

Arts & Leisure

Buddhist Festival Kicks off in Vientiane

Sisouphan Amphonepong

The Buddha Mahotsava Festival of India was officially opened at That Luang yesterday, aiming to promote cultural exchange between Laos and India.

The festival includes numerous events and activities and is attracting crowds of onlookers. There is a photographic exhibition to introduce the Dharma Darshan; Experiencing the Dharma.

The Pali or Sanskrit word Dharma refers to the doctrine taught by the Buddha during the 6th century B.C., which in due course became arguably the world's greatest religion, accepted throughout the world. Basically it is a way of life for peaceful and harmonious living.

The exhibition is an attempt to illustrate the life, important events and teachings of Gautama the Buddha through the masterpieces of Indian art and artefacts still existing at numerous sites throughout India.

The fostering of Buddhism throughout the Indian

subcontinent is evident in the remains of Buddhist art and architecture found in the sacred places of Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Sanchi, Piprahwa, Ajanta, Nalanda, Amravati and Nagarjungkoda.

Unrivalled views of these sites and important artefacts remain undiminished even today and form the first section of the exhibition.

The next section of the exhibition Dharma Darshan is a collection of Jataka tales recounted through illustrated paintings and write-ups in story form as well as rich visuals in the form of statues, reliefs, murals and paintings.

There are also photo blow-ups arranged in an artistic manner interspersed with the sayings of the Buddha, their explanatory blow-ups, captions and other signage along with audio chanting of verse from the Tripitaka.

Distt West Kameng from Arunachal Pradesh told *Vientiane Times* that the photo exhibition will be of great interest to all Buddhist people and play a role in promoting the philosophy and faith here in Laos.

Besides the photographic exhibition, people will also see the amazing Sand Mandala, a cosmic diagram that represents the dwelling place or celestial mansion of deities which reside in the mandala. The mandala is recognised as the pure expression of Buddha's fully enlightened mind.

Mandalas can be visualised, painted or constructed from wood, precious jewels, rice, flowers and so forth; sand is considered to be a superb medium because of its number of grains and the great skill required to create the mandala's exquisite detail.

The construction of sand mandalas, butter sculptures and sacred chants such as the Lama chant can be witnessed at the Buddha Mahotsava as part of Festival of India on until today with the photographic exhibition open until February 15 at That Luang. Entrance is free.

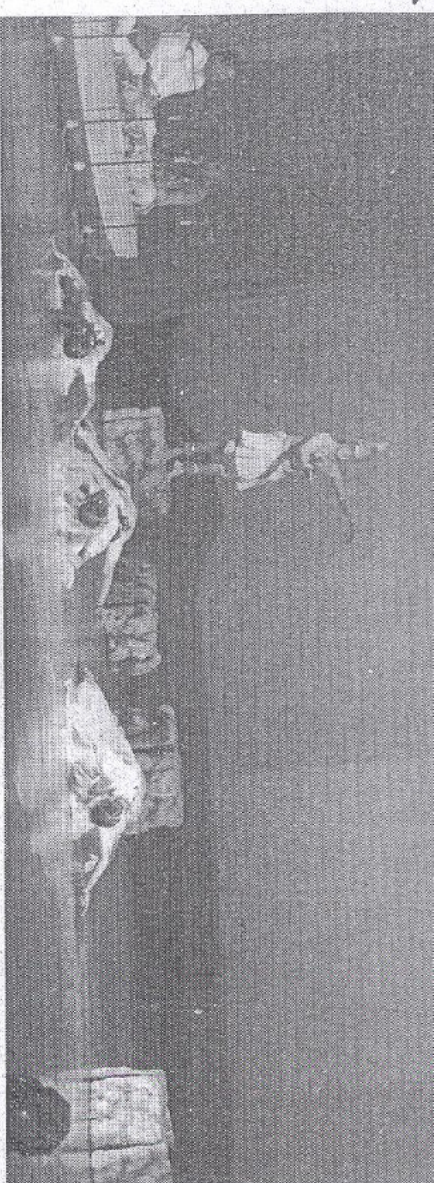
The Festival of India was organised by the Embassy of India to the Lao PDR in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture of India and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism of Laos.



