

Festival Of Lights: The Buddha Rashmi Pooja

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The illuminated Seema Malaka and the Beira Lake. Afloat is a boat platform carrying Bakthi Gee singers

The Buddha Rashmi Pooja, the National Vesak Festival will illuminate the region once again for the fifth consecutive year in commemoration of the Vesak Poya that falls in May. During a period of seven days the Gangaramaya Temple together with the Presidential Secretariat will facilitate the festival, transforming a precinct earmarked as the 'Vesak Kalapaya' for this principal Buddhist event of the Annual Calendar, signifying the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana or Passing of Lord Buddha.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara

The Buddha Rashmi Pooja, a religious and cultural festival is a concept of President Mahinda Rajapaksa and will commence on May 5, 2012 on Vesak Poya Day, with precedence to religious observances. Thereafter, the illumination of the festival will be initiated at the Seema Malaka by dignitaries led by the President following which the 'Vesak Kalapaya' or the festival zone will be open to the public from seven in the evening till the early hours of the following morning.

The public can thus observe the variety of exhibits from intricate designs of the lanterns, to craftsmanship of vibrant pandols, among the many displays throughout the seven days. The Vesak Kalapaya will include Pittala Junction, James Peiris Mawatha, Navam Mawatha, Perahera Mawatha and Galle Face. The zone would also host picturesque displays aloft the Beira Lake and the Seema Malaka. As is customary, the illumination of individual regions of the Vesak Kalapaya will be undertaken by the Armed Forces, while, organisations, institutions and individuals may greatly contribute towards bringing to life the festival zones - be it in designing, or sponsoring a creation.

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Not only are Vesak Lantern competitions held to champion craftsmanship of participants, the public can also find staged performances of Bakthi Gee, puppetry, and *Dan Sal* or free food stalls. This year stalls will also be hosted by 35 schools presenting displays of religious, cultural and sociological importance. A platform themed 'Vesak for Children' will showcase creations, plays and Bakthi Gee performances by school children as well. The main platform would host various performances by the Armed Forces, renowned singers and cultural organisations. Pandols and other displays elucidating the discourses of the Dhamma, such as *Buddha Charithaya* and *Dhamma Pada* offer lasting impressions and meaningful experiences to the masses and these qualitative features and decorative displays are often courtesy of various individuals, organisations and institutions that extend beyond religious and racial boundaries bringing everyone together.

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A national festival, the Buddha Rashmi Pooja, is one that has evolved as a cultural event and practice. Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike of all spheres partake in a festival of lights equipped with vibrancy and observances - it is an illumination for all.

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