

Union MoS for Culture Meenakshi Lekhi inaugurates 3-day international conference on 'Human Population Histories in South Asia' at KU

VC, top officials, experts share dais at inaugural session



Srinagar, June 7: Union Minister of State for Culture and External Affairs, Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi, on Wednesday inaugurated a three-day international conference on 'Reconstructing the Human Histories of South Asia using Archaeology and Genetics' at the University of Kashmir, a mega event that brings together academics and experts from diverse disciplines to foster "fresh perspectives" on the theme.

The Conference, supported by the Union Ministry of Culture under Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, has been jointly organised by Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences, Lucknow and KU's Centre of Central Asian Studies (CCAS).

In her presidential address, Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi said the conference is a great opportunity to "build a comprehensive and complete narrative" of the evolution of human histories in South Asia, especially the great Indian history.

"When people from different disciplines like archeology, economics, genetics, culture, DNA etc. work together, we are able to build a complete narrative because the gaps get filled by people from other disciplines through evidence which needs to be collaboratively brought together," the Union minister said.

Referring to India's rich ancient history, including the 'Sarasvati Harappan Civilisation', Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi, who was the Chief Guest at the inaugural session, lamented that history "gets to be written not by the people who actually made that history".

"This is the injustice which has happened with Indian history. Usually people would say that we haven't preserved our history, but that is not true," she said, also referring to how Kashmir has been a seat of great learning and exploration of ideas and spiritual knowledge since times immemorial.

"The world knows about Greek theatre but how many people know about Abhinavagupta, who wrote about dance, drama, music...The original books are lying somewhere else. The digitised copies are not being made available. So this is what we have the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' initiative for: to decolonise minds, decolonise history and to write history with a fresh Indian perspective," she said.

The Union minister also called for bringing scientists on board to discuss history, saying "science is unbiased and goes by facts and scientists are not averse to be challenged."

She also appreciated the University of Kashmir for hosting the Y20 and C20 working group meetings under India's G20 Presidency.

In his keynote address, Mr Sanjeev Sanyal, Secretary, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, said "peopling of the world is a great miracle where South Asia has played a great role". He also spoke in detail about the evolutionary history of South Asia and people's ancient migrations, besides their mixing and mingling, through the terrestrial and marine routes.

KU Vice-Chancellor Prof Nilofer Khan, in her special address, said the conference is a great opportunity for young students and research scholars to explore the country's great civilizational heritage, including the diversity in cultures, the ancient art, and the vast spiritual and scholarly contributions of great Indian scholars.

This event helps us to further advance the objectives of the National Education Policy-2020 which outlines the role of universities in promoting the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, she said.

Prof Partha Prathim Majumder, Founder Director, National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, Kalyani, also delivered the keynote address on 'Genetic Structure of Contemporary Populations in South Asia: Learning from ancient DNA Research'.

Dr Kumarasamy Thangaraj, Director, Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagonostis, Hyderabad, also shared his views on the conference theme.

A book titled 'Excavation Report on Burzohom' and Souvenir of Conference Abstracts were also released by the dignitaries.

Director CCAS Prof Tabassum Firdous delivered the welcome address and spelt out the broad objectives of the conference.

Dr Neeraj Rai gave the introductory remarks and Dr Ajmal Shah conducted proceedings of the inaugural session, which was attended senior KU academics and

officers, including Dean Academic Affairs, Dean Colleges and Registrar, besides faculty and scholars from CCAS.

Earlier, the VC and Registrar, Dr Nisar A Mir, accompanied the Union minister and the visiting delegates to the CCAS Museum at the Allama Iqbal Library.