

CSIR Weekly Briefing: Cultural Connect

Volume: 1, Issue: 12 | 31st July 2026

Ancient Buddhist Site of *Sarnath* Inscribed as Bharat's 45th UNESCO World Heritage

The Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath was officially inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on 25th July 2026 during the 48th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, marking a landmark achievement in Bharat's cultural and civilizational history. With this inscription, *Sarnath* became Bharat's 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site, ending a 28-year wait since it was first included on UNESCO's Tentative List in 1998. The recognition acknowledges *Sarnath* as one of the most sacred centres of Buddhism and one of humanity's most significant spiritual heritage sites. Located approximately 10 kilometres from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Sarnath is revered worldwide as the place where Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma), around the 6th century BCE, shortly after attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. This sermon marked the establishment of the Buddhist Sangha and the beginning of the worldwide spread of Buddhist philosophy based on compassion, non-violence, wisdom, and the Middle Path.

The archaeological remains at Sarnath include the magnificent Dhamek Stupa, Dharmarajika Stupa, ancient monasteries (Viharas), Mulagandha Kuti, and the celebrated Ashokan Pillar, whose Lion Capital was later adopted as the National Emblem of Bharat. Excavations and conservation undertaken over several decades by the *Bhartiya Puratatva Sarvekshan* (Archaeological Survey of India, GoI) have preserved these monuments as enduring symbols of Bharat's ancient architectural excellence and Buddhist heritage. The inscription also strengthens Bharat's growing role in Buddhist diplomacy, using its shared civilizational heritage to deepen cultural ties with countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal, Cambodia, Laos, Japan, South Korea, and other Buddhist-majority nations. In recent years, Bharat has complemented this approach through international exhibitions of sacred Buddhist relics, restoration of Buddhist monuments abroad, scholarly exchanges, pilgrimage initiatives, and cultural cooperation programmes, reinforcing centuries-old spiritual connections across Asia.

Sarnath has long served as a meeting point of faith, learning, art, philosophy, and intercultural dialogue. The exquisite Gupta-period sculptures discovered here are regarded among the finest examples of Buddhist art and influenced religious iconography throughout Asia. The site's inscription is expected to encourage greater heritage conservation, archaeological research, sustainable tourism, local economic development, and international awareness while reaffirming Bharat's timeless contribution to world civilization, religious harmony, cultural diversity, and the preservation of humanity's shared heritage. It also reflects UNESCO's recognition of Sarnath as a living symbol of peace, compassion, tolerance, and universal human values that continue to inspire millions of pilgrims and visitors from across the globe.

Source: UNESCO World Heritage Centre

Link: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ancient-buddhist-site-sarnath-inscribed-unesco-world-heritage-list

Inauguration of Shree Gusthal Mahavihar & Agam of Prathamshree Mahavihar at Lalitpur, Nepal



On 28th July 2026, the Bhartiya Dootawas (Embassy of India, GoI), Kathmandu, announced the inauguration of the restored Shree Gusthal Mahavihar and the Agam of Prathamshree Mahavihar in Lalitpur, Nepal, highlighting another important milestone in Bharat–Nepal cultural cooperation and heritage conservation. The inauguration marked the successful completion of an Bharat-assisted restoration project dedicated to preserving one of Nepal's historic Newar Buddhist monasteries (Mahavihars). The Shree Gusthal Mahavihar represents an important centre of Newar Buddhist tradition, while the Prathamshree Mahavihar holds religious significance within the local Buddhist community. The restoration of these heritage structures helps preserve traditional architecture, religious art, sacred manuscripts and ritual spaces for future generations. Bharat and Nepal share deep historical ties rooted in Sanatan Dharma, Buddhism, pilgrimage traditions and people-to-people interactions that have flourished for thousands of years. Sacred sites such as Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal, and

Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar and Rajgir in Bharat remain connected through a common Buddhist pilgrimage circuit that attracts devotees and scholars from across the world. Likewise, Hindu pilgrimage centres such as Pashupatinath, Janakpur, Varanasi and Ayodhya reinforce the spiritual bond between the two neighbouring countries.

Bharat's development partnership with Nepal has consistently supported the restoration of schools, monasteries, temples, health posts and community infrastructure, thereby strengthening both local development and cultural preservation. These projects represent an important dimension of cultural connection where heritage conservation serves as a bridge for enhancing mutual understanding, trust and friendship. The inauguration of the restored Mahavihar therefore symbolises not only architectural conservation but also the enduring civilisational partnership between Bharat and Nepal, reinforcing their shared Buddhist and Hindu traditions while promoting regional cultural harmony, historical continuity and spiritual cooperation.

