

Wonder what else is wonderful

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THE world now has a new set of "world wonders" based on over 100 million votes cast by people in 200 countries.

The so-called New Seven Wonders of the World, declared in Lisbon on July 7, included two sites in Asia— the Great Wall of China and the Taj Mahal in India.

The list, drawn from 21 short-listed contenders, had been controversial from the start. It attracted criticism even from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), which said the new wonders should not be chosen in a popular vote.

Others cited it as being flawed since multiple votes were allowed, presumably not much different from how fans and diehards vote for their idols in reality shows.

While countries that hosted the sites celebrated, others were more cautious. Some felt there are other more deserving sites, but less known to many of the potential voters as they were not well-promoted as popular tourist destinations. Or it could be due to poor Internet penetration to allow the locals to skew the voting pattern.

A case in point perhaps was the architecturally-wonderful Borobudur in Indonesia which did not even get short-listed.

In a sense, Cambodia's Angkor Wat fared better, but still failed to be among the Seven Wonders. The tally may have been different if the Cambodians were more accessible to better Internet facilities.

Unesco acknowledged that the "new Seven Wonders" was a private initiative and did not have anything to do with the organisation's World Heritage Programme which aims to protect world heritage and follows scientific criteria.

There are other lists of "Wonders" categorised quite differently. There are, for example, the Natural Wonders of the World which would include the Galapagos Islands, Amazon Rainforest, Great Barrier Reef and Victoria Falls.

Or, for that matter, the Underwater Wonders, namely Palau, Belize Barrier Reef, Deep-Sea Vents apart from Great Barrier Reef and Galapagos Islands. Others are purely profit-driven.

In other words, one draws up one's own ranking of "Wonders" based on some kind of criteria. And given the state of the world today, especially with tomorrow being the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, maybe it is timely to have a list of "Wonders" caused by war atrocities.

Such a list would serve as a useful reminder of the evils of war and violence, and those criminals who promoted them.

In Asia, there could be at least two such sites: The killing fields of Pol Pot's Cambodia and the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Dome. Both symbolise the unspeakable brutalities the world has witnessed.

It is for this precise reason that a list of "Wonders" of war devastation is urgently required so that we remain vigilant against violence towards fellow humans.

Gembaku Domu (Japanese for the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Dome), stands next to the Aioi river, one of several in the city. Located in Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park where the US dropped the first atomic bomb on Aug 6, 1945, at 8.15am, it is now a popular tourist destination.

The dome, which was originally the city's industrial promotion hall, was designed by Czech architect Jan Letzel and completed in April 1915.

Initially named the Hiroshima Prefectural Commercial Exhibition, it was later called Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall in 1933.

The dome, which was the closest structure to withstand the 1945 nuclear explosion, was 150 metres away from the hypocentre. The shock wave from the explosion created a pressure of 35 tonnes per square metre at the hypocentre.

What remains today is just an exposed metallic structure, still standing majestically, not only as a symbol of inhumane destruction, but more so a sign of hope for peace, given that Hiroshima has successfully defied its past to become a bustling modern city after being razed to the ground by the explosion.

It was one of the few buildings left standing within a two-kilometre radius of the deadly explosion which resulted in thousands being burned to death instantly. About 70,000 died that day, and 60,000 in the following months. Many others are maimed and scarred till today. Others suffered cancer and rare diseases.



Children releasing floating lanterns on the Motoyasu river near the A-Bomb Dome during prayers for victims of the world's first atomic bomb attack in Hiroshima. — AFP picture

Because of what it stands for, befittingly, the A-Bomb Dome was declared a World Heritage Site in 1996. However, it is also fast becoming a symbol of another destructive human activity.

The polluted and corrosive air is slowly eroding away the weakening metal structure. Already, there is a need to fit it with steel girders internally to prevent it from collapsing.

Ironically, despite its ability to survive the tremendous nuclear blast, it may not be able to face up to pollution if this continues unabated. What's more, global warming and other climate changes are having a disastrous effect.

At this juncture, it makes us wonder what else we must do to save the world from worsening?

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