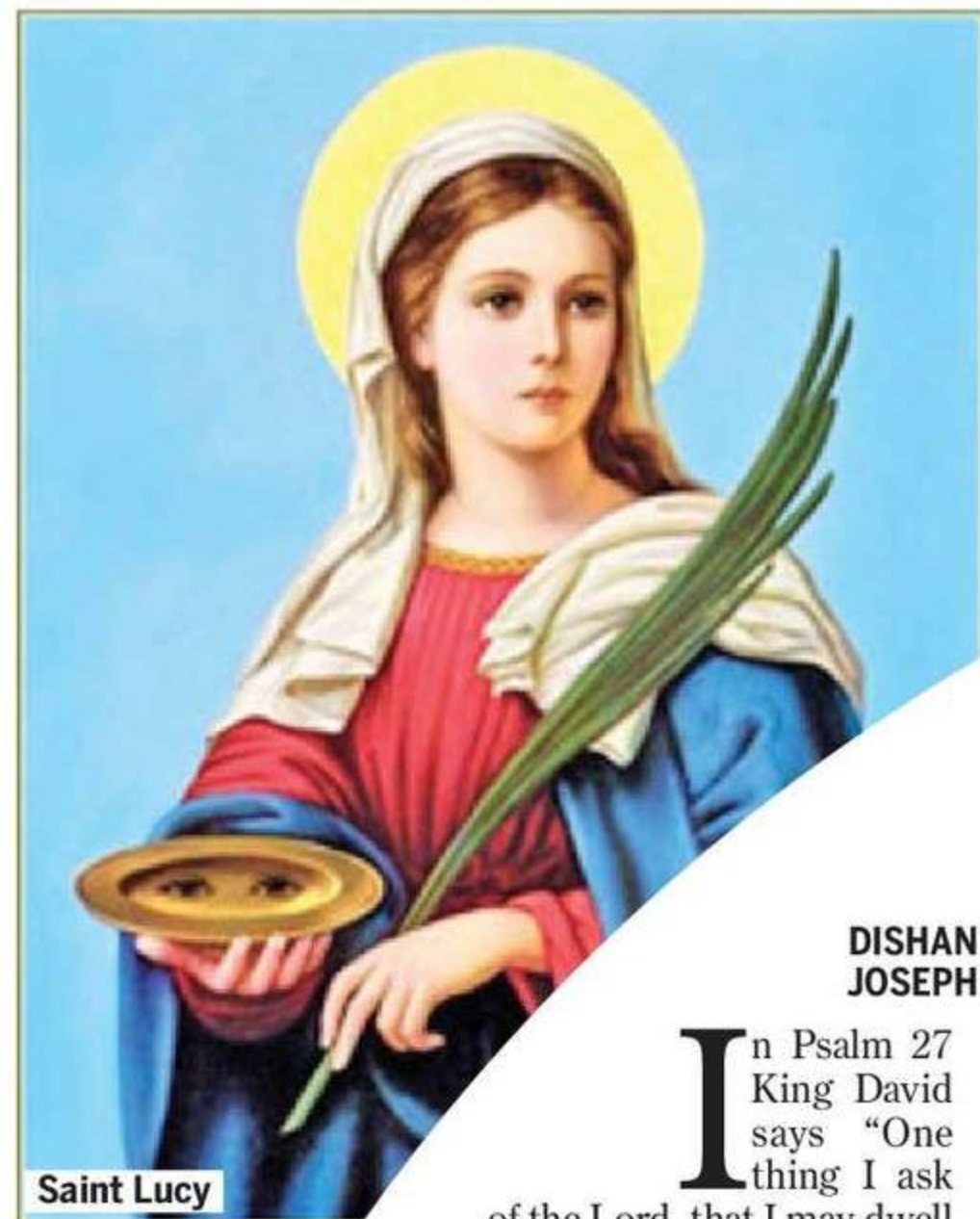


The large bell



Saint Lucy

DISHAN JOSEPH

In Psalm 27 King David says "One thing I ask of the Lord, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord". This is the significance of the sanctum of God had on King David. The Cathedral of Saint Lucia reflects decades of sacrifice, faith and the overcoming of an air raid during the Second World War.