Source: *Bhartiya Dootawas*(Embassay of India, Kathmandu)
Link: https://www.indembkathmandu.gov.in/media-detail/948

Bhartiya Dootawas, Kathmandu celebrates Ashadha Purnima (Guru Purnima) Celebration



On 29th July 2026, *Bhartiya Dootawas*(Embassay of India, Kathmandu) commemorated Ashadha Purnima (Guru Purnima), celebrating one of the most sacred festivals shared by both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The event brought together members of the diplomatic community, religious leaders, scholars and devotees to honour the spiritual significance of the day. Ashadha Purnima occupies a unique place in the cultural and religious heritage of Bharat and Nepal. In the Hindu tradition, it is celebrated as Guru Purnima, a day dedicated to expressing gratitude towards teachers, spiritual guides and gurus who illuminate the path of knowledge and wisdom. In the Buddhist tradition, the day commemorates the occasion when Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon, known as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, at Sarnath in present-day Uttar Pradesh, after attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya.

The 2026 celebration gained added significance because it took place in the same week that Sarnath received recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, creating a remarkable convergence between global heritage recognition and the observance of one of Buddhism's most sacred occasions. This coincidence further strengthened the cultural and spiritual connections linking Bharat and Nepal through their shared Buddhist heritage. Nepal, the birthplace of Lord Buddha at Lumbini, and Bharat, home to Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Rajgir, Sravasti and Kushinagar, together preserve the principal sites associated with the Buddha's life and teachings. These sacred places attract pilgrims, monks, researchers and tourists from around the world, reinforcing centuries-old civilisational bonds. Guru Purnima also highlights the enduring Bhartiya tradition of the Guru-Shishya Parampara, which has shaped education, philosophy, classical arts, yoga, music and spiritual learning for thousands of years. The observance of Ashadha Purnima in Kathmandu served as a meaningful expression of the enduring cultural partnership between Bharat and Nepal, founded upon shared traditions of Buddhism, Sanatan Dharma, peace, compassion and spiritual knowledge.

Source: Embassy of Bharat (Bhartiya Dootawas), Kathmandu
Link: https://www.indembkathmandu.gov.in/gallery-detail/419

Kargil Vijay Diwas Commemoration at Kashmiri Cultural Centre, New Delhi

On 26th July 2026, Bharat commemorated the 27th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, honouring the courage, sacrifice and patriotism of the soldiers of the Bhartiya Sena (Bhartiya Army) who secured victory during the Kargil War of 1999. One of the significant commemorative events was organised at the Kashmiri Cultural Centre, New Delhi, where distinguished guests, veterans, scholars and members of civil society gathered to pay tribute to the nation's brave soldiers. The programme was organised by the Jammu Kashmir Peoples' Forum in association with the PoJK Youth Forum. Addressing the gathering, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh described the Partition as a historic blunder and reiterated Bharat's long-standing position regarding Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK). The event combined remembrance of military valour with discussions on national unity, territorial integrity and

historical memory. The choice of the Kashmiri Cultural Centre as the venue highlighted the role of cultural institutions in preserving the heritage, traditions and identity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir while also serving as spaces for dialogue on historical and contemporary issues.

Kargil Vijay Diwas is observed every year to honour the supreme sacrifice of soldiers who defended the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bharat during the conflict in the Kargil sector. Cultural programmes, patriotic songs, exhibitions, documentary screenings and interactions with veterans formed an important part of the commemoration, enabling younger generations to understand the significance of the nation's military history. Such events also preserve the rich cultural traditions of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, regions known for their diverse languages, music, crafts, literature, cuisine and spiritual heritage. The participation of community organisations reflects the growing role of cultural memory in strengthening national consciousness and preserving historical narratives. By linking remembrance with cultural identity, the programme reinforced patriotism, honoured the sacrifices of the armed forces and highlighted the importance of safeguarding the civilisational and cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir. The observance therefore served as both a tribute to national heroes and a reaffirmation of Bharat's commitment to unity, cultural continuity and historical remembrance.

Source: IBG News

Link: https://ibgnews.com/2026/07/26/kargil-vijay-diwas-dr-jitendra-singh-calls-partition-a-historic-blunder-reiterates-indias-stand-on-pojk/

Sahitya Akademi Seminar on Ramanand Sagar and Literary Forum, Rajouri (Jammu & Kashmir)



On 28th–29th July 2026, the Sahitya Akademi (Sahitya Akademi) organised a two-day seminar titled "Ramanand Sagar: Life & Works" along with a "Literary Forum: Poetry Readings" at Himalayan Degree College, Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir, celebrating one of Bharat's most influential storytellers and promoting literary engagement in the region. According to the official notice issued by Sahitya Akademi (Sahitya Akademi), the programme brought together scholars, writers, poets, students and literary enthusiasts to discuss the life, literary contributions and cultural legacy of Ramanand Sagar, whose celebrated television serial "Ramayan" became one of the most influential cultural productions in Bharatiya broadcasting history.

