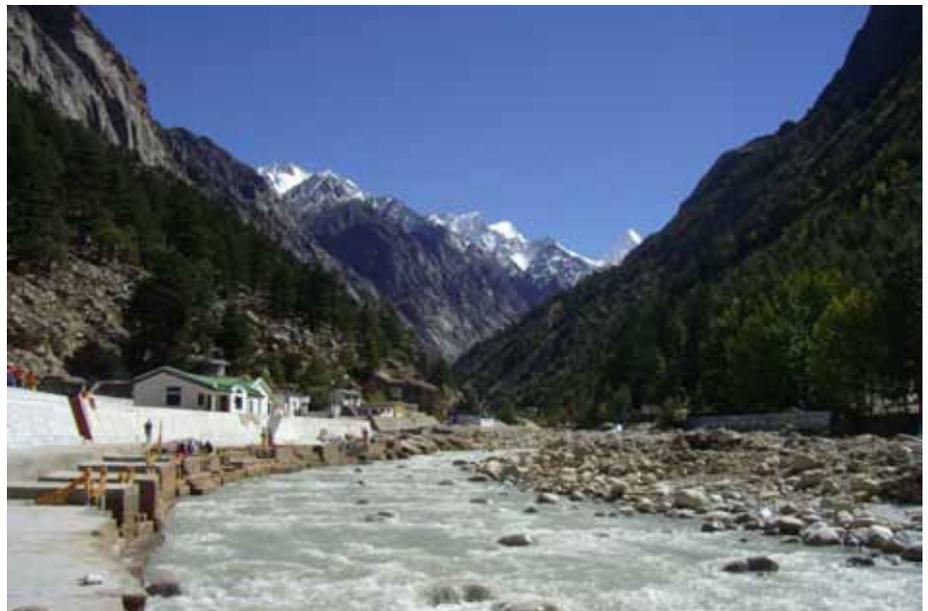
then onto West Bengal, becoming the Hooghly and finally dissolving into the ocean soon after.

Yamuna

The massive Bundarpunch Peak cradles the source of the river Yamuna, the Saptrishi Kund, a sparkling lake that lies above and to the north of the Yamunotri shrine. Yamunotri, also the name of the temple dedicated to the same river. Water from the hot springs around are diverted into bathing tanks where pilgrims bathe before entering the temple. The river actually has its origin in

the ice bound Champasar glacier, whose waters first accumulate at the foot of the Bundarpunch massif as the lake.

The lake moves with good speed from the mountains to the plains, through Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand before moving into Uttar Pradesh to become the serene backdrop of the Taj Mahal in Agra. At Allahabad, the river forms a confluence, the Sangam, with the Ganga. The Yamuna becomes a part of the Ganga and flows on through to Varanasi, thereon following the path of the Ganga to the Bay of Bengal.





Surajkund Crafts Mela

The 27th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, held in Faridabad, Haryana, may be seen as a vibrant start of the new year. A festive ambience with a joyous riot of sounds, sights and colours splashed all around with multi-hued cut-outs, streamers and the resonating beats of drums, the fair had a bouquet of delights to stay in your mind for long. This year, Karnataka made a comeback to the fair as the theme state after a hiatus of 18 years.

While it cannot be denied that a wide range of handicrafts and handlooms can be found at numerous fairs in India round the year, what makes the Surajkund Mela stand out is some unusual artworks

not easily spotted elsewhere. At the first look, the fair ground itself looks like a complete village with a 'chaupal' or a rural community space, a well and a huge replica of a cot adding to the ambience. Mud huts, wooden lampposts, grinding stones, string cots, little streams and the uneven terrain complete the rural landscape. The uneven unpaved paths lead to innumerable thatched platforms that provide glimpses of the exquisite paintings, textiles, wood work, pottery, terracotta, stone work, papier mache, lac work, cane and grasswork.

In an effort to capture the cultural and archaeological heritage of Karnataka aesthetically, replicas of the magnificent

gates of the Mysore Palace, architectural styles of Belur, Hampi and the world famous monument of Jain Basadi and Bijapur were erected at the ground. More than 300 weavers, artisans, folk musicians and dancers from the state brought the fair alive with a vibrant display of their unique and ancient heritage.

