



Consulate General of India, NY Celebrated International Day of Yoga at the Times Square



Renowned Yoga expert Ms. Ruchika Lal of the Art of Living Foundation conducted the lead Yoga session at the Times Square on June 21 from 0930-1030 hrs. Consul General of India Randhir Kumar Jaiswal, his wife and members of the Consulate staff are seen participating in the Yoga session

THOUSANDS, INCLUDING CONSULATE AND GOVERNMENT OF INDIA UNDERTAKINGS STAFF PARTICIPATED

NEW YORK CITY (TIP): The 8th International Day of Yoga (IDY) was celebrated by the Consulate General of India in New York at the iconic Times Square, the cross-roads of the World, today. This year the Yoga celebrations were special, for they formed part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav - 75 years of India's Independence.

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The INDIAN PANORAMA
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Will bring out a special edition to mark America's Independence on 4th of July.

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Supreme Court strikes down New York gun law, expanding gun rights

The ruling comes as Congress is actively working on gun legislation following recent mass shootings in Texas, New York and California



The Supreme Court said Thursday, June 23, that Americans have a right to carry guns in public.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): In a major expansion of gun rights, the Supreme Court said Thursday, June 23, that Americans have a right to carry guns in public.

The ruling comes as Congress is actively working on gun legislation following recent mass shootings in Texas, New York and California.

The justices' 6-3 decision, along the known party lines, follows a series of recent mass shootings and is expected to ultimately allow more people to legally

carry guns on the streets of the nation's largest cities - including New York, Los Angeles and Boston - and elsewhere. About a quarter of the U.S. population lives in states expected to be affected by the ruling, the high court's first major gun decision in more than a decade.

Justice Clarence Thomas wrote for the majority that the Constitution protects "an individual's right to carry a handgun for self-defense outside the home."

In their decision, the justices struck down a New York law requiring people to demonstrate a particular need for carrying a gun in order to get a license to carry one in public. The justices said the requirement violates the Second Amendment right to "keep and bear arms." California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island all have similar laws. The Biden administration had urged the justices to uphold New York's law.

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Senate Approves Bipartisan Gun Safety Bill, hours after the Supreme Court struck down New York's Gun Law



The Senate approved bipartisan legislation on Thursday, June 23, aimed at keeping firearms out of the hands of dangerous people

WASHINGTON D.C. (TIP): The Senate approved bipartisan legislation on Thursday, June 23, aimed at keeping firearms out of the hands of dangerous people, after a small group of Republicans joined Democrats to break through their party's longstanding blockade of gun safety measures and shatter nearly three decades of congressional paralysis on toughening the nation's gun laws.

The 65-33 vote included 15 Republicans in favor and came hours after the Supreme Court struck down New York's gun law, likely limiting the

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Afghanistan's deadliest earthquake in two decades has claimed 1000 lives and rendered thousands without shelter

Afghan earthquake death toll at 1,000 makes it Afghanistan's deadliest earthquake in two decades, according to U.S. government data

Aid to the earthquake hit region begins to arrive

KABUL (TIP): Aid began arriving on Thursday, June 23, in a remote part of Afghanistan where an earthquake killed 1,000 people but poor communications and a lack of proper roads are

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Murli Menon

There are seven types of sea turtles in India. These include the Green Turtle, Hawksbill, Loggerhead, Leatherback and Olive Ridley. The Olive Ridley turtle indulge in mass nesting, once a year, on a full moon night every March. There are only three beaches in the world, where Olive Ridley's choose to nest. Coincidentally, all these three beaches are located in Odisha state in India. These mass nesting sites are located at Rushikulya beach in Ganjam District, Devi beach in Puri district and Gahirmatha beach in Kendrapara district of Odisha. Mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles usually take place in March at Rushikulya, April at Gahirmatha and May at Devi. I was there at all these three beaches to videotape and photograph these turtles.

One has just returned after a close encounter with nature at Rushikulya beach at Ganjam District in Odisha State. Ganjam is a three hour drive away from Bhubaneswar, near Berhampur, on the fringes of the "Chilka Lake."

