

Over 50,000 to perform yoga in Dehradun with PM Modi

ARCHIS MOHAN

Dehradun, 20 June

The choice of Dehradun, the capital of Uttarakhand, as the venue of the fourth edition of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Yoga Day celebrations on Thursday, has come with much thought for its religious and spiritual symbolism.

However, it has also electoral significance for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with it being the last Yoga Day celebrations before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. On Thursday morning, the Prime Minister will deliver a speech and perform yoga, along with an estimated 50,000 participants, at the sprawling campus of the 112-year-old Forest Research Institute here. The first international day of yoga, after it was recognised by the UN in end-2014, was held in New Delhi in 2015. Chandigarh and Lucknow hosted the subsequent two editions in 2016 and 2017, respectively. But Uttarakhand, considered 'dev bhumi', or 'land of the gods', as the venue has unique religious significance for Hindus. It is home to Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri.

"Dehradun, along with Haridwar and Rishikesh, is the yoga capital of the world. Uttarakhand is where yoga took birth and there couldn't have



People participate in a rehearsal ahead of Prime Minister's event on International Day of Yoga 2018, at Forest Research Institute, in Dehradun on Tuesday

PHOTO: PTI

been a better place for the PM to speak of the importance of yoga to the world," Rajesh Kotecha, secretary in the AYUSH ministry, said.

Elaborate arrangements have been put in place for Thursday's event. As many as 1,000 buses will transport the participants to the venue. These would include students, volunteers of Nehru Yuvak Kendra, personnel of the paramilitary forces and representatives of 160 yoga training organisations. Several Hindu seers and saints will be given the pride of place at the celebrations and perform yoga with the PM.

AYUSH minister Sripad Yesso Naik said Yoga Day will also be celebrated at 5,000 locations across the country, and over 180 countries across the world. The ministry has also collaborated with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to use satellites to give real-time data of the number of locations in which Yoga Day will be celebrated. The biggest of such congregations will be in Kota, Rajasthan, where an estimated 200,000 people are likely to attend the event. All Union ministers will lead Yoga Day celebrations in different cities.

At the venue in Dehradun, giant

screens have been put up for the participants to watch the PM's speech in the backdrop of the Greek and Roman influenced architecture of the Forest Research Institute's majestic building.

Participants will perform yoga on saffron coloured yoga mats put on a green carpet – the colours of India's as well as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s flags. After complaints that yoga mats were being imported from China, the Uttarakhand government and AYUSH ministry have been careful this time to source mats manufactured in India. Naik said some of the mats have been sourced from the North-East.

Kotecha said the AYUSH ministry had spent ₹80 million for the PM's Yoga Day celebrations in Lucknow in 2017. He said this time the expenditure is unlikely to exceed ₹60 million. However, expenditure figures of the Uttarakhand government weren't available.

Last year's Yoga Day celebrations in Lucknow were affected by rain. Dehradun experienced rain on the eve of the event. While the state administration was keeping its fingers crossed, Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said he was confident there will not be any rain during the event on Thursday morning.