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## Thai Pongal marks renewal of strong links between humans and nature – President

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The Thai Pongal festival marks a renewal of the strong links between humans and nature and the unity of people and communities in worship to deities and in day-to-day life. It is a symbol of devotion to deities, gratitude for blessings, and hopeful beginnings for the future, President Mahinda Rajapaksa said. "This festival brings families together in a spirit of renewed affection and understanding and joins communities in paying tribute to the Sun God for a successful harvest and expectations of continued blessings for good harvests and success in the coming year," President said in a message to mark the Thai Pongal festival. The Hindus of Sri Lanka, together with their fellow believers in South Asia, celebrate the important Thanksgiving and Harvest Festival of Thai Pongal today.

Taking its name from the first day of the month of Thai, this festival is traditionally dedicated to the offering of thanks to the Sun God - Surya, for all the blessings received for a successful harvest. The Pongal which signifies the boiling over of milk and rice that is the highlight of this festival is believed by Hindus as the commencement of new opportunities in life with the blessings of Surya. This is also considered the "Surya Mangalyam" when the first grains of the harvest are offered to Surya. This festival brings families together in a spirit of renewed affection and understanding and joins communities in paying tribute to the Sun God for a successful harvest and expectations of continued blessings for good harvests and success in the coming year. The second day of this festival has the important tradition where the cattle used for ploughing, transport, provision of milk and fertilizer are treated with honour and respect. The Thai Pongal festival marks a renewal of the strong links between humans and nature and the unity of people and communities in worship to deities and in day-to-day life. It is a symbol of devotion to deities, gratitude for blessings, and hopeful beginnings for the future. I wish all Hindus in Sri Lanka a Happy and Blessed Thai Pongal.