

(IPR) The celebration of 203<sup>rd</sup> Bhanu Jayanti took place in a grand manner here at Gangtok today. The celebration started with the Sova Yatra from Bhanu Uddhayan at Zero point with the offering of scarves and garland to the statue of Adi Kavi Bhanu Bhakta Acharya by the Minister for Culture Shri G.M Gurung who was present as the Chief Guest of the function. The Minister spoke about the significance of celebrating Bhanu Jayanti and his contribution to the Nepali language in the society. He urged the present and the coming generation to draw inspiration from Bhanu Bhakta and work towards conservation of one's tradition and culture. Shri Gurung also mentioned that people of Sikkim are peace loving and urged to give it continuity in the future too with communal harmony and to live with unity.

Governor's message for the people of Sikkim was also readout by Mr. Jiwan Sharma of Nepali Sahitya Parishad during the programme.

The programme started with the recitation of the Magalacharan and observed two minutes silence to honour the martyrs (Gorkhas) who had sacrificed their life for the cause of the community.

The second half of the programme saw noted litterateur Shri Raj K. Shrestha being conferred with the prodigious 'Bhanu Purashkar' for the year 2017 in the State level 203<sup>rd</sup> Bhanu Jayanti Samaroh held at Manan Kendra Gangtok today. The Award is constituted by the Nepali Sahitya Parishad Sikkim and is conferred every year on the occasion of Bhanu Jayanti on individuals who have made noteworthy contribution in the field of Nepali literature and preservation of the language and culture. Shri Shrestha has made significant contribution to Nepali literature in a period spanning over three decades. Shri Shrestha was awarded the 'Bhanu Puraskar' by the Chief Minister of Sikkim Shri Pawan Chamling who was present as the Chief Guest.

Apart from the 'Bhanu Puraskar', the Seva Shree Samman were also conferred to individuals for their notable contribution in various fields like language, literature, music, art and journalism.

The following individuals were conferred the Seva Shree Samman Awards:

1. Shri K.N. Sharma – Bhasa Seva Shree Samman
2. Shri N.H. Khan – Sahitya Seva Shree Samman
3. Shri Sanjay Subba – Sangeet Seva Shree Samman
4. Shri Madhav Ghimire – Sangeet Seva Shree Samman
5. Shri Matrika Sharma – Natak Seva Shree Samman
6. Smt Geeta Bhandari – Patrakarita Seva Shree Samman
7. Shri Bhawani Pradhan – Chitrankarita Seva Shree Samman

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Shri Pawan Chamling recalled the contribution made by Adi Kavi Bhanu Bhakta Acharya and stated that the poet's work finds all the more relevance in the present time. He urged the gathering comprising mostly of intellectuals teachers and students to recognize the greatness of Adikavi Bhanu Bhakta Acharya and to internalize his messages. He congratulated Shri Raj K. Shrestha on receiving the 'Bhanu Puraskar' and added that it was long due. The Chief Minister in his address also made references to some of the suggestions made by the Bhanu Puraskar recipient in his address earlier.

Chief Minister Shri Chamling stated that the overpowering influence of global link language English over local languages is a universal phenomenon and should not be taken as a deterrent, rather we should positively make individual and collective efforts to safeguard and promote our own language. For this, education should be life-oriented and not confined to being profession-oriented, he added. Simultaneously, conscious effort should be made to safeguard and promote our language which can be possible only if intellectuals and members of the civil society collectively take initiatives. Instead of blaming anyone, we should introspect on our own shortcomings and work towards mending them, he added. He further stated that the Government has consistently worked towards preservation of Nepali language through creation of infrastructures and institutions of learning. He informed that the Government has even started recruiting Nepali Graduate teachers and will expand to the Primary level too in near future. (Presently only Post Graduate Teachers are recruited for Nepali Language).

The Chief Minister expressed his concern over the under-utilization of institutions created by the Government such as the Kavi Bhanu Bhakta Acharya Adhyayan Kendra in Geyzing, which he lamented, is allowed to stagnate as a mere infrastructure. He exhorted the literary community and members of the civil society to take ownership of such institutions instead of depending entirely on the Government for its sustenance and development. "I call upon the

learned community to come forward with your suggestions to safeguard these infrastructures created by the Government for the intellectual development of the present and future generations,” added the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister also placed a suggestion before the audience that the annual celebration of the Birth Anniversary of Adi Kavi Bhanu Bhakta Acharya everywhere in the country could have a common theme every year based on prevalent contexts. This would give a strong message of unity among the Indian Nepalis spread across the country, he added.

The Chief Minister announced that the annual grant of Rs. 10 lakhs awarded to Nepali Sahitya Parishad will now be increased to Rs. 15 lakhs (Fifteen Lakhs). He added that this increased amount could be used to increase the amount that accompanies the ‘Bhanu Puraskar’ which will henceforth be made Rs. 5 lakhs. He further suggested that cash incentives be given to the Seva Shri Samman recipients as well.

Chief Minister Shri Chamling made a clarion call for emotional and intellectual integration of the Sikkimese people, and added that our strength lies in our unity. He also highlighted the accomplishments of the State in every sector through good governance and inclusive policies of the Government.

The Chief Minister dedicated a section of his address to the students, exhorting them to make the most of the unlimited opportunities provided by the Government. “Some of you might get through your examinations by resorting to unethical means, but to pass in life you cannot afford to copy. You have to find your own answers to life’s challenges. But the student-friendly policies of my Government are such that they can even guide you through the challenges of life,” stated the Chief Minister.

The Programme was also addressed by ‘Bhanu Puraskar’ 2017 recipient Shri Raj K. Shrestah where he recalled his literary journey from the late seventies and early eighties leading upto the present day. He expressed his gratitude to the Nepali Sahitya Parishad Sikkim for selecting him for the prestigious award.

Earlier, finalists of the Inter School Ramayan Path Competition presented verses from the Nepali Ramayan. In the competition held earlier this week, Tadong Senior Secondary School had stood first, while there was a tie in the second prize between Deorali Girls SSS and Enchey SSS. The third prize went to West Point Senior Secondary School. The participants were also handed over cash awards announced by the Chief Minister during his address.

The programme also saw poetry recitation by Smita Basnet of PNG School and Gopal Dhakal in the open category. They had stood first in their respective categories in the competition held earlier in the week. The participants of the poetry competition were also felicitated and awarded cash grant from the Chief Minister.

Likewise, in the Inter-School Sova Yatra Competition held in the morning, Tashi Namgyal Senior Secondary School, Tashi Namgyal Academy and Modern Senior Secondary School stood first second and third respectively in the inter-school category, while in the open category, Nepali Sanskriti Samrakshan Samiti 5<sup>th</sup> Mile Tadong stood first and Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh and Akhil Sikkim Thami Sangh were first and second runners up respectively. The Programme at Manan Kendra began with a welcome address by President, Nepali Sahitya Parishad, Shri Rudra Poudyal.

Artists of Ujjwal Kala Kendra Deorali and Ajambari Samaj Gangtok lent colour to the event with their dance performances.

The Chief Guest also released some books on the occasion.

The function had the presence and participation of MLA Gangtok and Chairman of the Celebration Committee Shri Pintso Chopel Lepcha, MLA Shri Shyam Pradhan, MLA Shri D.B. Thapa, Chief Secretary Government of Sikkim Shri A.K. Shrivastava, Principal Secretary Cultural Affairs & Heritage Department Shri A.K. Ganeriwala, noted literary figures, members of the Nepali Sahitya Parishad, teachers and students.

The programme concluded with Vote of Thanks proposed by Vice President NSP Shri T. B. Chandra Subba.