
President Rajapaksa visits Sanchi

Monday, 24 September 2012

Last Updated Wednesday, 26 September 2012

At the invitation of the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Chouhan, President Rajapaksa visited sacred Sanchi on 21 September for a series of landmark events, during his official visit to India. On arrival, President Rajapaksa was received by the Governor of Madhya Pradesh Ramnaresh Yadav, Chief Minister Shivraj Chouhan, and other dignitaries of the Madhya Pradesh Government. The President visited the Sanchi Stupa Complex built by Emperor Asoka, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and paid homage to the Relics of the two main disciples of Gautama Buddha, Arhat Sariputta and Maha Moggallana, at the Chetiyagiri Vihara in Sanchi.

Thereafter, the President laid the foundation stone for the Sanchi University of Buddhist and Indic Studies together with the Prime Minister of Bhutan Jigme Yoser Thinley, the Governor and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Minister of Culture of Madhya Pradesh Laxmikant Sharma, and former Member of Parliament Prakash Ambedkar. To mark this important occasion, President Rajapaksa planted in Sanchi, a sapling of the Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura. Addressing a Public Meeting in Sanchi attended by approximately five-thousand people, to mark the occasion, President Rajapaksa remarked that his journey to Sanchi was undertaken as a pilgrim, in veneration of sacred Sanchi, and saluting and celebrating the glorious past of that great region. Welcoming the President, Chief Minister Shivraj Chouhan said “Shri Mahinda Rajapaksa's name reminds me of another Mahendra. He was born centuries ago in the area that I represented in Parliament for many years. He was the son of Emperor Asoka the Great. Mahendra, accompanied by his sister Sanghamitra had gone to Sri Lanka from Vidisha, a town from here. Thus, Mahindaji, your arrival from that Land is like completion of a circle of history. One Mahendra had gone from here in the 3rd BC and the other Mahinda has come to us from Sri Lanka today.” The text of President Mahinda Rajapaksa's speech at the Public Meeting follows: Sri Lanka High Commission, India 23 September 2012 Venerable Bhikkus and Religious dignitaries Hon. Shri Ram Naresh Yadav, Governor of Madhya Pradesh H.E. Jigme Yoser Thinley, Prime Minister of Bhutan Hon. Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Honoured Guests, and Dear People of Madhya Pradesh, I bring to you, the warm greetings of your brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka. Dear Friends, Over 2300 years ago, it was from this sacred land in Sanchi that your Great Emperor, Asoka sent his son and daughter, Arahata Mahinda and Theri Sanghamitta, to my country. They arrived in Sri Lanka, in peace and friendship. They brought with them, the Message of the Great Teacher, Gautama Buddha – a Message of compassion, non-violence, equanimity, tolerance and understanding. They were received by my ancestors in Sri Lanka with deep reverence. Theri Sanghamitta brought to Sri Lanka, a sapling of the pipal tree in Bodhgaya, under which Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment as Gautama Buddha, the Two thousand six hundredth anniversary of which we celebrate this year. This sacred tree, accepted as the oldest historically recorded tree in the world, which remains in Anuradhapura in my country, to this day, has been worshipped since the 3rd Century BC. Today I have brought back a sapling of the same tree to be planted in this sacred land for veneration by those who visit Sanchi. In the second week after enlightenment, the Buddha spent seven days in meditation in gratitude to the Bodhi Tree that gave him shelter in his search for the truth of samsara. The deep sense of respect for nature among Buddhists in my country, has its roots in this great act of gratitude of the Buddha. It also has an important message in today's need for protection of the environment and sustainable development. Dear Friends, My journey to Sanchi today, is primarily an act of gratitude on behalf of the people of my country; I am here as a pilgrim, in veneration of sacred Sanchi, saluting and celebrating the glorious past of this region. Honourable Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan, I thank you for inviting me to this sacred land and giving me the honour of participating in the Foundation Laying Ceremony of the “Sanchi University of Buddhist and Indic Studies”. By this, you not only honour me but also the people of my country who value the historical bond between Sanchi and Sri Lanka. As you may know, an ever-increasing number of Sri Lankans, at present over 150,000, who visit this sacred region every year, receive the welcoming hospitality of the Government and people of Madhya Pradesh, a state that is hailed as one of the most tranquil in India. Dear Friends, Your great Emperor Asoka, following the teachings of tolerance and understanding of the Buddha, honoured and supported all other religions in his empire. He declared that one should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour the faiths of others, as well. I think this message of tolerance and understanding is of great relevance today, as we see the tragic results of enmity and hatred towards other faiths leading to violence and destruction, and great loss to societies. This message of tolerance is of equal importance in the East and West alike. We must recall that the greatest son of modern India – Mahatma Gandhi – who gave spiritual strength to the freedom movement, was moved by the great values of non-violence, peace and compassion which remain among the core values of our region. I believe it is our duty as well to spread this message further and deeper, both in our own lands and the larger world that is trapped in material-based progress. Dear Friends, On this occasion we must also pay tribute to other great sons of our region for their contribution to the revival of Buddhist and Indic thought, values, and practice both in India and beyond. Anagarika Dharmapala, the well-known Sri Lankan Buddhist sage spent a life-time in India, working on rehabilitation of ancient Buddhist sites of worship. Next year, 2013, will be the 120th Anniversary of his memorable address at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, on Buddhism. Anagarika Dharmapala was joined by Swami Vivekananda at the World Parliament who spoke equally eloquently, on Hinduism. We must also honour the memory of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for his profound contribution to the revival of Buddhist thought in this Land of the Buddha; and for his efforts to incorporate Buddhist and Indic values in the modern day governance systems of India. Dear Friends, This University seeks to follow a unique path in higher education in the pattern of classical Indian Universities, such as Takshila, Nalanda, Vallabhi and Vikramshila. I believe it will focus on the study, research and spread of knowledge of Buddhist thought, in all its rich and varied dimensions. It is more than a coincidence that this happy and auspicious occasion is graced by two heads of Government of two nations in South Asia: Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Both our countries

