**I. Background :**

India is a unique nation, whose fabric has been woven by diverse linguistic, cultural and religious threads , held together into a composite national identity by a rich history of cultural evolution, coupled with a rousing freedom struggle that was built around the tenets of non-violence and justice. The spirit of mutual understanding amidst a shared history has enabled a special unity in diversity , which stands out as a tall flame of nationhood that needs to be nourished and cherished into the future.

Time and technology have narrowed down distances in terms of connect and communication. In an era that facilitates mobility and outreach, it is important to establish cultural exchanges between people of different regions, as a means to further human bonding and a common approach to nation-building. Mutual understanding and trust are the foundations of India's strength and all citizens should feel culturally integrated in all corners of India. Students from the north-east, for example, should not feel like 'strangers in a strange land' when they arrive in Delhi.

The idea of a sustained and structured cultural connect between denizens of different regions was mooted by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the Rashtriya Ekta Divas held on 31st October, 2015, to commemorate the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Hon’ble Prime Minister propounded that cultural diversity is a joy that ought to be celebrated through mutual interaction & reciprocity between people of different States and UTs so that a common spirit of understanding resonates throughout the country. Every State and UT in the country would be paired with another State/UT for a year, during which they would carry out a structured engagement with one another in the spheres of language, literature, cuisine, festivals, cultural events, tourism etc. For example, Andhra Pradesh is paired with Punjab for the year 2017. During the year, Punjabis would attempt to learn key words in Telugu , a few Telugu books would be translated into Punjabi & vice-versa, Andhraites would hold food festivals offering Punjabi dishes, Punjabis would perform Andhra folk dances, while Andhraites would perform Bhangra at staged events etc. This pattern of cultural adoption of the partner State/UT would be followed by all States and UTs .

All the 36 States/UTs in India have been paired for an entire year. The paired States/UTs would sign MoUs with each other, delineating a set of activities that they would carry out through the year. An activity calendar for each pair would be prepared through mutual consultation , paving the way for a year long process of mutual engagement. Such interaction between different segments of the population of each pair of States /UTs at the cultural level, would generate the vibrance of understanding & appreciation amongst the people and forge mutual bonding, thus securing an enriched value system of unity in the nation.

**II. Objectives of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat :**

The broad objectives of the initiative are as follows

i. **To CELEBRATE** the Unity in Diversity of our Nation and to maintain and strengthen the fabric of traditionally existing emotional bonds between the people of our Country;

ii. **To PROMOTE** the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all Indian States and Union Territories through a year-long planned engagement between States;

iii. **To SHOWCASE** the rich heritage and culture, customs and traditions of either State for enabling people to understand and appreciate the diversity that is India, thus fostering a sense of common identity

iv. **TO ESTABLISH** long-term engagements and,

v. **TO CREATE** an environment which promotes learning between States by sharing best practices and experiences.

**Key Themes for Interaction:**

* To celebrate the idea of India as a nation wherein different cultural units across varied geographies coalesce and interact with each other, this glorious manifestation of diverse cuisine, music, dance, theatre, movies & films, handicrafts, sports, literature, festivals, painting, sculpture etc. will enable people to imbibe the innate chord of binding and brotherhood.
* To make our people aware about the seamless integral hull of the Modern Indian State spread across a vast landmass on whose firm foundations, the geo-political strength of the country is ensured to benefit one and all.
* To impress upon people at large about the increasing inter-connectedness between the constituents of various cultures and traditions, which is so vital for the spirit of nation building.
* To induce a sense of responsibility & ownership for the nation as a whole through these close cross-cultural interactions as it intends to build up the inter-dependence matrix unequivocally.

**III. Implementation Strategy/Methodology:**

The EK Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Engagement Matrix between States and UTs for the First year would be as follows:

* Jammu & Kashmir : Tamil Nadu
* Punjab : Andhra Pradesh
* Himachal Pradesh : Kerala
* Uttarakhand : Karnataka
* Haryana :Telangana
* Rajasthan : West Bengal
* Gujarat : Chhattisgarh
* Maharashtra :Odisha
* Goa : Jharkhand
* Delhi : Sikkim & Assam
* Madhya Pradesh : Manipur & Nagaland
* Uttar Pradesh : Arunachal Pradesh & Meghalaya
* Bihar : Tripura & Mizoram
* Chandigarh : Dadra & Nagar Haveli
* Puducherry : Daman & Diu
* Lakshadweep : Andaman & Nicobar

The aforesaid States and UTs are to enter into a wide range of mutual engagements. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, which has been designated Nodal Ministry for co-ordination of the programme has intimated all States/UTs to nominate a nodal officer for the programme, sign the MoUs with the partner States/UTs and prepare an Action Plan showing the activities, time lines and implementation responsibilities , in consultation with the partner States/UTs.

Some key activities which have been communicated to States for taking up suitably under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat are given below and this is an indicative list:

1. Translation of at least 5 Award Winning Books, 5 award winning songs of One State in the Language of Partnering State.
2. Identification of proverbs having similar meaning in the languages of the two States and their translation and dissemination for interchangeable use.
3. Cultural Exchange Programmes between partnering States with the help of troupes identified in the home State through Cultural Competitions.
4. Exchange programme for Writers and poets etc. in the form of Literary Festivals.
5. Culinary festivals with opportunity to learn Culinary practices of partner State.
6. Educational Tour by University Students reciprocally in the partnering States to bring out salient features of that State.
7. Promotion of Home Stay culture for visitors from partnering States.
8. Promotion of RajyaDarshan programmes for tourists from partnering States
9. Organising Familiarisation Tours for the Tour Operators of one State to the partnering State.
10. Exposure of students of one State to alphabets, songs, proverbs and 100 sentences in the languages of the partnering State.
11. Encouraging the administration of oaths / Pledges in the two Languages of the pairing states.
12. Inclusion of a few pages in the course books of schools in the language of the partnering State.
13. Organising Essay Competition among students in the language of the partnering State.
14. Organising Optional Classes in schools / colleges, where feasible, for learning the language of the partnering State.
15. Organising Drama(s) of other State in the educational institutions of the partnering State.
16. Exchange of information on traditional Agricultural Practices and Forecasting among farmers in partnering States.
17. Organising Combined Tableau of Partnering States on the Occasion of 15th August and 26th January.
18. Participation of Parade Contingents from one State in the Ceremonial Functions of the partnering State.
19. Telecasting / Broadcasting of programmes of one State on the Regional TV / Radio channels of partnering States.
20. Organising Film Festivals in the State with Sub-Titles in the language of the partnering State.
21. Encouraging fashion shows and frequent wearing of attire of the partnering State by the students and people of the State.
22. Organising National Quiz Competition in various languages on MyGov portal.
23. Taking lead in organising State Specific Quiz Competition on TV / Radio / MyGov portal in the language of the partnering State.
24. Organising Photography competition for the people of One State creating their portfolio on sites, places and objects in the Partnering State.
25. Organising Blog Competitions on Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.
26. Organising Cycling expeditions for the students / people of one State to the places in the partnering State.
27. Organising NCC, NSS Camps of students of one State at the locations in the partnering State.