

Locals can help preserve Darjeeling toy train: UNESCO team

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The UNESCO team that is working on a Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) for Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (DHR), better known as 'toy train', believes that this world heritage site can be preserved with active participation from the local communities.

The CCMP is mandatory for all world heritage properties. For the DHR, CCMP is being formulated by the UNESCO team in collaboration with the Indian Railways. The two-year project involves survey, documentation, dialogue and will take into consideration institutional management, finances, legal and technical aspects.

[Read: Darjeeling Toy Train's world heritage status under threat](#)

"Conservation of the DHR is people-centric. It is a culture-based development. If one respects the local culture, then they in turn will respect the world heritage DHR," said Moe Chiba, section chief and programme specialist for culture, UNESCO.

Incidentally, the DHR was bestowed the status of a world heritage site by UNESCO on December 5, 1999.

A six-member team comprising two UNESCO representatives and four resource persons are working on the CCMP. They recently met in Kurseong to discuss the progress made in the project since April 2016.

"Conservation of this heritage is a subtle exercise. The local communities have to feel empowered. The train has become disconnected from the local livelihood over the years. So if they are not made to feel culturally empowered, the local communities and especially the new generation will not be able to connect with this world heritage," added Chiba.

As part of this exercise, competitions involving school students have been organised by UNESCO and the DHR in all major railway stations along the DHR route since November 14. The programme will culminate in a prize distribution ceremony for these competitions at the Darjeeling Chowrasta on Sunday.

[Read: Iconic toy train begins Siliguri-Darjeeling journey all over again](#)

Competitions were held for art and painting, short story writing, short film making, poetry writing and photography. A good number of students from different hill schools took part in the competitions endorsing the growing interest in the DHR.

In 1879 work started on DHR, then called the Darjeeling Steam Tramways. The stretch from Siliguri to Kurseong was opened on August 23, 1880. The Siliguri to Darjeeling track was inaugurated on July 4, 1881. The name of the rail company was then changed to Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company.

At present, it covers a 88-km stretch from Darjeeling to New Jalpaiguri. There are six diesel and 13 steam locos in the DHR fleet now.