

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF RELEASE OF
A COMMEMORATIVE POSTAGE STAMP ON
ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA**

RASHTRAPATI BHAWAN, NEW DELHI ON 25.10.2014

It gives me great pleasure to be present here today to release a Commemorative Postage Stamp to pay tribute to the great Srilankan Buddhist revivalist and writer Anagarika Dharmapala.

2. I congratulate the Department of Posts for taking this initiative of bringing out a Commemorative Postage Stamp on Anagarika Dharmapala. I hope that this gesture will contribute towards further strengthening the bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka and bring the two nations closer. Historically, India and Sri Lanka have remained natural allies. The relations between the two countries have withstood the test of time and socio-cultural exchanges for centuries have fostered further close cooperation in various fields. Both the countries have much to learn and imbibe from each other in order to resolve various issues which are the legacies of a protracted period of colonial rule. I am confident that the relations between the two countries will continue to further strengthen in the coming years to the mutual benefit of our two peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Buddhism, one of the major religions in the world began in India and is a faith based on non-violence and pursuit of spiritual excellence rather than material aggrandizement. It's principles continue to have great relevance even in this age. Buddhism promotes peace and stability and strongly advocates the spirit of compassion and tolerance. It aims to wean the humanity away from war and skirmishes and inspires people to channelize their collective energy towards the betterment of society.

4. This stamp release on one of the apostles of Buddhism, once again reminds us to work relentlessly and collectively to ensure an era of peace, stability and friendly bilateral and multilateral ties in order to create an enabling environment for the rapid socio-economic development of the people.

5. In this backdrop, it becomes much more imperative to recall the achievements and safeguard for posterity the memories of the great Buddhist thinker and preacher, Anagarika Dharmapala who practically lived and breathed Buddhist ideals and worked till the last to revive Buddhism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. Anagarika Dharmapala, was one of the founding contributors of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and was also a pioneer in the revival of Buddhism in India. He not only embraced Buddhism but also lent it Sinhalese nationalist character. He waged a protracted struggle to protect and conserve the foundations of Buddhism in its place of birth, India. He joined the Theosophical Society and spearheaded the reform and revival of Ceylonese Buddhism and its propagation. He later entered the order of Buddhist monks as Venerable Sri Devamitta Dharmapala and is considered a Bodhisattva in Sri Lanka. He was ordained a bhikkhu at Sarnath in 1933 and he died there in December of the same year.

7. In 1891, Anagarika Dharmapala went on a pilgrimage to the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha had attained enlightenment. He decided to work towards restoring its glory. Accordingly, the Maha Bodhi Society at Colombo was founded in 1891 and one of its primary aims was the restoration to Buddhist control of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya.

8. Many people remember Anagarika Dharmapala for his religious zeal. But there was another aspect to this towering figure - his practical vision regarding the alleviation of poverty. The voice of Anagarika Dharmapala was also a significant factor in Ceylon's historical struggle for freedom from the British Raj. He spoke of the importance of a firm educational and economic foundation if the struggle for freedom was to succeed. He also concentrated on establishing schools and hospitals in his country. He had a vision of a newly emerging Ceylon, which could effectively link up with other countries and forge ahead.

9. In 1893 Dharmapala was invited to attend the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago as a representative of "Southern Buddhism" - which was the term applied at that time to the Theravada. There he met Swami Vivekananda and like him, he was also a great success at the Parliament.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. On this occasion, as I pay my humble homage to this towering personality, I once again congratulate the Department of Posts for bringing out the Commemorative Postage Stamp on Anagarika Dharmapala who worked selflessly all his life with a missionary zeal to propagate Buddhist ideals and to restore the glory of Buddhism.

Jai Hind