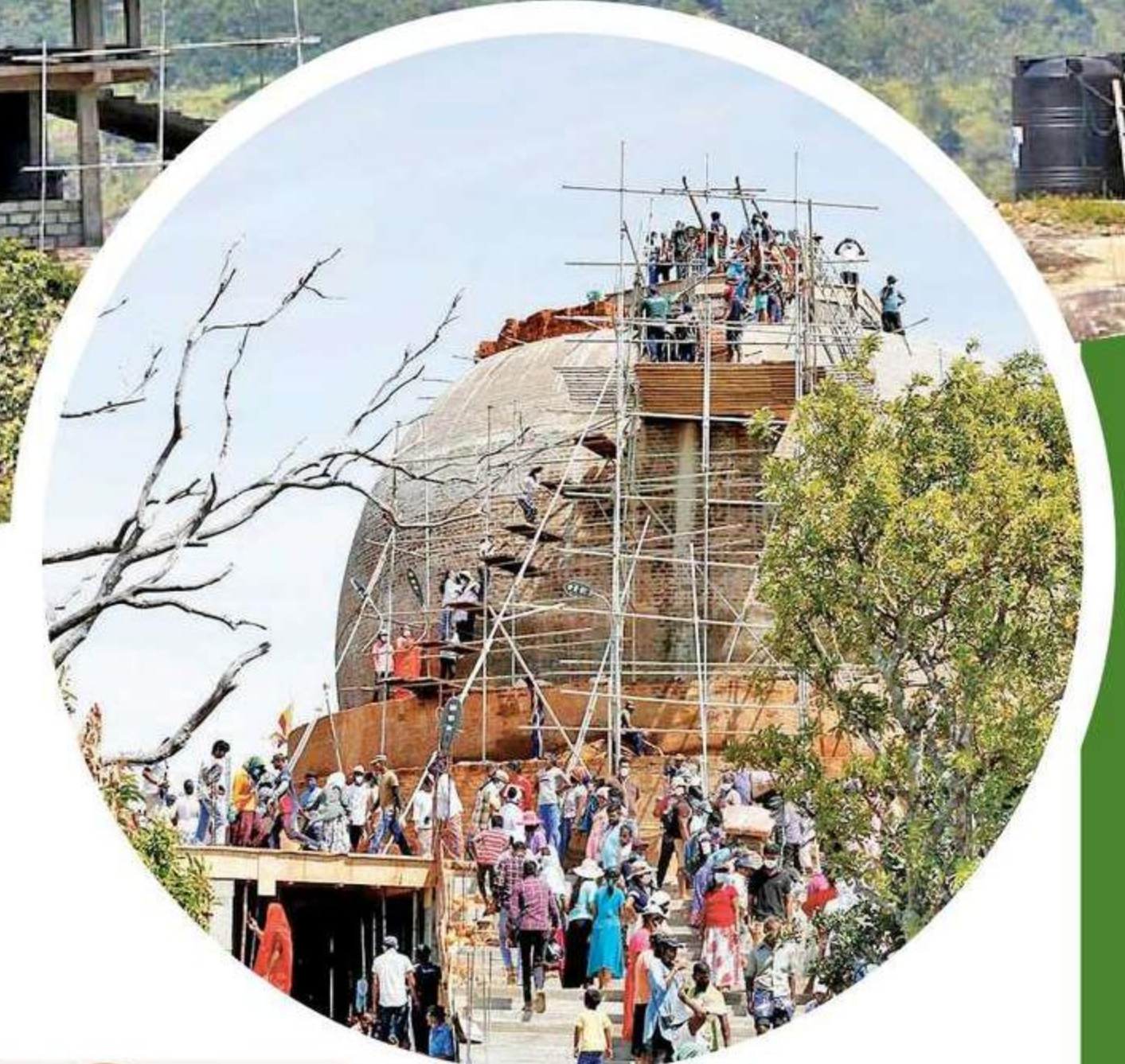
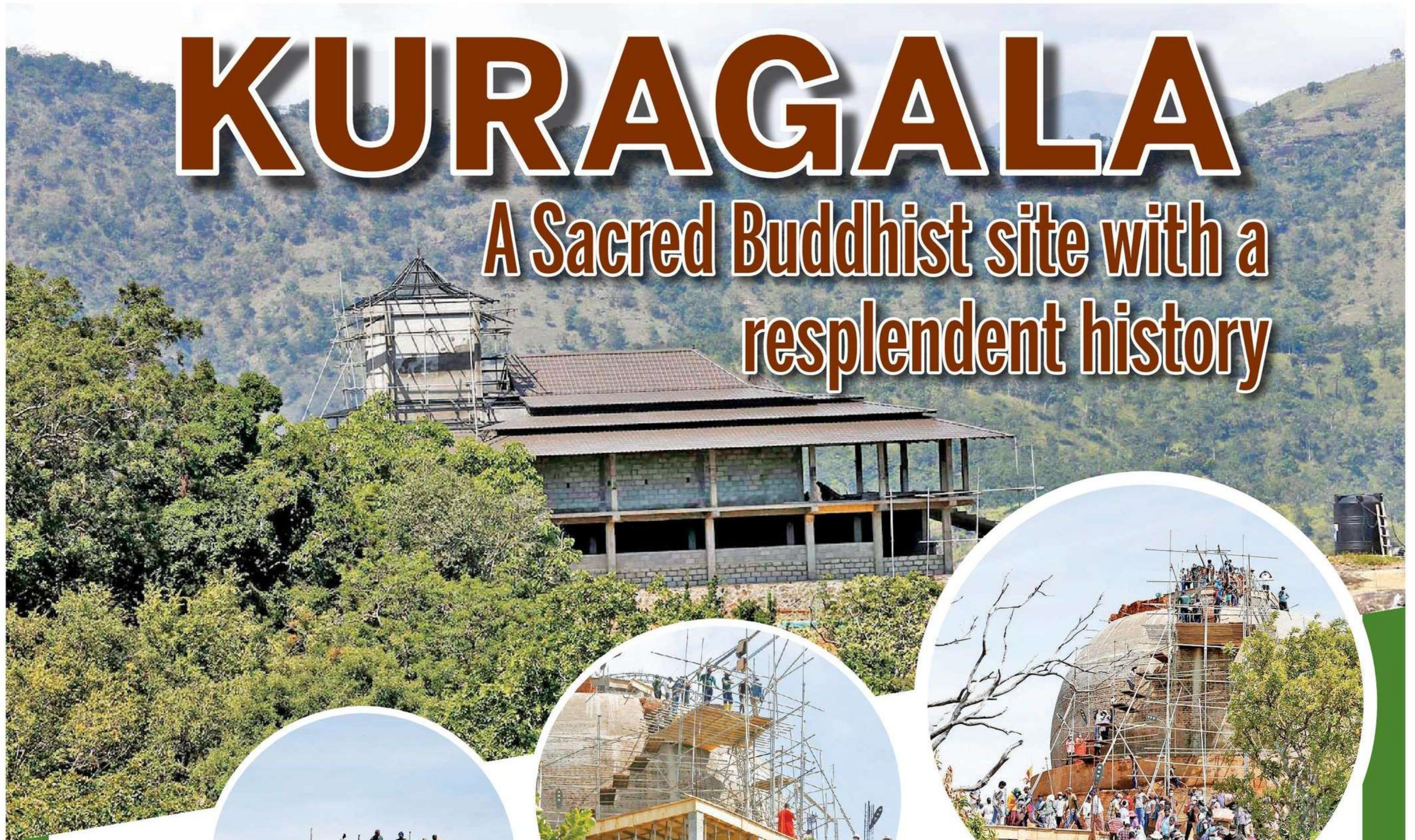


