

Buddha Rashmi In Celebration of Vesak



Buddha Rashmi Vesak illuminates the Beira Lake and Seemamalakaya with its grandeur.

Buddha Rashmi Vesak, organized by the Gangaramaya Temple together with the Prime Minister's Office, will light up the Colombo night sky for four days this month. Buddhists around the island commemorate the Birth, Enlightenment, and Parinibbana of the Buddha, and the National Vesak Festival illuminates the streets of Colombo.

Words Gayathri Kothalawala.

Photographs BT Images.

On the thrice blessed festival of Vesak, thousands of devotees strive to renounce feelings of greed, hate, and ignorance from their minds so that they may begin

the journey towards Nibbana, the highest honor that can be paid to the Buddha. Observing sil, listening to sermons, and meditating that help the mind attain a sense of tranquility and gain Pragna - wisdom, are religious practices that devotees re-iterate in the season of Vesak. A time of veneration and religious practices, it is the most significant Poya day for Buddhists, who engage in numerous activities following the philosophy conveyed by the Great Teacher.

Devotees also engage in alms giving, practicing generosity of spirit. Dansal - halls of alms - organized by devotees line the roads and streets across the island, offering meals, snacks, refreshment and even flowers to the passers-by. This is a reflection of Dana Paramitha - the Perfection of Generosity, one of the ten Perfections attained by the Bodhisatva.

Handmade Vesak lanterns, clay oil lamps and paper buckets that proudly hang from their gardens light up the gathering darkness as night approaches. The practice of illumination is perhaps one of the best metaphors to signify the light of wisdom dispelling the darkness of ignorance. It is not merely limited to homesteads. Streets and buildings are adorned with dazzling lights, and pandols showcase Jathaka stories, Dasa Paramitha or Ashta Loka Dhamma.

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Lanterns displaying the colors of the Buddhist flag.

Buddha Rashmi Vesak, which is an extensive zone near the resplendent Beira Lake and Nawam Mawatha, Colombo 2 is dedicated to reflecting the spiritual and cultural importance of Vesak to Sri Lanka. An initiative by Venerable Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple, it is the first and only one of its kind in the country. Held with State patronage, Buddha Rashmi Vesak espouses the Dhamma and has instilled a sense of discipline and religiosity in those that venture forth. Buddha Rashmi Vesak welcomes people from all walks of life to witness the intricate lanterns, beautiful decorations and to participate in the various activities in unity where all are equal as per the teachings of the Buddha. Lanterns created by both experienced artistes, craftsmen and students are creative and convey a message or display a story. The Beira Lake is resplendent with thousands of bright lights, arranged in elaborate patterns and designs in the water. The reflection from these heighten the enchanting aura of the nighttime. Seemamalakaya bedecked with electric lights resembles a dazzling gemstone surrounded by the Lake. Buddha Rashmi Vesak, held with the participation of people from around the island, is a significant event in the Sri Lankan calendar.

This year, the Buddha Rashmi Vesak Festival will be held from May 18 to May 21.