For more than a century, Kotahena has been a predominantly Catholic town uniting Sri Lankans of all religions. As we look back this area covering the Municipal Ward of Colombo 13 was once a quaint village in the 17th Century. It was somewhere in 1760 that the zealous clergy of the Oratorian Order came to Ceylon to propagate their gospel and decided to build a small chapel. It is recorded that the first chapel was merely a hut, but people came to seek God's blessings. By 1779, the Catholics of Kotahena had selected this hill as their gathering point. In 1796, the Dutch and British soldiers were encamped on either side of the Kelani River, and a confrontation was dangerously imminent. It is said the citizens on the Colombo side had taken refuge on the hill where the Chapel stood and sought divine protection.

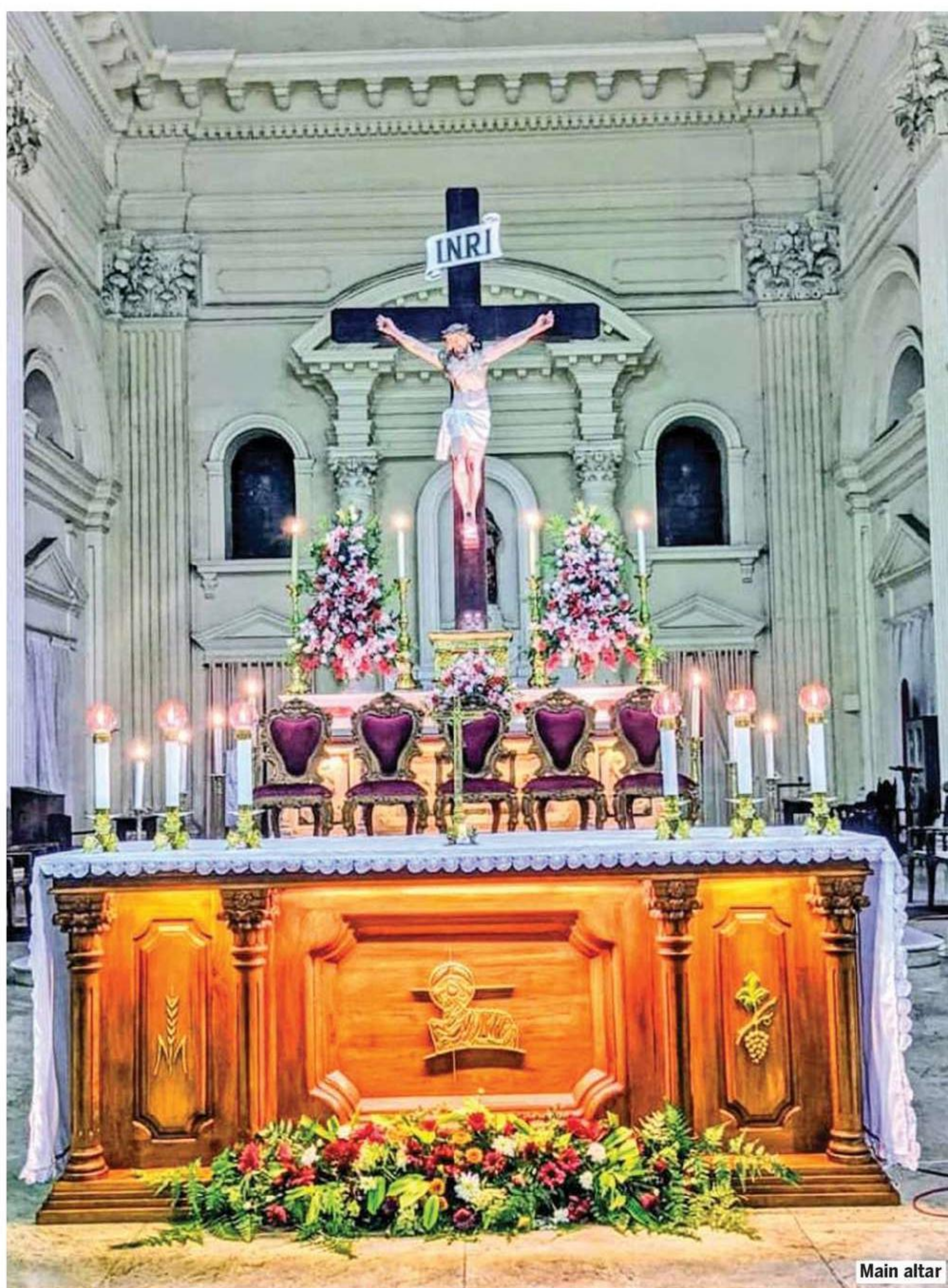
The humble Catholic Chapel began gaining attention and pious devotion. By 1763, brickwork was added to the Chapel. Patience yields blessings and thus in 1838, the little church was elevated to a Cathedral, the first in Ceylon. In January of the same year, Rev. Vincente de Rozairo was installed as the Vicar Apostolic of Ceylon. He travelled by sea from Goa. Records indicate that the construction of the present Cathedral began with the foundation stone being laid in 1852. However, the process of construction began in 1873 and the first phase was completed in 1881. The presiding Bishop at this time was Bishop Clement Pangmani. After years of resilient effort, the Cathedral was built and completed in 1887 under the leadership of Bishop Christopher Bonjean, OMI. The presence of this colossal church influenced missionary zeal and many Christian religious formations (nuns and priests) to come to Ceylon. Many of these orders still function across the island.