Visitors admire the photographic exhibition.



Indian monks constructing sand mandalas to worship the Buddha.



Hanuman crosses the waves in the sea to help Sita from being killed by demons.



Chooodamani Pradranam Showcase in Vientiane

Sisouphan Amphonephong

Lanka Dahanam, with excerpts from the original dance drama Chooodamani Pradnam, attracted an interested audience to the National Culture Hall on Monday night, with the performance promoting cultural exchange between the peoples of Laos and India.

The show provides different scenes of the original colourful dance drama to tell the story of Rama, the eldest son of Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya. At the behest of sage Vishwamithra, Rama, along with his brother Lakshmana, accompany the sage and ably protect their religious sacrifices from the demon.

Scene one opens with Vali, who on hearing Sugriva's fierce war cries, rushes to the battlefield. Tara, his beautiful

and the brothers begin to fight. Rama, noticing that Sugriva is utterly exhausted, mortally wounds Vali with his own arrow. Vali, who is now in terrible agony, accuses Rama of unfairly slaying a warrior engaged in combat with another. Rama replies that he richly deserves the punishment for abducting another's wife.

Tara brings her young son, Angada, and in her grief implores Rama to kill her too. A remorseful Vali then calls Sugriva and embrace him; he entreats him to look after his beloved son, Angada. Next, he removes from around his neck the divine necklace given to him by his father, Indra, and puts it around Sugriva's neck. Seeing that Vali's end is near, Rama pulls out the arrow that had pierced his heart. Vali's spirit ascends to heaven.

crowned king Sugriva, who as promised offers to send the mighty and legendary Hanuman in search of Sita.

The third scene is of rolling waves, the rhythmic ebb and flow of the ocean and the denizens of the deep sea are seen. The rakshasis surround Sita in the fourth scene, admonishing her to accept Ravana.

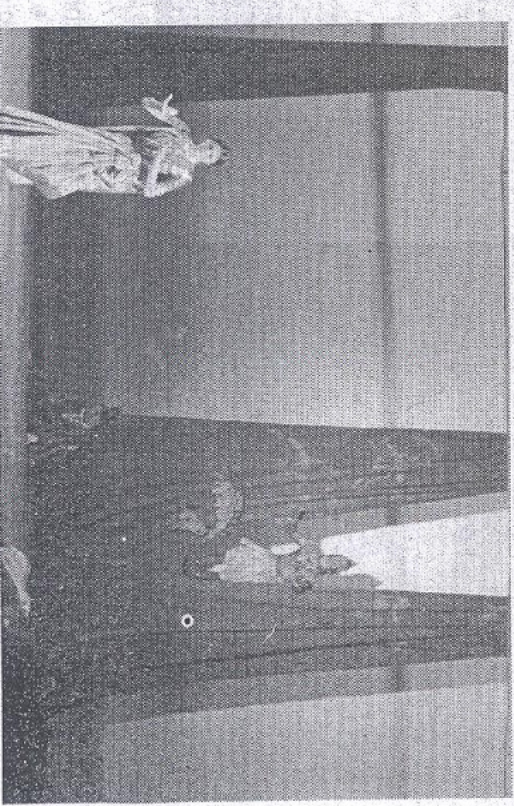
In the final scene the rakshasis report to Ravana that the fearsome looking monkey had destroyed the entire palace garden. Ravana then decrees that Hanuman's tail should be set on fire. But Hanuman escapes from his tormentors and his flaming tail, sets the entire city of Lanka on fire.

Attending the performance were the Lao Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism Prof Dr Bosenkham Vongdara and the Ambassador

to showcase this composite culture of India in Laos, to further strengthen our bilateral cultural cooperation and finally to promote people to people level contacts through the medium of culture, and we would like thank the Lao government for the support extended for hosting the festival," Mr Gururaj said.

Secretary of Culture Shri Ravinda Singh said India and Laos share warm and friendly relations based on historical and cultural linkages over the years, with both countries working together closely in a spirit of trust and confidence.

"Bilateral relations between our two countries have been strengthened through multifaceted cooperation and high level visits from both sides," Mr Shri said.



Rama and his brother Lakshmana prepare to protect their religious sacrifices from the demon.

