

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE DHARMA CHAKRA DAY CELEBRATION  
ORGANIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST  
CONFEDERATION**

**Rashtrapati Bhavan, July 4, 2020**

1. It was today, on Asadh Purnima, some two thousand five hundred years ago, that the Word of Wisdom was spoken out for the first time. On attaining enlightenment, the Buddha spent five weeks in a state beyond description. Then he started sharing with people the nectar he had discovered. It was in the Deer Park in Sarnath, near Varanasi, the ancient city in the Eastern part of India, that the Buddha taught the Dhamma to his five original disciples. It was a momentous occasion unparalleled in the history of humankind.
2. The day is also known as Guru Purnima. Hindus and Jains also celebrate it as a mark of reverence for their spiritual teachers. This day is an unbroken link to India's eternal pursuit of wisdom without dogma. I am happy to host the Asadh Purnima celebration in the Rashtrapati Bhavan as part of our civilizational journey for welfare of the universe since time immemorial.
3. The video message by the Prime Minister of India seen by all of us just now reflects the eternal values and positive approach of India. I am delighted at the very enriching message from the President of Mongolia His Excellency Khaltmaagiin Battulga read out by the Ambassador. I had the privilege to host the President of Mongolia as our honored guest in Rashtrapati Bhavan during his State Visit in September last year. It was an occasion for us to deepen our civilisational friendship and to nourish our age-old Buddhist ties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. I am told that the International Buddhist Confederation or IBC, with its presence in 36 countries, is holding the celebrations around the

world. We, however, are in the midst of a virulent pandemic that has overwhelmed the entire humanity. Perhaps no part of the world remains untouched by this calamity that adversely affects every individual. As a precaution, we have to follow certain discipline and maintain physical distance.

5. The IBC is, therefore, holding the events virtually. I believe that such an effort is praiseworthy, because this makes it possible for a far larger number of people, from all corners of the world, to participate in them. Ceremonies and prayers are being organised at the sacred sites in Sarnath and Bodh Gaya in India, Kandy in Sri Lanka and Gandan Tegchengling monastery in Mongolia. Chanting of the Dharma Chakra Pravartana Sutra by the Mahasangha in various countries is being streamed live.
6. Let us remind ourselves that the Buddha's first sermon was disarmingly simple. That sermon, known as 'Dhamma Chakka Pavattana Sutta' in Pali, has a unique place in the Buddhist canon. Both practitioners and scholars revere it as the treasure in which the entire teaching is hidden. For 45 years after he attained enlightenment, the Buddha travelled across the vast regions of the Gangetic plains to bring the healing message to the masses. Thus he delivered a very large number of discourses. Yet, all of them, arguably, offered only variations and extensions of the key themes summarised in the first sermon.
7. Ironically, the Buddha's teaching was "against the current" during those times. But the force of his argument was woven around love, compassion and non-violence. The spread of Buddhism around the world was guided by these eternal values. In his lifetime he always sought to convince people through his logical and moral arguments. For the Buddha always held that to force oneself to believe and accept a thing without understanding is political and not spiritual or intellectual.
8. This is the precise reason that in his first sermon, the Buddha advises the five original disciples to shun the extreme

methods and prefer the Middle Path, 'Madhyam Marg'. Then he speaks of the ultimate reality as given in the four Noble Truths, which are: i. Dukkha or suffering, ii. Samudaya, the arising or origin of Dukkha, iii. Nirodha, the cessation of Dukkha, and iv. Magga, the way leading to the cessation of Dukkha.

9. As summation of the human condition as well as human potential, these four pithy lines are unmatched in any tradition, spiritual or literary, in entire history. After the diagnosis of our ailment, the Buddha prescribes the medicine, which is the Noble Eight-Fold Path to Enlightenment, known as the "Ashtang Marg". It is a complete and perfect way of life. The eight steps are: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.
10. In conclusion, the Buddha proclaims, [QUOTE] "And a vision of true knowledge arose in me thus: My heart's deliverance is unassailable. This is the last birth. Now there is no more rebirth." [UNQUOTE]
11. Thus the 'Dhamma Chakka', the Wheel of Truth, was set in motion. Ever since, it has been the lodestar, helping spiritual seekers navigate through the maze of worldly life and arrive at the end of suffering – here and now. It is so scientific that it resembles psycho-therapy more than a traditional, dogmatic religion. It is this open attitude of inquiry into the heart of existence and the possibility of finding the key to eternal serenity that has attracted seekers in every age for the last twenty-five hundred years. The Wheel has come full circle, and the Word of Dhamma has in the recent decades spread to distant shores in the West too.

Dear Seekers,

12. India is proud of being the land of the origin of the Dhamma. It was from India that it began to spread in neighbouring regions. There, in new fertile soil and new climate it grew organically, eventually branching off into various offshoots.

13. In India, we see Buddhism as a fresh expression of the sublime truth. His enlightenment, and the subsequent preaching by him for over four decades, were in line with India's tradition of respect for intellectual liberalism and spiritual diversity. In modern times, two exceptionally great Indians – Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar – found inspiration in the words of the Buddha and went on to shape the destiny of the nation.
14. Following in their footsteps, we should strive to hear the call of the Buddha, to respond to his invitation to walk the Noble Path. The world seems full of suffering, in short term as well as in long term. There are many stories of kings and affluent people suffering from acute depression who took refuge in the Buddha to escape cruelties of life. Indeed, the life of the Buddha challenges earlier convictions as he believed in finding a deliverance from suffering in the midst of this imperfect world.

Dear Friends,

15. Today, as the pandemic ravages human lives and economies across the globe, the Buddha's message serves like a beacon. He advised people to shun greed, hatred, violence, jealousy and many other vices to find happiness. Contrast this message with the hankering of an unrepentant mankind indulging in the same old violence and degradation of nature. We all know that the moment the virulence of Coronavirus slows down, we have a far more serious challenge of climate change before us.
16. Mahatma Gandhi, our Father of the Nation, knew that the Buddha offered a way out of our present predicament. In 1927, he told the students of the Ananda College in Colombo:

[QUOTE] “The great Master taught us what is known as the Right Path ... and to learn the Right Path is not merely to pack our brains with many things that sound nice, good and sweet, but to do the right things. ... Gautam Buddha was so filled with mercy and kindness that it was he who taught us to love not only the members of the human family but also to love all life, to love all the

animal world. And he taught us also the personal purity of life.”  
[UNQUOTE]

17. In the final phase of his life, the Buddha was acutely conscious of the fact that egotism driven by envy, hatred, greed and ambition would undermine compassion and loving-kindness. The Buddha therefore encouraged the culture of dialectic and debate among his followers to arrive at their own truth. His cure for human suffering remains as relevant today as it was over two and half millennia ago. There is no doubt that the urgency of abiding by the values that the Buddha preached is eternal. By ignoring the soothing wisdom of every spiritual tradition, we have arrived at the juncture where we find ourselves today. It is high time we paid heed.

Dear Friends,

18. I am grateful to the International Buddhist Confederation for providing me the opportunity to host this event, and also to share my thoughts with you. The world has suffered much this year, and I sincerely wish that this sacred day heralds a new ray of hope and grants a glimpse of happiness. I also pray that it lights the lamp of wisdom in the heart of everyone.

Atta Deepo Bhava  
May we all be blessed!  
May we all awaken to wisdom!

Thank you  
Jai Hind!