

# Ministry of Tourism organises second Independence Day themed webinar titled “Cellular Jail: Letters, Memoirs & Memories” under DekhoApnaDesh webinar series

The Webinar showcased the journey of India’s independence struggle through the galleries and cells of the Cellular jail

The next episode of the Webinar titled JallianwalaBagh: A turning point in the freedom struggle

Posted On: 12 AUG 2020 1:26PM by PIB Delhi

As India gears up to celebrate its 74<sup>th</sup> Independence Day celebrations , the Ministry of Tourism’s DekhoApnaDesh Webinar Series presented the webinar titled “Cellular Jail : Letters , Memoirs & Memories on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

The 46<sup>th</sup> in the series of DekhoApnaDeshwebinars, the “Cellular Jail :Letters , Memoirs & Memories”was presented by Ms. NidhiBansal, CEO, India City Walks & India with locals, Dr.Soumi Roy, Head of Operations, India with Locals and India Heritage Walks and Ms. SomritaSengupta, City Explorer, India City Walks. DekhoApnaDesh Webinar Series is an effort to showcase India’s rich diversity under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat and it is continuously spreading spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat through virtual platform.

The Webinar showcased the journey of India’s independence struggle through the galleries and cells of the Cellular jail. The lives and stories of some of the most famous political prisoners like Veer Savarkar, B.K.Dutt, Fazl-e-HaqKhairabadi, Barindra Kumar Ghose, SushilDasgupta were presented. The important contribution made by NetajiSubhas Chandra Bose in Andaman towards India’s independence also had a mention in the presentation.

The Cellular Jail in Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands is a prison where Indians fighting for freedom from the British were exiled and incarcerated under very inhuman conditions. Today, a national memorial, it is called cellular because it was constructed to host only individual cells for the purpose of solitary confinement. Originally, the building had seven wings, at the centre of which was a tower with a large bell, manned by guards. Each wing had three storeys and each solitary cell was about 15 ft by about 9 ft, with a single window at a height of 9 ft. The wings were built like the spokes of a bicycle and the front of one wing overlooked the back of the other so there was no way a prisoner could communicate with another.



Ministry of Tourism presents

# Dekho Apna Desh

a webinar on

## Cellular Jail: Letters, Memoirs & Memories

The presenters recalled how the year of 1857 turned out to be a threat to British supremacy and the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century shook the English empire. The political atmosphere of 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the stages of freedom struggle like Gandhi's policy of non violence and Civil disobedience and several other campaigns. The construction of the prison started in 1896 and was completed in 1910. The original building was a puce-coloured brick building. The building had seven wings, at the centre of which a tower served as the intersection and was used by guards to keep watch on the inmates.

Prior to Cellular jail, it was the jail at Viper Island that was used by the British to inflict the worst form of torture and hardship on those who strove to free the country from the British rule. Solitary cells, lock-ups, stocks and whipping stands characterized the Viper Jail. Women were also held. The conditions at the jail were such that the place got the notorious name, "**Viper Chain Gang Jail.**" Those who had challenged the might of the British authority were chained together and confined at night by a chain running through coupling of irons around their legs. It was at this jail that members of the Chain Gang were put to hard labour.

The architecture of Cellular Jail was conceptualized on the basis of 'Pennsylvania System or Separate System' theory in which separate confinement is necessary for each inmate for complete isolation from other inmates. No communication of any kind was possible between prisoners in the same or different wings. Each and Every brick of the Cellular Jail has got a heart rendering stories of resistance, sufferings and sacrifices. Cellular Jail stands as a mute spectator to the inhuman sufferings of the patriots, freedom fighters who were imprisoned in these cells. They even had to sacrifice their precious lives as victim of tyranny.

Often punishment were inhuman, it ranged from extra hours on the grinding mill to standing handcuffed for a week, gardening, drying copra, rope making, coir pounding, carpet making, weaving towels, to bar-fetters for six months, to confinement in solitary cells, to four days of starvation diet and to cross bars for ten days, a punishment which compelled the victim to keep his legs apart.

The presenters highlighted the sacrifices of following freedom fighters who had to go through the inhuman sufferings at the Cellular Jail.

a) Veer Savarkar - In 1911, freedom fighter Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was sentenced to 50 years in the cellular jail of Andamans (also known as Kala Pani) for revolting against the Morley-Minto reforms (Indian Councils Act 1909). He was released in 1924. He was known for his bravery and hence nicknamed 'Veer'.

b) B.K. Dutt - Batukeshwar Dutt, also known as B K Dutt, was a Revolutionary Freedom Fighter. He, along with Bhagat Singh was involved in the Central Legislative Assembly Bombing Case of 1929, passed away on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1965 after an illness at the age of 54. Dutt was sentenced to life imprisonment and deported to the Cellular

Jail in Port Blair.

