

BIMSTEC Newsletter

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BIMSTEC Outlook

Diwali Festival



Deepawali or Diwali, is a festival of lights symbolising the victory of righteousness and the lifting of spiritual darkness. The word 'Deepawali' literally means rows of diyas (clay lamps). This is one of the most popular festivals in the Hindu calendar. It is celebrated on the 15th day of Kartika (October/November). This festival commemorates Lord Rama's return to his kingdom Ayodhya after completing his 14-year exile.

The most beautiful of all Indian festivals, Diwali is a celebration of lights. Streets are illuminated with rows of clay lamps and homes are decorated with colours and candles. This festival is celebrated with new clothes, spectacular firecrackers and a variety of sweets in the company of family and friends. All this illumination and fireworks, joy and festivity, signify the victory of divine forces over those of wicked. The Goddess Lakshmi (consort of Vishnu), who is the symbol of wealth and prosperity, is also worshipped on this day. In West Bengal, this festival is celebrated as Kali Puja, and Kali, Shiva's consort, is worshipped on the occasion of Diwali.

In the South, Deepawali festival often commemorates the conquering of the Asura Naraka, a powerful king of Assam, who imprisoned thousands of inhabitants. It was Krishna who was finally able to subdue Naraka and free the prisoners. To commemorate this event, people in Peninsular India wake before sunrise and make imitation blood by mixing kumkum or vermilion with oil. After crushing underfoot a bitter fruit as a symbol of the demon, they apply the 'blood' triumphantly on their foreheads. They then have ritual oil baths, anointing themselves with sandalwood paste. Visits to temples for prayers are followed by large family breakfasts of fruits and a variety of sweets.

Another story of king Bali is attached to the Diwali festival in South India. According to the Hindu mythology, King Bali was a benevolent demon king. He was so powerful that he became a threat to the power of celestial deities and their kingdoms. And Lord Vishnu came as the dwarf mendicant Vamana, to dilute Bali's power. Vamana shrewdly asked the king for land that would cover three steps as he walked. The king happily granted this gift. Having tricked Bali, Vishnu revealed himself in the full glory of his godhood. He covered the heaven in his first step and the earth in his second. Realising that he was pitted against the mighty Vishnu, Bali surrendered and offered his own head, inviting Vishnu to step on it. Vishnu pushed him into the nether world with his foot. In return Vishnu gave him the lamp of knowledge to light up the dark underworld. He also gave him a blessing that he would return to his people once a year to light millions of lamps from this one lamp so that on the dark new moon light of Diwali, the blinding darkness of ignorance, greed, jealousy, lust, anger, ego, and laziness would be dispelled and the radiance of knowledge, wisdom and friendship would prevail. Each year on Diwali day, even today, one lamp lights another and like a flame burning steadily on a windless night, brings a message of peace and harmony to the world.

Source: http://india.gov.in/knowindia/festivlas_deepawali.php

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Diwali Festival

Diwali in India

The festival of lights and fireworks is celebrated for 5 days. This festival gives an occasion to meet families and friends, to enjoy and establish a word of closeness. Gifts are exchanged and special dishes are prepared. People decorate their houses. The celebration starts with Dhanteras and ends with Bhai Duj.

The 1st day or Dhanteras has a great importance for the rich mercantile community of western India. Houses and business premises are renovated and decorated. The 2nd Day or Choti Diwali is called Narak Chaturdasi or Choti Diwali. On this day Lord Krishna destroyed the demon Narakasur and made the world free from fear. The 3rd day or Main Diwali, when worship of Mother Lakshmi is performed, Hindus believe that Goddess Lakshmi will bring the blessings of wealth and prosperity, the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. The 4th Day or Padwa, Govardhana Puja is also performed in this day. The 5th day or Bhai Duj, sisters perform puja for their brothers safety and well-being. Brothers in return give Bhai Dooj Gifts to their sisters as a token of love.

Diwali in Myanmar

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, symbolizes the triumph of good over evil in Hindu mythology, and is celebrated with great fervor by people all over Myanmar. Sharing the eastern border of India, Myanmar has a good number of Hindu populations. Hence most of the Hindu festivals are celebrated there. Diwali is one of them that is celebrated according to the Hindu solar calendar. The festival day is celebrated by worshiping God. A good number of lights or traditional lamps are lit to illuminate the home inside and outside. Delicious foods are cooked and new garments are worn. Traditional dancing and music follow to mark the occasion. Everyone enjoys the sweets, the lights, the crackers and the enthusiasm to the festival.

