

**HIGH COMMISSION OF INDIA  
COLOMBO**

**PRESS RELEASE**

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, visited the Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA) this morning to inaugurate the International Buddhist Conference organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Buddhasasna and Religious Affairs of Sri Lanka, together with the Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy and the University of Peradeniya were the Partner Institutes for the Conference, which is being organized as part of the joint commemoration by India and Sri Lanka of the 2600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attainment of enlightenment by Lord Buddha. The inauguration of the Conference was also graced by the presence of Hon'ble D.M. Jayaratne, Prime Minister, Prof. G. L. Peiris, Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Ashok K. Kantha, High Commissioner of India and Mr. Suresh K. Goel, Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The Governor of the Central Province, a number of senior Cabinet Ministers, the Attorney General of Sri Lanka, Deputy Ministers, Members of Parliament, Provincial Ministers, Members of the Central Provincial Council and senior officials of the Government of Sri Lanka also attended the inauguration ceremony.

Scholars from Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam are participating in the Conference, which has as its theme "Cultural Interface between India and Sri Lanka based on Buddhist History, Art, Literature and Philosophy". The papers presented at the two-day Conference will be published in the form of a volume.

Addressing the august gathering, High Commissioner Kantha emphasized the continuing relevance of the fundamental and universal values and philosophies that Lord Buddha propounded. He underlined that cultural interaction between India and Sri Lanka had been marked by constant cross fertilization in the spheres of art, literature and philosophy and the journey of the Holy Tree from India to Sri Lanka demonstrated this amply. High Commissioner also highlighted the other activities being undertaken by India to commemorate the Sambuddhiva Jayanthi. These include an exposition of the Kapilvastu Relics in Sri Lanka later this year, setting up of an Indian gallery at the International Buddhist Museum in Kandy and installation of a specially crafted idol of Lord Buddha in Sarnath style from the Gupta period at the entrance of the International Buddhist Museum complex in Sri Dalada Maligawa. He also announced that Indian Railways was planning to launch a special Buddhist Train DAMBA DIWA VANDANA later this year from Chennai catering to Sri Lankan pilgrims, adding that all these initiatives were reflective of India's desire to strengthen her cultural and people-to-people linkages with Sri Lanka, with which India shared deep historical bonds.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Mr. Suresh K. Goel, Director General, ICCR emphasized the important role of cultural communication and dialogue in increasing mutual understanding and highlighted the key role being played by ICCR in this regard. He reiterated the commitment of ICCR to strengthening the cultural relationship between India and Sri Lanka through activities such as exchange of cultural troupes, exhibitions, distinguished visitors and scholarships.

Prof. G. L. Peiris, Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka, also addressed the gathering, highlighting the foundation of many modern-day precepts in Buddhist thought and philosophy. Following his address, the Diyawadane Nilame of Sri Dalada Maligawa presented the first issue of the academic journal of SIBA, "Sri Lanka International Journal of Buddhist Studies", to President Rajapaksa. The ceremony ended with a vote of thanks by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Peradeniya. The academic sessions of the conference will be held today and tomorrow and the valedictory session will be held on 21<sup>st</sup> March.

The Conference being organized in Kandy is the third such conference on Buddhism sponsored by ICCR, following similar events in Singapore and Cambodia. More international conferences on Buddhism are on the anvil for Nepal and Vietnam.

**Kandy  
20 March 2011**