



PM addresses Opening Ceremony of the International Vesak Day Celebrations

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The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, today addressed the Opening Ceremony of the International Vesak Day Celebrations at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo.

The Prime Minister was greeted on arrival at the venue by Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, and Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. Ceremonial Drummers and Traditional Dancers welcomed Prime Minister Modi, who lit a ceremonial lamp at the entrance of the auditorium.

The function began with the recital of the 5 Buddhist precepts. The welcome speech was delivered by Mr. Wijeyadasa Rajapakse, Sri Lankan Minister for Buddha Sasana and Justice.

"For us in Sri Lanka, you are one of us, he said, addressing Shri Narendra Modi.

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena said it is a matter of great fortune, that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is present here today. He spoke of the ancient ties between the two nations, and said that Prime Minister Modi's presence at the Vesak Day event today is of great significance, and will be taken note of, by the entire world. He brings a message of friendship and peace, the President added.

Prime Minister Modi, in his address, described Vesak as the most sacred of days, when humanity reveres the birth, enlightenment and Parinirvana of Lord Buddha. He added that it is a day to reflect on the supreme truth and timeless relevance of Dhamma, and the four noble truths.

The Prime Minister said he was grateful to President Maithripala Sirisena Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, and the people of Sri Lanka, for inviting him as the Chief Guest at the International Vesak Day festivities in Colombo.

"On this auspicious occasion, I also bring with me the greetings of 1.25 billion people from the land of the Samyak-sambuddha, the perfectly self awakened one," the Prime Minister said.

Placed below are some key excerpts from the Prime Minister's speech:

Bodhi Gaya in India, where Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha, is the sacred nucleus of the Buddhist universe.

Lord Buddha's first sermon in Varanasi, which I have the honour to represent in the Parliament, set in motion the wheel of Dhamma.

Our key national symbols have taken inspiration from Buddhism.

Buddhism and its various strands are deep seated in our governance, culture and philosophy.

The divine fragrance of Buddhism spread from India to all corners of the globe.

Mahindra and Sanghamitra, the worthy children of King Ashoka made their journey from India to Sri Lanka as Dhamma-Doot to spread the biggest gift of Dhamma.

Today, Sri Lanka takes pride in being among the most important centres of Buddhist teachings and learning.

Centuries later, Anagarika Dharmapala undertook a similar journey, but this time, from Sri Lanka to India, to revive the spirit of Buddha in the land of its own origin.

In some way, you took us back to our own roots.

The world also owes a debt of gratitude to Sri Lanka for preserving some of the most important elements of the Buddhist heritage.

Vesak is an occasion for us to celebrate this unbroken shared heritage of Buddhism.

A heritage that connects our societies across generations and through centuries.

The friendship between India and Sri Lanka was etched in time by the "Great Master".

Buddhism imparts an ever present radiance to our relationship.

As close neighbours, our relationship spreads across many layers.

It draws its strength as much through our interconnected values of Buddhism as it does from the limitless possibilities of our shared future.

Ours is a friendship that lives in the hearts of our people and in the fabric of our societies.

To honour and deepen our links of Buddhist heritage, I have the great pleasure to announce that from August this year, Air India will operate direct flights between Colombo and Varanasi.

This will ease travel to the land of Buddha for my brothers and sisters from Sri Lanka, and help you directly visit Sravasti, Kusinagar, Sankasa, Kaushambi and Sarnath.

My Tamil brothers and sisters will also be able to visit Varanasi, the land of Kashi Viswanath.

I believe we are at a moment of great opportunity in our ties with Sri Lanka.

An opportunity to achieve a quantum jump in our partnership across different fields.

And, for us, the most relevant benchmark for the success of our friendship is your progress and success.

We are committed to the economic prosperity of our Sri Lankan brothers and sisters.

We will continue to invest in driving positive change and economic growth to deepen our development cooperation.

Our strength lies in sharing our knowledge, capacity and prosperity.

In trade and investment, we are already significant partners.

We believe that free flow of trade, investments, technology, and ideas across our borders will be to our mutual benefit.

India's rapid growth can bring dividends for the entire region, especially in Sri Lanka.

In infrastructure and connectivity, transport and energy, we are poised to scale up our cooperation.

Our development partnership stretches across nearly every sector of human activity such as agriculture, education, health, resettlement, transport, power, culture, water, shelter, sports, and human resources.

Today, India's development cooperation with Sri Lanka amounts to US Dollars 2.6 billion.

And, its only aim is to support Sri Lanka in realizing a peaceful, prosperous and secure future for its people.

Because, the economic and social well being of the people of Sri Lanka is linked with that of 1.25 billion Indians.

Because, whether it is on land or in the waters of the Indian Ocean, the security of our societies is indivisible.

My conversations with President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickramasinghe have only reinforced our will to join hands in achieving our common goals.

As you make important choices for the harmony and progress of your society, you will find in India a friend and partner that will support your nation-building endeavours.

Lord Buddha's message is as relevant in the twenty first century as it was two and a half millennia ago.

The Middle Path shown by Buddha, speaks to all of us.

Its universality and evergreen nature are striking.

It has been a unifying force among nations.

The countries of South, Central, South East and East Asia are proud of their Buddhist links traced to the land of Buddha.

The themes of Social Justice and Sustainable World Peace, chosen for the Vesak day, resonate deeply with Buddha's teachings.

The themes may appear independent.

But, they are both deeply interdependent and interconnected.

The issue of Social justice is linked to conflict within and among communities.

This arises principally because of Tanhaa, or Trishna in Sanskrit, the thirst, which in turn stems from greed.

Greed has driven the mankind to dominate and degrade our natural habitat.

Our desire to achieve all our wants has created income inequalities in communities and disturbed social harmony.

Similarly, the biggest challenge to Sustainable World Peace today is not necessarily from conflict between the nation states.

It is from the mindsets, thought streams, entities and instruments rooted in the idea of hate and violence.

The menace of terrorism in our region is a concrete manifestation of this destructive emotion.

Sadly, these ideologies of hate and their proponents in our region are not open to dialogue and hence only open to causing death and destruction.

I firmly believe that Buddhism's message of peace is the answer to growing arc of violence all over the world.

And, not just a notion of peace defined by the absence of conflict.

But, an active peace where we all work to promote dialogue, harmony and justice, based on Karuna (compassion) and Pragya (wisdom).

As Buddha said, "there is no higher bliss than peace".

On Vesak, my hope is that India and Sri Lanka will work together to uphold the ideals of Lord Buddha and promote values of peace, accommodation, inclusiveness, and compassion in the policies and conduct of our governments.

This is the true path to free individuals, families, societies, nations and the world at large from the three poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance.

On the blessed day of Vesak, let us light the lamps of knowledge to move out of darkness; let us look more within; and let us uphold nothing else but the truth.

And, dedicate our efforts to follow the path of Buddha whose light shines all over the world.

As the verse 387 of Dhammapada says:

The sun shines by the day,

The moon lights up the night,

The warrior shines in his armour,

The Brahmin shines in his meditation,

But, the awakened one shines all day and night by his radiance.

Thank you once again for the honour to be with you.

I look forward to paying homage at the Sri Dalada Maligawa, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, in Kandy today afternoon.

May the Triple Gem of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha bless us all.

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