The seminar explored his contribution to literature, cinema and television, while the Literary Forum provided a platform for poetry readings and creative interaction among authors and emerging writers. Ramanand Sagar's adaptation of the Ramayana introduced millions of viewers in Bharat and abroad to the timeless values of dharma, devotion, compassion, sacrifice and righteousness, contributing significantly to the popular understanding of one of the world's greatest epics. The serial also found audiences among the Bharatiya diaspora and in several countries across South-East Asia, reinforcing the cultural influence of Bharatiya civilisation beyond national boundaries. The seminar also emphasised the enduring relevance of classical epics and storytelling traditions in shaping ethical values and cultural identity. By commemorating Ramanand Sagar and encouraging literary dialogue, the programme strengthened appreciation for Bharat's rich literary heritage and demonstrated the continuing importance of literature as a bridge between generations, communities and cultures. The event therefore reinforced the role of literary institutions in preserving Bharatiya civilisation while promoting cultural understanding, creativity and national unity.

Source: SahityaAkademi

Link: https://sahitya-akademi.gov.in/

Bharat and Sri Lanka Join Hands to Strengthen Pali Language Studies in Colombo Symposium



A significant milestone in Bharat–Sri Lanka cultural and educational cooperation was marked on 24 July 2026 with the organisation of a symposium in Colombo dedicated to strengthening Pali language studies. The event brought together senior government representatives, distinguished academics, Buddhist monks, researchers and students from both countries to discuss the preservation, promotion and advancement of Pali scholarship. Recognising Pali as the principal language of the Theravāda Buddhist canon, the symposium underscored its enduring relevance in understanding the philosophical, literary and historical foundations of Buddhism across South Asia.

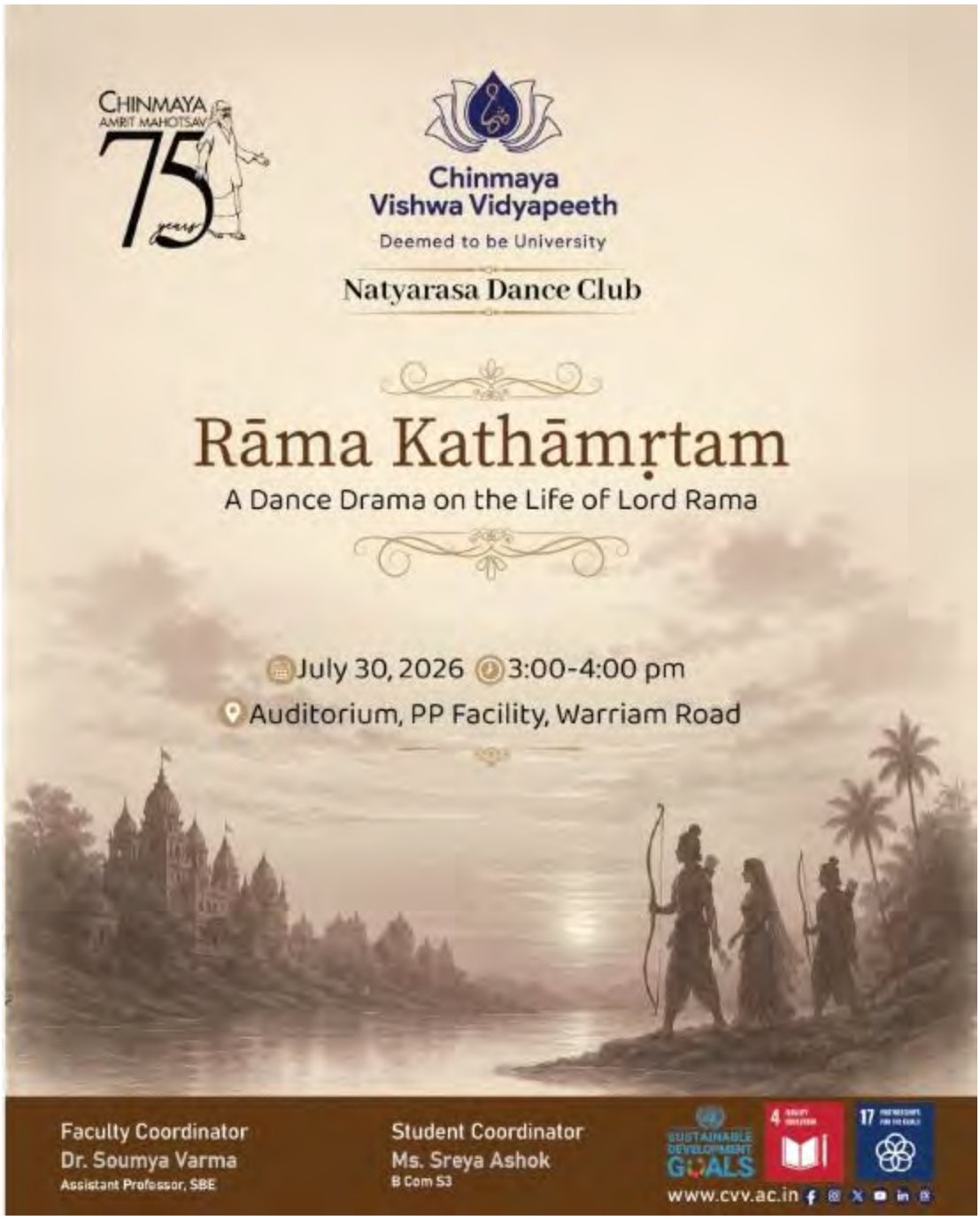
Bharat reaffirmed its commitment to supporting academic collaboration through institutional partnerships, scholarly exchanges and capacity-building initiatives aimed at promoting the study of Pali and Buddhist literature. Discussions focused on expanding cooperation between universities, research institutions and monastic education centres, while encouraging joint research projects, faculty exchanges, translation initiatives and digital preservation of ancient