have benefitted from the spark of civilization that came with the dawn of Buddhist practice in our nations. I am very pleased that the Prime Minister of our brotherly nation, Hon. Jigme Yoser Thinley is with me today to share the joy of this occasion. Dear Friends, Today's conventional education that we have largely inherited from our colonial past often restricts development of the human mind and ignores the relationship between the mind and matters of life. Not only, does it focus on personal gain and ambition, but also gives rise to ruthless competition, and wasteful consumption. It fails to help individuals discover true and lasting values and to build a complete person capable of dealing successfully with life as a whole. Dear Friends, It is our long held tradition that a complete education must involve the awakening of the self and the cultivation of self-knowledge and wisdom and help fashion one's life for the greater good of humankind. Dear Friends, This University will revive Buddhist and Indic studies based on the ancient concepts of teaching, self-enquiry, and traditional knowledge. It will fulfil a much needed role in our region which is today troubled by the ill-effects of commercialisation, urbanisation, de-forestation, and intense competition. We believe it will seek ways and means to revive the traditional concepts of social responsibility. Dear Friends, Undoubtedly, there is a need to go back to the roots of our civilizations and search for the wisdom that prevailed in our ancient world. The Buddhist and Indic value systems that paved the way to modern concepts of human rights and fundamental freedoms need to be revived. In this context, it is our hope that the wisdom that will in time come from the work of the 'University of Buddhist and Indic Studies' becomes a beacon of light for our region as we battle against: intolerance and hatred; separatism and ethnic prejudice; terrorism and violence; and social inequality and exclusion. Honourable Chief Minister, Before I conclude, it is important to recall that we in Sri Lanka have always considered India as a friendly land and people. As in the past, our people still refer to India as Dambadiva and Jambudveepa and still undertake pilgrimages to Dambadiva. The federal structure and the emergence of states has not erased our vision of India as a single land of friendship with the great bonds of history. Our traditional education also owes much to the early Indian and larger Indic traditions. I believe this tradition of embracing all of India in friendship will continue to enrich our relations. The Government and people of Sri Lanka and I will continue to contribute towards the success of this University. I am confident that this University will grow from strength to strength and that men and women who will graduate from it will be inspired by the Buddha's words, displayed on the pillar that we unveiled this afternoon: "One who is virtuous and wise shines forth like a blazing fire." I wish you all, the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem: Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Source: <http://www.mea.gov.lk/index.php/media/3638-president-rajapaksa-visits-sanchi>