A spectacular stage was set for the artistes from across India and beyond. Madhubani paintings from Bihar, Navalgund mats of Karnataka, Ganjifa (Mysore) paintings and marble artefacts from Rajasthan were on sale. Craftspeople from neighbouring nations such as Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh also brought their crafts to the fair this year. Entertainment during the fair included formal nuances of the classical genre, folk dance and theatre at the open-air theatre, Natyashala.

The chaupal was packed to its capacity with people enjoying spectacular performances of dance troupes from Kashmir, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tajikistan, Namibia and so on. The cuisine available at the fair ranged from Kashmir's rista, to Kerala's dosa and Gujarat's undhiyu to Bengal's roshogulla. Popular Chinese and snack foods, and traditional sweet meats from Karnataka were there as well. This lovely combination of food and arts truly made the fair a truly enjoyable experience!





Exploring New Year Feasts Around India

India is a land of diversity with numerous festivals spread across its regions.

Talking of the New Year celebrations, the occasions may differ from one India state to the other, but the spirit is alike – usher in the year with joy, peace, prosperity, brotherhood and bonhomie. These are occasions when Indian kitchens gear up for the best cuisine worth waiting for all year, and we take you on a short culinary tour of the celebrations across the country.

North

Come April 13th and there will be celebrations in the Punjab to welcome the arrival of the harvest season with the significant festival, Baisakhi. People traditionally visit temples and gurudwaras with sweets and money, to thank the Gods for their good fortune and pray for a better crop the next year as well. The festival involves a lot of socializing with friends and relatives. Visitors are welcomed with fruits, sweets and buttermilk. Langars or community meals



are served at gurudwaras – consisting of puri (fried bread), cooked potatoes, dal (pulses) and the sweets, halwa and kheer, made in pure ghee.

East

West Bengal celebrates the same festival on April 14th as 'Poila Boishakh' which is the first day of the Bengali calendar. Also known as Nobo Borsho, it is a day marked by cleaning homes, taking early baths, wearing new clothes and preparing special dishes. Traditionally the day starts with an authentic meal that consists of panta bhaat (soaked rice), with onion, green chillies and fried hilsa fish.

West

In the west, the new year is celebrated as 'Gudi Padwa', the first day of the Maharashtrian calendar. Families decorate their homes with intricate rangoli at their doorsteps and begin the day by eating the bittersweet leaves of the neem tree, sometimes making a



paste of the leaves with cumin, jaggery and salt. Delicacies like puran poli (sweet bread), sooth panak (Konkani drink), srikhand (sweet yoghurt), puri and chana ussal are all eaten on these days.

South

Ugadi in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka marks the beginning of the New Year. Prayers are held on this day by devotees who make special offerings, buy new clothes and decorate their homes beautifully. Special food that is made includes tamarind mango chutney, badam halwa, payasam, moong dal kheer, pulihora, lemon rice, onion vadas and pappu pulusu (red grams). In Tamil Nadu, the New Year with Puthandu that is celebrated on April 13th or 14th and in Kerala it is celebrated as Vishu. Lord Vishnu is worshipped on this day with special food such as aviyal, ada pradhman, kuzhi paniyaram, beans thoran and kalan.





Orchha

WORLD-CLASS SIGHTS IN SMALL-TOWN SERENITY

Orchha's location, on the banks of the serene river Betwa, combined with its rich collection of medieval palaces and temples, makes it a perfect place for a weekend getaway in central India. The photogenic corners of the monuments and the river bank ensure a load of fine memories and the fun of exploring a slightly off-mainstream town.

History of Orchha

Orchha State was an independent princely state in India, founded in 1501 by the Bundela chief, Rudra Pratap Singh on the banks of Betwa river. The word Orchha means 'hidden' or 'low enough' and it is believed the word was used derisively by a visiting king commenting on the remoteness of the place. Yet, in uncertain times, being well-hidden was its strength.

Orchha reached the height of its glory during the reign of Bir Singh Deo (1605-27), who was an ally of Jahangir, the Mughal emperor. Many important buildings, foremost of which is the

Jehangiri Mahal, were built during this period.

