

Restoration brings shine back to frescoes at Tsuklakhang

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GANGTOK, 30 March:

Restoration work is underway on the frescoes at the Tsuklakhang Monastery situated in the palace premises here in the capital. The restoration is being overseen by two respected architects who have worked extensively on conservation of Tibetan architecture - Andre Alexander from Germany and Anca Nicolaescu from Paris, who are in Sikkim on the invitation of the Tsuklakhang Trust.

"This is my first project in Sikkim, but I have worked eight years in Ladakh and another seven in Tibet and also head the Tibet Heritage Fund," informed Andre, who has studied Tibetan Architecture in Lhasa and is a Conservationist Architect.

"Actually, I work on whole buildings and have done Meru Ningpa [a 9th century monastery in Tibet] in 1998-2000 and some 14th Century buildings and murals in Ladakh," he further said.



He also informed that the Tsuklakhang monastery has wall paintings on the least around 100 years old.

"When we first came here last year, we took photographs, marked the areas and then did mapping of all

the drawings," explained Anca Nicolaescu, the restorer from Paris.

"We are now removing dust and soot that has accumulated on the paintings by cleaning them with soap water and then using alcohol diluted in different concentrations to clean the yellow varnish that was used on the paintings," she added.

The work is already impressive, with the contrast between the restored sections and the still grimy artwork, making a strong statement on the treat of restoration that awaits the monastery.

"There are cracks and gaps that have appeared in the walls which will be filled with mud plaster then the repair of the paintings will follow and finally the retouching will be done," she said, adding that the whole process could take around a year to finish.

"The Tsuklakhang wall paintings are one of the finest Buddhist wall-arts in the world today," endorsed Hope Leezum, who is also the

Chogyal's representative in the Tsuklakhang Trust.

"This is a completely voluntary work and even though Andre is busy with his work in Lhasa, he, along with Anca, on the invitation of the Tsuklakhang Trust, have come to work here in Sikkim," she informed.

"The Tsuklakhang monastery is open to the people to visit and anyone wishing to help is welcome," she added, informing that many government officials were already helping out in various capacities such as arranging a supply of distilled spirit from the Excise Department for the restoration work.

She added that three artists from Ladakh, who have been trained by the duo, were also helping out and Sikkimese people interested in such restoration works could also be trained to carry on such works for free.

"Preserving Buddhist heritage in the long run means preservation of the heritage of Sikkim," she said.