After Rushikulya, one also witnessed the mass nesting at Gahirmatha and Devi beach. The Olive Ridley turtles are an endangered species and they need to be protected at all costs.

One passes the historical village of Balugaon along the way from Bhubaneswar to Ganjam. We are welcomed by a group of flamingoes flying in formation, as soon as we enter Ganjam Town. We start our trek to Rushikulya Beach which is 3 km. away and soon find ourselves in the middle of a flat beach with rust coloured sand as far as eye can see. After thirty minutes of cruising through the beach, one sees a large water body in the distance. We are informed by our guide that the water body is the Rushikulya River which meets the sea at Ganjam. The nearest village is Gokharguda which is about a kilometer away from Rushikulya beach. The other villages on the periphery of the beach include Purunabandha, Palibandha and Nuagaon. Devi beach is an uninhabited beach which stretches to about 10 km. at Jahania village located about 100 km. away from Bhubaneswar. Gahirmatha beach lies inside the Bhitarkanika wildlife sanctuary and is accessible only by boat.

We come to the edges of the beach to find hundreds of cattle egrets lined up on the edge of the water. It is a pleasure to watch a multitude of colourful birds at close quarters, as they flock to the edge of the water. The water is shallow and the sand is swampy. The unique feature about Rushikulya beach is the softness of the sand. As the river empties into the sea here, the beach is made up of soft sand. It is possible to dig deep into the soil with one's bare hands. The deep blue sky, reflected in the crystal clearness of the waters is a joy to behold. Watching the crimson sunrise over the rust coloured sands is the highlight of the visit to Rushikulya.

Every year, between January and March, about 300,000 Olive Ridley sea turtles land at Devi, Rushikulya and Gahirmatha beaches for mass nesting! These giant turtles are 70 cm. in length and weigh 45 kg. They travel from the depths of the Pacific Ocean near Ecuador in South America and travel 9000 km. across the Pacific to reach the Bay of Bengal. This mass turtle migration over 9000 km. is a miracle of nature which happens on three days of every year in the first three weeks in the month of March. The sea turtle is a marine reptile which has

Odisha – Sanctuary for Olive Ridely Turtles



to surface in the ocean to breathe. Sea-turtles spend a large part of their lives in the ocean but as they lay eggs, the females have to come to the shore once a year. It is no coincidence that every year these turtles choose Rushikulya beach for mass nesting. The other two sites where one can witness mass nesting are Devi river mouth near Puri and Gahirmatha Beach in Bhitarkanika sanctuary in Kendrapada district of Odisha. There are few events in the history of Indian wildlife which is worth watching and seeing thousands of turtles crawl out of the sea and laying their eggs after digging a deep pit and covering the pit with sand to protect the eggs from predators is a miracle which tops the list.

Thousands of Olive Ridley turtles emerge from the sea at the same time and nest on the beach together, for two to three days. Only the females come ashore. The males continue to remain in the ocean. Nesting takes place in pitch darkness between 12:00 midnight and 4:00 a.m. The female digs out a deep pit, using her hind flippers to dig the soft sandy soil. She digs a two feet deep pit, lays her eggs into this pit and covers it with sand with her front flippers. Every female lays about 80 to 100 eggs at a time in a time period of 45 minutes. The mother turtle returns to the sea and after 45 days the eggs hatch at dawn, the infant turtle breaks the shell and crawls on its own into the ocean to join his parents. The baby turtle breaks out of the egg and burrows through the sand, reaches the surface and opens its eyes to see the reflection of the stars on the ocean and moves in that direction to enter the ocean. The sex of the hatchling depends on the temperature. More females are born at higher temperatures and more males are born at lower temperatures.

Sea turtles return to the place they were born to nest. It is indeed amazing, how these turtles manage to find their way back to the beach they were born after migrating thousands of kilometers away from their "natal beach." Watching thousands of infant turtles hatching from their eggs and entering the ocean enmass at the exact moment the first rays of the sun strike the earth, is an extremely

emotional experience, which demonstrates the interconnectedness of man, animals and nature. The turtle hatchlings break the shell of their eggs with a tooth designed for the purpose and emerge out of the shells and sense the reflection of the stars on the ocean and move towards the brighter horizon and enter the ocean. The nesting turtle is sensitive to light and needs pitch darkness for nesting. Any natural or artificial lighting on the beach, disorients the turtles, who may return to the ocean without laying eggs if disturbed. Hence it is imperative to ensure minimum movement on the beach, especially during the nesting season.

