

Tibetan new year dawns in Indian hill town

Himachal Pradesh, March 11: Homes are being spruced up, prayers being offered and a special two-foot-high 'bhungu amchok' structure made of food is being erected as Tibetans in exile celebrate their new year, known as Losar.

A walk down the Bhagsu Nag temple road and in the busy market of Mcleodganj, 10 km from Dharamsala town and the abode of the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, makes it amply clear how religiously the community observes its new year.

In Losar, 'lo' stands for year and 'sar' for new. According to the Tibetan calendar, the New Year began March 5 this year. The rituals and celebrations related to it will continue for nearly two weeks.

Traditionally, houses are cleaned and prayers offered for the well-being of the family on the first day of the New Year. Lamas offer prayers, chant hymns and read Buddhist scriptures, Rinchen Samkhar, who runs cookery classes here, told IANS.

We also make a special beverage, changkol, made of 'chhaang', a Tibetan beer. During the festival, we meet our relatives and friends. People visit the local monasteries and pray for a prosperous year ahead,' she added.

Even the Tibetan government-in-exile is celebrating the New Year in its true traditional style, with 'bhungu amchok' (meaning Donkey's ears) on the entrance of its parliament complex.

Bhungu amchok is made of various food items. It is a two-foot structure built on baked and fried bread, food grains, salt, tea leaves and butter. It is further decorated with chocolates, sweet candies, juices, fruits, wine and incense sticks on the top. These are all symbols of good signs and success for us,' said Jamyang Lodou, who is associated with JJI cafe, a prominent eating joint.

According to the Tibetan calendar, our new year starts in either February or March. People celebrate it for 10 to 15 days. Bhungu amchok also has religious significance and we also make it during marriages, birth of a child and during other special occasions,' said Lodou.

Mcleodganj, situated just above Dharamsala town in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh with the snow-capped mighty Dhauladhar range in the backdrop, is one of the prominent tourist destinations of India. It is frequented by scores of foreign tourists every day.

Over 100,000 Tibetans are settled in India. The Tibetan government-in-exile is headquartered in Mcleodganj.

Dawa Tripa, a resident of Mcleodganj studying English honours at a college in Chandigarh, said: 'Losar is one of the most important events of the Tibetan community calendar. It is a family-oriented festival and celebrated amidst a blend of customary traditions.

We normally have three to five days of holidays so that we can celebrate this festival at our homes with our family members. All Tibetans here are in a party mood and I have specially come here from

Chandigarh to celebrate this event. We together wash our houses or white-wash them to please our gods and deities.?

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