manuscripts. Participants also explored the potential for integrating modern pedagogical tools and digital technologies into Pali language education to make the discipline more accessible to younger generations and international scholars.

The symposium highlighted the centuries-old civilizational links between Bharat and Sri Lanka that have been nurtured through the transmission of Buddhism. Since the time of Emperor Ashoka, the exchange of Buddhist teachings, monastic traditions and sacred texts has formed one of the strongest foundations of bilateral relations. By promoting Pali studies, both countries seek not only to preserve a shared intellectual and religious heritage but also to strengthen contemporary educational and cultural cooperation. The initiative reinforces the importance of Buddhist scholarship as a bridge connecting historical traditions with present-day academic engagement.The Colombo symposium also demonstrates that classical languages can serve as vehicles of international cooperation, promoting intercultural dialogue, preserving intangible cultural heritage and encouraging collaborative research. Source: Bhartiya Dootawas (Embassay of India, GoI Colombo)

https://www.hcicolombo.gov.in/section/speeches-and-interviews/remarks-by-h-e-santosh-jha-high-commissioner-of-india-to-sri-lanka-at-symposium-on-and-quot-strengthening-pali-language-studies-in-sri-lanka-a-strategic-roadmap-for-revival-and-global-engagement-and-quot-held-in-colombo-24-07-2026/

Art Meets Timeless Philosophy at Rāma Kathāmṛtam during Ramayana Month Observance



As part of the annual Ramayana Month (Karkidakam) observance, Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth (CVV) organised Rāma Kathāmṛtam on 30th July 2026 at the Prajna Pratisthanam Auditorium, bringing together scholars, artists, students and spiritual practitioners to celebrate the enduring relevance of the Ramayana through an interdisciplinary lens. The event combined artistic performances, philosophical discourses and academic engagement to explore the timeless ethical,

cultural and spiritual values embedded in the Bhartiya epic. It formed part of the university's broader commitment to promoting India's knowledge traditions through higher education, research and cultural outreach.

The programme featured presentations that interpreted the Ramayana not merely as a religious text but as a living civilizational document that continues to influence literature, performing arts, governance, ethics and social values across Asia. Classical music, dance, dramatic narration and scholarly lectures illustrated how the epic has inspired diverse artistic traditions over centuries. Faculty members and invited experts examined the philosophical dimensions of Lord Rama's life, emphasising ideals such as dharma (righteousness), ethical leadership, compassion and selfless service. These discussions encouraged participants to reflect on the continuing relevance of the epic in addressing contemporary social and moral challenges.

A notable feature of Rāma Kathāmṛtam was the participation of international Indology scholars, researchers and students, reflecting the growing global interest in India's classical literature and intellectual heritage. Their engagement demonstrated the increasing role of Bhartiya universities as centres for the study of Sanskrit texts, Indic philosophy and comparative civilizational studies. By providing a platform for academic dialogue and cultural exchange, the event contributed to strengthening international collaboration in the humanities while promoting a deeper understanding of India's literary traditions.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, the programme reinforced the Ramayana's status as a shared cultural heritage extending beyond India's borders into countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, where local adaptations of the epic continue to shape artistic and cultural life. By integrating scholarship with artistic expression, Rāma Kathāmṛtam showcased India's civilizational legacy to a global academic audience and highlighted the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage through education, research and intercultural dialogue. The event exemplified how universities can serve as important institutions for advancing cultural diplomacy and strengthening people-to-people connections through shared knowledge traditions.

Source: Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth

https://www.cvv.ac.in

Prepared by: Pragya, Anubha, Triloki