Olive Ridley turtles come to nest on a full moon night after midnight, till 4:00 a.m. To watch the nesting one has to sleep on the starlit beach in temporary straw huts, scanning the coastline for unusual movement. As soon as one sights a turtle crawling away to the soft sands or spots the tracks of the turtle on the sands, one follows the tracks to spot the turtle, who lays about 100-140 eggs in a space of about 45 minutes and returns to the sea, only to return the following year! Olive Ridley turtles have a life span of 100 years and nest after once they turn 25.

After spending a week each at Rushikulya, Devi and Gahirmatha beaches, observing the mass nesting of the turtles, one can suggest the following remedial measures to protect these gentle and delicate darlings. Jackals should be prevented from entering the beach and eating the turtle eggs by fencing off the mass nesting sites. Developmental activities including ports, oil refineries and steel plants should be located far away from the three turtle nesting sites in Odisha. All commercial activity, including movement of ships and boats should be restricted during the three months when mass nesting takes place. No offshore drilling must be allowed along the route of the turtle migration.

Illegal sand mining on these beaches should be stopped with immediate effect. The female sea turtle requires absolute privacy and should be undisturbed while laying her eggs. As mass nesting always

takes place after midnight in pitch darkness, all flashlights, torches and camera flashes should be avoided while observing the turtles. The female turtles return without laying the eggs if they are disturbed slightly! Radio-tagging of turtles for research purposes should be banned too! All mechanized fishing should be banned on the Odisha coast with immediate effect.

The enemies of the Olive Ridley turtle includes a port which has come up near Gahirmatha sanctuary, two offshore drilling platforms which are directly in the middle of the migration route of the turtles, 50 km. away from Devi mouth and Rushikulya beaches.

Large trawlers which kill mother and baby turtles in a heartless manner. As turtles come up to breathe every 45 minutes, they are caught in the fishing nets of these large trawlers who fish in the waters off the Odisha coast. The trawler owners kill the pregnant mother turtle by first blinding it by piercing their eyes with hot iron rods heated in the boiler room of the boat. Then they pour hot water on the mother turtle to stun it and then in a macabre ritual, the behead the mother turtle with a giant knife and throw the dead turtle into the sea. Every year 100,000 dead turtles are found on the beaches of Odisha. Every fish-eater is directly responsible for killing these innocent, pregnant, mother turtles when you eat fish.

As I return after spending a memorable stay at Rushikulya, Devi and Gahirmatha I am reminded of an ancient saying of the Oriyas:

*"Turtles are my friends,
Make them your friends today
Together we can save them"*

How to get there?

By road: Rushikulya Beach is 140 km. away from Bhubaneswar. The non-stop drive from Bhubaneswar to Rushikulya should not exceed three hours. Devi beach is 100 km. away from Bhubaneswar and Bhitarkanika sanctuary is located about 150 km. away from Bhubaneswar. Gahirmatha beach can be accessed only by boat and forest department permits are mandatory before entering the sanctuary. These permits have to be obtained from the Forest Office at Bhubaneswar, a week prior to your intended date of visit.

By air: The nearest airport to reach Rushikulya Beach is at Bhubaneswar. Bhubaneswar is connected by direct flights from most Indian cities.

By train: Ganjam is the nearest railhead to reach Rushikulya. From Ganjam taxis ply to Rushikulya. Most trains going from Bhubaneswar to Vishakhapatnam stop at Ganjam.

(Murli Menon, is a travel writer, stress management consultant and author-based at Ahmedabad, India. He is the author of "ZeNLP-Learning through stories" published by The Written Word Publications, "ZeNLP-the power to succeed" published by Sage publications and "ZeNLP-the power to relax" by New Dawn Press. He can be reached at zenlp@rediffmail.com)