Diwali in Nepal

In Nepal, Diwali is known as "Tihar" or "Swanti" which is celebrated during the October/November period. Here the festival is celebrated for five days and the traditions vary from those followed in India. The 1st day is dedicated to cows as they cook rice and feed the cows believing that goddess comes on cows. The 2nd day is for dogs as the **Vahana of Bhairava**. Preparation of delicious food especially meant for the dog is a typical characteristic of the day. Lights and lamps are lit to illuminate the entire surrounding and some of the specialty items are prepared to mark the 3rd day of the festival. Fireworks, lamps and crackers are widely used. The 4th day is dedicated to Yama, the Hindu God of Death. He is prayed for long life. The 5th final day is Bhhaya Dooj dedicated for the brothers who are wished long life and prosperity by their sisters.

Diwali in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is on the extreme southeastern point of India. Related to the epic of Ramayana, Diwali holds a special importance for the people here. The festival is marked by illumination, making of toys of enamel and making of figures out of crystal sugar popularly known as Misiri. The sugar crystals take the place of sweets. Hindus light oil lamps to invite the blessings of the goddess of wealth. Burning of crackers in the evening of the festival is a common practice. Sri Lanka's celebration may lack many of the traditional aspects of Diwali such as games, fireworks, singing and dancing, but the tradition of a large meal is admirably preserved.

Source: <http://www.diwalifestival.org>

Chulalongkorn Day, Thailand



Chulalongkorn Day or Piya Maharaj Day is considered the memorial day for King Chulalongkorn, or King Rama V. It falls on 23 October every year. King Chulalongkorn the Great was one of the most important kings of the Chakri Dynasty. The most prominent contribution he made was slavery abolition as well as numerous national reforms undertaken to modernize the country.

King Chulalongkorn “Phra Chula Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua” succeeded to the throne at the death of his father, King Rama IV “Phra Chom Klao”. He was born on September 20, 1853, the first son of Queen Ramphai Pamarapirom (Thepsirindra) and the 9th surviving son of King Mongkut. King Rama V ascended the Throne in 1868 at the age of 15, with Chao Phraya Sri Suriyawongse as Regent. His death on 23 October 1910 was a great loss to the entire nation as he was one of the most honored and beloved kings, who was praised as “Somdej Phra Piya Maharaj- the Great and Beloved King”.

The King’s reforms have greatly benefited every aspect of Thai life, especially the abolition of slavery, the expansion of the communication system through the construction of railways, the establishment of post, telegraph services and the creation of a ministerial system, which all the current ministries and departments owe their origin of his initiatives. Moreover, the King established a variety of public utilities as well, particularly in the fields of health care and education. At that time, the world did not allow him to proceed smoothly with his administrative reforms as it coincided with the age of colonialism. The King, therefore, had to adapt his foreign policy to maintain a balance and multilateral relations as well as avoid confrontation with the major powers. In the last period of his reign, the nation lost a lot of lands to France. At the time of the crisis, Thailand was eventually able to keep independence even if some of the territories were sacrificed.

King Rama V’s long reign of 42-years was a prosperous era of national reforms and the emergence of Thailand into the modern era. He learned the systems of Western Governments and also sent the royal children to receive education in the West. Furthermore, he was the first Thai monarch who traveled frequently to neighboring and other countries around the globe.

During his reign, King Chulalongkorn wished to make His people less subservient. After the coronation in 1873, he proclaimed that prostration in front of the king be abolished. Later, in 1905, the slavery was completely ended. This slave abolition was the most important royal contribution to the nation. The Slave Act was enacted by the King in 1905 to prohibit slave trade. Apart from slavery abolition, all of his numerous contributions and reforms for the prosperity and sustainable development for the nation were too numerous to mention.

Up until now, Thai people believe in the King’s miraculous power of bringing good luck and prosperity to the persons who pays respect to him. Thus, the King’s pictures are normally seen in almost every house across the nation. People from all walks of life generally pay tribute to the Great King and lay wreaths at the Equestrian Statue, which is located at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok.

BIMSTEC Upcoming Activities

Date	Activity	Venue
16 November 2009	95th BWG Meeting	Bangkok
2-3 December 2009	Workshop on Experience Sharing in Certification of Energy Managers and Energy Auditors	Sri Lanka
8-11 December 2009	12 th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and 14 th Senior Officials' Meeting	Myanmar

Dates to be Identified

2 nd Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation	Nepal
1 st Meeting of the BIMSTEC Think Tanks	India
19 th Trade Negotiation Committee Meeting	India
2 nd BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Conference	Thailand
5 th JWG on Counter-Terrorism and Transactional Crimes	Nepal
1 st Meeting of Tourism Working Group	India
3 rd Expert Group Meeting on Agricultural Cooperation	-

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