



The Bakthi Gee platform on the Diyawanna Lake

Denzil Kobbekaduwa Mawatha, Battaramulla had livened up with busy preparations for the festival that was about to unfold along the street by the beautiful Diyawanna Lake. The Vesak full moon cast its rays upon the still waters of the lake creating a silvery glow on its surface. Clad in white, people gathered to commemorate the most vibrant and principal Buddhist celebration of the year—the Vesak Festival.

Words Hansani Bandara and Dilshi Thathsarani **Photographs** Indika De Silva

The vibrant Diyawanna Vesak Zone (Diyawanna Vesak Kalapaya) was organised under the guidance of Ven Elle Gunawansa Thero and spread across an expanse covering the Denzil Kobbekaduwa Mawatha and Pannipitiya Road from Battaramulla to Pelawatta at the Palam Thuna Junction.

The ceremonial illumination of the festival was conducted under the patronage of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in the presence of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Dinesh Gunawardene, Minister of Water Supply and Drainage, Senior Minister A H M Fowzie, General Jagath Jayasuriya, Chief of Defence Staff, Buddhika Pathirana, MP and other dignitaries.

Diyawanna Vesak Zone consisted of over 70 beautifully crafted lanterns and other exhibits that displayed the flair of master craftsmanship. The lotus flower lanterns on the lake lit up in unison with string lights draping the trees alongside the riverbanks. In an instance, the entire area illuminated and drew a dazzling panorama before our eyes. Then from a far corner of the lake, a Bakthi Gee platform made on a navy boat made its way to perform a melodious chorale of Bakthi Gee—a performance by the Sri Lanka Coast Guard.

Thereafter, the attention of the gathering was drawn towards the portrayal of the story of Patachara, which depicted how her infant child was snatched by a giant eagle. The vivid presentation brought to life against the backdrop of the lake using the latest technology and sound effects, was a result of the tireless efforts made by the Sri Lanka Army Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' Base Workshop, Katubedda.

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We took a long stroll around the Vesak Zone, taking time to admire the intricately designed lanterns. Made using everything from paper, disposables to sand, coconut leaves and various other materials, each lantern conveyed a flair for design that was unique. Some of them depicted instances from the Life of the Buddha, while others had motifs of traditional carvings.

Towards the side of the Parliament, a path of illuminated lotus flower lanterns precluded a statue of Prince Siddhartha on his horse Kanthaka, accompanied by Channa, the head charioteer at the palace. Beside it was a track that ran across the river to the other side. The setting implied that there was much more to this statue. And we could see people gathering at the bridge. Thus we too hurried towards there to have a better look. From the bridge, little lightened red spots on the pitch-black water created a picturesque view. Suddenly, we saw the figure of Prince Siddhartha soaring across the river on his horse! It was a depiction of how Prince Siddhartha crossed the Neranjana River on his departure from the palace and all royal comforts to seek the path towards enlightenment.

Walking along the brightened pathways, we completed our saunter around the Vesak Zone. Treats treats from Dansal on the way kept us in high spirits. Enjoyed by all irrespective of religious differences, the Vesak Zone brought bliss for all.