Contribution to education

The Catholic Church has made an immense contribution to education in Ceylon for more than 200 years. St. Benedict's Institute was founded by Abbot Hilarion Sillani OSB in 1865. The De La Salle Brothers

The Cathedral of Saint Lucia resonates with inspiring architecture. Its facade has four majestic pillars rising into the ceiling. On the topmost border, there are statues of Blessed Mary, St. Lucia, St. Anthony, St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Francis of Assisi. A clock with Roman numerals still indicates the time. The large dome was once subject to a crack when the Japanese bombed Ceylon in April 1942.

CATHEDRAL OF SAINT LUCIA: A Spiritual Lighthouse



Main altar

ers came to Ceylon in 1867. These dedicated men taught and influenced generations of Catholics, and the La Sallian brothers continued to serve thousands of students.

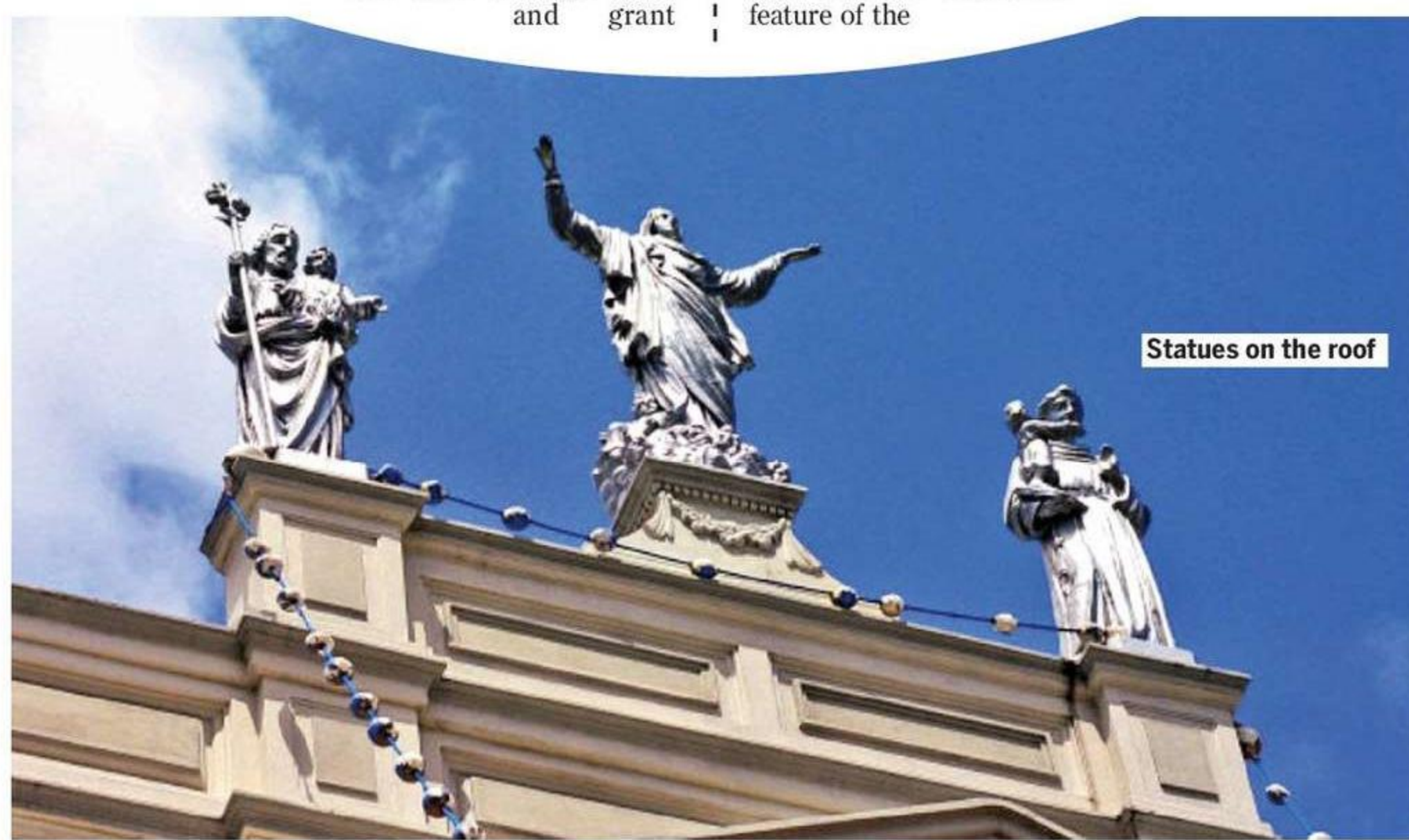
The spiritual essence poured out from this Cathedral and gained momentum with the arrival of the Good Shepherd Order in 1869. These religious sisters have manifested the love and grace of God for decades. The prudent sisters established the Good Shepherd Convent in May 1869, where thousands of girls have received a holistic education. St. Lucia's College was built in 1918. It was from this Cathedral that the much-loved Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) was introduced to Ceylon in 1907. The radio-training laboratory was begun by Fr. Ignatius Perera in 1962 and this was the pioneer training entity that produced hundreds of qualified technicians.

I have visited the Cathedral on many occasions. Every time I gaze above and see the vastness of its high dome I am reminded of God's goodness and protection. Within its sacred precincts are statues of Christian saints and martyrs. We must pause here to realize that saints do not wave a magic wand and grant

miracles. It is Almighty God who works miracles through his divine grace. The life of a saint should serve as a reminder to us of how we should live as followers of Jesus Christ. The feast of St. Lucy will be celebrated today (13); in addition, the Corpus Christi and the Month of May festival are also significant dates in the Catholic calendar. The Cathedral is the seat of the Archbishop of Colombo.

The Cathedral of Saint Lucia resonates with inspiring architecture. Its facade has four majestic pillars rising into the ceiling. On the topmost border, there are statues of Blessed Mary, St. Lucia, St. Anthony, St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Francis of Assisi. A clock with Roman numerals still indicates the time. The large dome was once subject to a crack when the Japanese bombed Ceylon in April 1942. The crack began to widen and in 1957, it took the full year to repair it. On the massive columns that support the structure, there are statues of Saint Aloysius, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Cecelia and Saint John de La Salle.

