Monument of peace opens at Gorai

Mumbai: Thousands of Vipassana practitioners from India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and other parts of the world came together at Gorai where the doors of Global Vipassana Pagoda were thrown open to masses on Sunday.

President Pratibha Patil inaugurated the 325-ft tall stone structure, which is the world's largest dhaarmik place of worship for people of all faiths. It took 11 years, 25 million man-days and widespread research to build the monument of peace and harmony. The structure, which has enough space for 3,000 people to meditate together, may soon turn into a hub for spiritual tourism - envisaged at the top of the pagoda are stone reliefs of Lord Buddha donated by the Sri Lankan government and the Mahabodhi Society of India.

A Vipassana practitioner herself, Patil lauded the efforts of Acharya S N Goenka, founder of Global Vipassana Foundation (GVF), in propagating the ancient meditation technique that was rediscovered by Gautam Buddha. Known to cure universal ills, the technique involves mental purification, which helps people fight stress and live a more balanced life.

Designed by traditional stone structure expert Chandrabhan Sonpara, the global pagoda stands as a symbol of gratitude to Myanmar as well as its Vipassana teachers—the Gorai structure is modelled on the Shwedagon Pagoda at Yangon in Myanmar. Wearing a brown longyi with a Kombong tied around his head, U Shwe, member of the Shwedagon Pagoda of Myanmar, said, "This global pagoda has been built a little shorter than our gold-covered one in Myanmar so as to show reverence to the original."

The pagoda will have one-day courses for students who are already well-versed with the meditation technique. Vipassana student Kusun Galanga from Gujarat's Kutch district explained that Vipassana involves breathing exercises where practitioners control their minds, avoid talking and abstain from all other distractions.

"It helped me deal with my family and work pressures. Now I am a calmer person," says Galanga who often visits the pagoda at Buddha in Kutch.

Among those present at the event were Governor S C Jamir, state deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal, ministers Sharad Pawar, Pratul Patel, Przyanka Gandhi-Vadra and her husband Robert Vadra, several foreign dignitaries, members of the diplomat corps in Mumbai and Global Vipassana Foundation chairman Subhadra Chandra.