In the early 17th century, Orchha was occupied by the Mughal forces as a result of a rebellion by Raja Jujhar Singh. Much later the town of Tehri, presently Tikamgarh, became the capital of Orchha state in 1783. Tehri was the site of the fort of Tikamgarh, and the town eventually took the name of the fort. Later kings began projects of modernization and development and Orchha remained the oldest and highest in rank among all Bundelkhand region kingdoms.

A Place of Beauty

Orchha is a land of beauty and peace, with nature and history flowing side-by-side. It is a place that attracts a fair number of foreign travelers in India, though it has not reached the exploding point that other such places do. Like nearby Khajuraho, Orchha also offers some world-class tourism, with small town serenity.

The palaces and memorials at Orchha offer an intriguing glimpse into royal medieval life, apart from the Mughal palaces that are much more well-known. Ram Raja and other smaller temples, which are still functioning today, are another glimpse into Indian life. Religious practices are an unbroken link with the past and the sight of devotees ringing bells, or of saints reciting prayers, is indeed a sight to observe. However, do not get taken in by 'holy men' who try to force you to pay something for their blessings or other services. Nothing of this sort is mandatory.

A trip that combines Khajuraho and Orchha will show one a wide range of sights from Indian history - religion, spirituality, eroticism and royalty, and interlinked stories of Indian and Islamic cultures as well as British Colonial exploration. That's quite a lot in just a few days!

26 April 2013
8pm/the Substation

Tickets at \$25/-

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But what is *Raga*

What is *Tala*

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Shruti (pitch), *Swara* (note),

Raga (melody) *Tala* (rhythm)

as she interweaves comparisons of the Chinese and Western Classical genres.

what

who

Sushma Somasekharan

is a disciple of Ms Lalita Sivakumar and received her initial training from Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society. She is the first Singaporean to win the All India Radio Competition for Carnatic Vocal. She has performed in many prestigious venues including the Indian Embassy of Brussels, Indian Consulate of Luxembourg and the Indian High Commission at Kandy, Sri Lanka.



Git Anjali - A Concert

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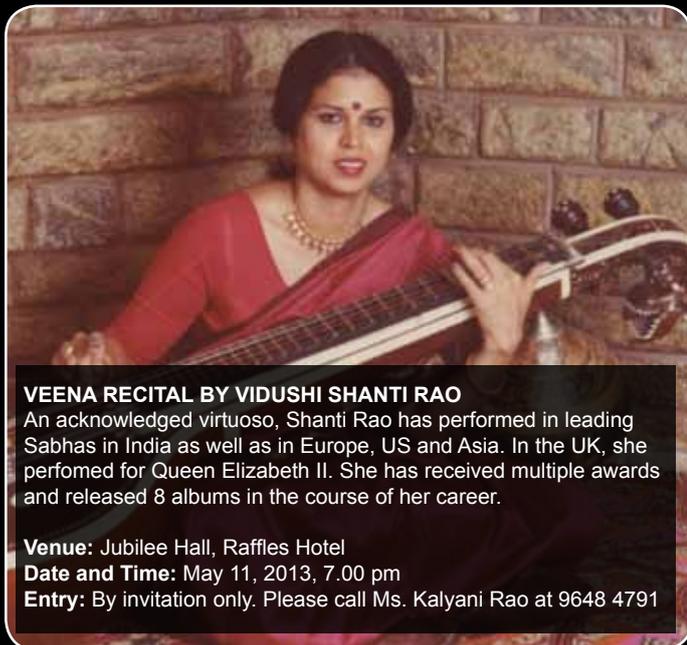
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A disciple of Ms Lalita Sivakumar, Sushma received her initial training from the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society, and is the first Singaporean to win the All India Radio Competition for Carnatic Vocal. She has performed in many prestigious venues including the Indian Embassy of Brussels, Indian Consulate of Luxembourg, Indian High Commission at Kandy Sri Lanka and at Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, Singapore. She resides in Chennai.

Sushma Somasekharan

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VEENA RECITAL BY VIDUSHI SHANTI RAO

An acknowledged virtuoso, Shanti Rao has performed in leading Sabhas in India as well as in Europe, US and Asia. In the UK, she performed for Queen Elizabeth II. She has received multiple awards and released 8 albums in the course of her career.

Venue: Jubilee Hall, Raffles Hotel

Date and Time: May 11, 2013, 7.00 pm

Entry: By invitation only. Please call Ms. Kalyani Rao at 9648 4791

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