c) Fazl-E-Haq Khairabadi- After the Indian Rebellion of 1857 failed, Fazl-E-Haq was covered by an amnesty and was arrested by the British authorities on 30 January 1859 at Khairabad for inciting violence. He was tried and found guilty of encouraging murder and role in the 'jihad'. He had chosen to be his own counsel and defended himself. His arguments and the way he defended his case was so convincing that the presiding magistrate was writing a judgement to exonerate him, when he confessed to giving the fatwa, declaring that he could not lie. He was sentenced for life to the prison at Kalapani (Cellular Jail) on Andaman Island, and his property was confiscated by the judicial commissioner of Awadh court.

d) Barindra Kumar Ghose - Barindra Ghose was born at Croydon, near London on 5 January 1880. Following the attempted killing of Kingsford by two revolutionaries Khudiram and Prafulla on 30 April 1908, the police intensified its investigation which led to the arrest of Barin and Aurobindo Ghosh on 2 May 1908, along with many of his comrades. The trial (known as the Alipore Bomb Case) initially sentenced Barin Ghosh and Ullaskar Datta to death. However, the sentence was reduced to life imprisonment, by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Barin was deported to the Cellular Jail in Andaman in 1909 along with other convicts.

e) Sushil Dasgupta - Sushil Kumar Dasgupta (1910-1947) was born in Barishal, now in Bangladesh. He was a member of the revolutionary Yugantar Dal of Bengal, and the Putiya Mail Robbery case of 1929 took him to Medinipur prison. From there, he escaped along with fellow revolutionaries, Sachin Kar Gupta and Dinesh Majumdar. They were absconding for seven months. Eventually Dinesh was caught and hanged, Sushil was sent to Cellular Jail, and Sachin first to Mandalay Jail and, then, to Cellular Jail.

Mass hunger strikes were resorted to especially between 1932 and 1937. The last strike began in July 1937 and it continued for 45 days. The government finally decided to close down the penal settlement and all the political prisoners of Cellular Jail were repatriated to their respective states on mainland India by January 1938.

On December 29, 1943, political control of the islands was passed to the Azad Hind government of Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose visited Port Blair to raise the tricolour flag of the Indian National Army. During this, his only visit to the Andamans, he was kept carefully screened from the local population by the Japanese authorities. Various attempts were made to inform him of the sufferings of the people of the Andamans, and the fact that many local Indian Nationalists were at that time being tortured in the Cellular Jail.

The presenters also showcased the beautiful island beyond Cellular jail. The Andaman Islands are an Indian archipelago in the Bay of Bengal. These roughly 300 islands are known for their palm-lined, white-sand beaches, mangroves and tropical rainforests. Coral reefs supporting marine life such as sharks and rays make for popular diving and snorkeling sites. Indigenous Andaman Islanders inhabit the more remote islands, many of which are off limits to visitors.

Port Blair on South Andaman Island is the capital city of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Its seafront Cellular Jail hints at its past as a British penal colony and is now a memorial to Indian independence activists. Inland, the Samudrika Marine Museum showcases local marine life. The Anthropological Museum focuses on the islands' indigenous tribes. Cellular Jail Museum, a prominent and the most attractive sightseeing spot at Andaman and Nicobar Island for tourists across the globe comprises of National Memorial houses, Freedom Fighters Photo and Exhibition Gallery, Art Gallery, and a Library on Freedom Movement. The place is sure to draw our memories back to the Indian Freedom Struggle. Ross island or N.C. Bose Dweep has the ruins of opulent British past in the form of bakery, old office buildings, churches etc. Neil Island or Shaheed Dweep with white shores, coral reefs is often visited for snorkeling. Havelock island also named Swaraj island is home to Radhanagar beach. Travelers can enjoy scuba diving, fishing, snorkeling etc at Elephant island.

Shri. Rajesh Kumar Sahu, Director, Ministry of Tourism in his concluding remarks spoke about the launching of the Submarine Optical Fiber-Cable (OFC) connecting Andaman & Nicobar Islands to the mainland through video conferencing by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The connectivity would now enable endless opportunities in the islands. The Prime Minister said the Submarine Cable will help A&N in getting cheaper & better connectivity and all the benefits of Digital India, especially in improving online education, tele-medicine, banking system, online trading and in boosting tourism.

The DekhoApnaDesh Webinar Series are presented in technical partnership with National e Governance Department, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. The Sessions of Webinar are now available on the [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbzIbBmMvtvH7d6Zo\\_ZEHDA/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbzIbBmMvtvH7d6Zo_ZEHDA/featured) and also on all social media Handles of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

The next episode of the Webinar scheduled on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020 at 11:00 am, is titled Jallianwala Bagh: A turning point in the freedom struggle and registration is open for the webinar: <https://bit.ly/JallianwalaBaghDAD>

\*\*\*\*\*

**NB/AKJ/OA**

(Release ID: 1645292) Visitor Counter : 821

Read this release in: Urdu , Marathi , Hindi , Bengali , Manipuri , Punjabi , Tamil , Malayalam