The main altar has a crucifix and shows the letters 'INRI' engraved at the top. Another important feature of the



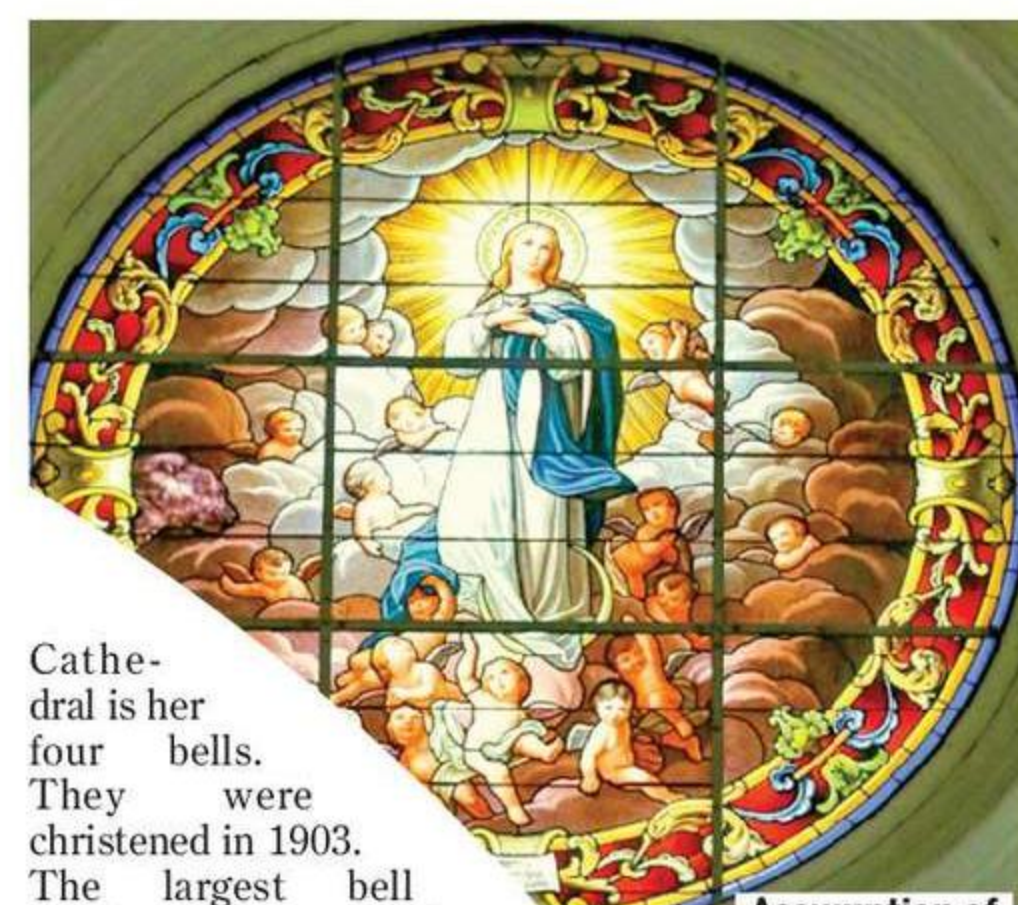
Statues on the roof



Front view



Interior of Cathedral



Assumption of Mary - stained glass

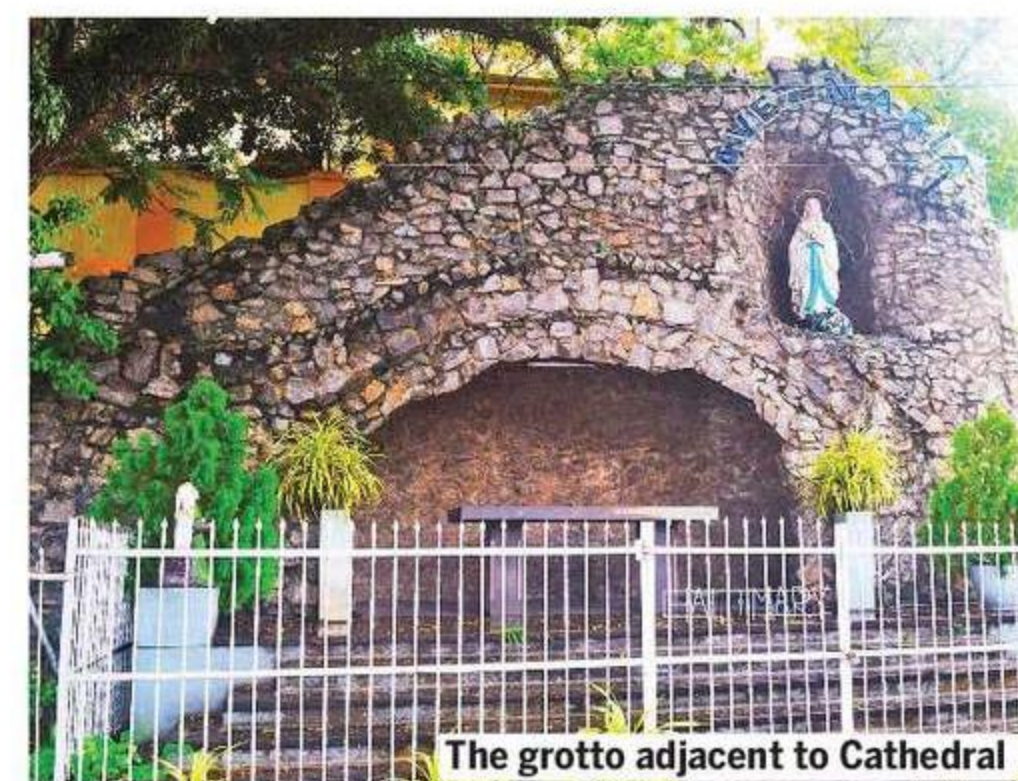
Cathedral is her four bells. They were christened in 1903. The largest bell weighs 4,300 pounds and is called Anthony Thomas; the second bell, Henry Lucia Emilia weighs 2,000 pounds, and the third bell, Francis Theresa weighs 1,400 pounds. Weighing 950 pounds, the small bell was christened Jean Baptist Edward Anna. A plaque celebrates the beatification of Fr. Joseph Vaz, Apostle of Sri Lanka in 1995 by Pope John Paul II. The amiable Pope visited the Cathedral during this event.

Story of Santa Lucia

Visitors to the Cathedral must understand the story of Santa Lucia which dates back to the third century. Lucy was born to a rich noble family, with a comfortable life. The family was shaken when her father died. She was only five years old. Having realized the uncertainty of life and focusing on spiritual matters, she had pledged her life to the church as a young woman. Not knowing the intentions of her pious daughter, Lucy's mother Eutychia had arranged her daughter's marriage. When her heathen suitor, who was not a Catholic, found that his bride to be was already promised to a life of divine service, he complained to Governor Paschasius.

The pagan governor threw Lucy in jail and ordered her to be defiled. Church historians say that when the guards came to take her away they could not move her. So, they brought firewood into her cell, and tried to light the logs. To their surprise, the logs would not burn. At this stage, an enraged and confused Paschasius ordered her eyes to be gouged out. This order was carried out. Lucy was killed by the sword. When her body was taken to the family mausoleum, people were shocked to see her eyes fully restored. It was this encounter which drew attention to the departed young Lucy. Since then artists drew paintings of Lucy holding her eyes on a golden plate.

In retrospect, the story is a reminder to us about how we exercise our faith when assailed by life's challenges and if we would mirror the love and compassion of God. The focus on the eye is also interesting, for it is through the human eyes that people covet and desire all the material possessions. During this month of yuletide it is prudent to open our spiritual eyes and understand life with a Biblical view. St. Lucia's Cathedral will continue to be a house of prayer and hope.



The grotto adjacent to Cathedral



The majestic pipe organ