

Unique events and arresting venues in Thailand India fest

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focus

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A 10-day festival of India in Thailand was launched in Bangkok on Wednesday, the first such festival in the country. This is the fourth festival in the region after similar festivals held earlier in the year at Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. The next one is scheduled to be held in Shanghai, China.

According to Anil Wadhwa, MEA's secretary



(east) and former ambassador to Thailand, it was not a coincidence that the Asean countries were chosen, to revive the festivals of India, after a long gap of nearly two decades.

"A festival of India in an Asean country is bound to be a success because of our close bonds over the years. This will help us in forging closer ties with this part of the world, which will become an important conglomerate next year," he said.

Arvind Manjit Singh, joint secretary, ministry of culture, who attended the opening event, agreed, and informed that they had planned "uniquely new" event, compared to the festivals of India held in the 1980s at Russia, France and the US.

Thus, the opening event on Wednesday was a refreshing amalgam of religion, culture, and hom-

age to the host country. It was held in Bangkok's most important monastery, the Wat Bovornivesvihara, home to the Thai kings during their monkhood days, and also the abode of the supreme religious patriarch of the country.

Thailand's last supreme patriarch passed away nearly six months back. But his body is still enshrined in the temple. That is why yesterday's opening event was a kind of a homage to him, especially as he had interacted with many former ambassadors and leaders of India.

The 19 Buddhist Lama monks who had come from the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies in Arunachal Pradesh performed a series of religious chantings accompanied by their gongs and cymbals, which was greatly appreciated by

the high-profile gathering, which included representatives from the royal family, businessmen, academics, diplomats, media.

The monks also created a large sand mandala and colourful butter sculpture, with images of Buddha, which will remain in the temple for a week.

The Lama monks then donned elaborate brocade costumes and fiery masks as they did the sacred Cham dance, enunciating the themes of good and evil, accompanied by live instruments and sonorous chants. The dances will be performed again, at another unique venue — the scenic Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives.

Other events at the 10-day festival include a Buddhist exhibition of gigantic standee images of the holy Buddhist sites of India, as well as replicas of Buddhist relics, which



will be first held at the Srinakharinwirot Varsity and then move to the well-known Siam Paragon mall next month. At least 200,000 people are expected to view these objects in this deeply Buddhist country.

There will also be a yoga workshop by a noted guru from India, as well as a demonstration of the new and exciting bollyfit exercise routine (exercises done to Bollywood rhythms), which should go well with this exercise-crazy country.

A food festival will feature Chettinad cuisine, which will be new for Thailand. Chefs Abhilash Nair from the Hotel Jaipur Ashok and Girish Kumar from The Ashok, Delhi, have laid out a variety of spicy kozhi curries and biriyanis at the Blue Elephant restaurant for the "invited" dinner, and

the Royal Orchid Sheraton hotel for the buffet next week. They expect the spice-levels and aromas of the cuisine to appeal to this land of gourmands.

The cultural part of the festival will feature the Aphilo Kuwo folk dance from Nagaland, which should excite Thai audiences, thanks to the new interest in the Northeast part of India, which has closest proximity to Thailand. Then there is a Bharatanatyam performance by the Kalakshetra dance institution who have performed in Bangkok earlier, at the International music-dance festival. They will be enacting yet another sequence from the Ramayana which is an eternal favourite with Thai audiences. The performance will be held at the old-world, exotic Sala Chalermkrung Royal

Theatre, which traditionally stages the classical Thai "Khon" dance theatre centring around stories from the "Ramkien".

What's most impressive about the festival, is that all the events are "free".

"It's the govt of India's gift to Thailand" said the new Indian ambassador to Thailand, Harsh Shringla. He has been in the country for barely three months, and admitted that it was a challenge to put together a big festival like this, in a record three weeks' time. May be that's why they chose unorthodox venues, rather than the well-known ones. But that has proved to be one of the highlights of the festival. If the aim of the festival of India is to reach out to newer sections of the host-country, their new template of unique events and unique venues, should work well.