# KURAGALA

## A Sacred Buddhist site with a resplendent history



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THARAKA

The ceremony to enshrine Sacred Relics in the 'Asadisi Shakya Sugatha Maha Seya' (The Stupa) being built at the Kuragala Sacred Site under the 'Revival of Kuragala' programme will be held from January 16-18.

The 130-feet high 'Asadisi Shakya Sugatha Maha Seya' is considered to be the largest such Stupa in the Sabaragamuwa Province which is visible from six districts in four provinces due to its location.

Most Venerable Mahanayake and Anunayake Theras of the Malwathu and Asgiriya Chapters and Ramanna and Amarapura Sectors, Sri Lanka Army Commander General Shavendra Silva, Sri Lanka Army and Civil Security Department personnel who contributed to the constructions and the devotees who dedicated their labour and funds for the Stupa project will participate on this occasion.

Parallel to the enshrinement ceremony,

a series of religious programmes including an overnight Pirith chanting ceremony and an overnight Bana sermon will be held during this three-day programme.

Associated Newspapers of Ceylon (Lake House) is the print media sponsor of this religious event.

Kuragala is a prehistoric archaeological site with ruins of an ancient Buddhist cave temple complex dating back to the Second Century BC, in Balangoda. The temple complex is located on the Balangoda-Kalthota road approximately 24 Kilometres away from the Balangoda town. The Kuragala Sacred Area is located at the centre of the Kuragala Rock which rises upwards from the Kaltota valley. The Kuragala Ancient Buddhist Monastery is located in the Kuragala Grama Niladhari Division which now

belongs to the Kaltota Divisional Secretariat in Balangoda, Ratnapura District of the Sabaragamuwa Province.

This Sacred Site was forcibly occupied by religious extremist groups for the past 50-year period since 1971. Continuous attempts and struggles made under several governments to take it over from them failed due to various reasons during these five decades.

The 'Revival of Kuragala' programme is the result of this five-decade-long continuous attempt which finally gave the Buddhist community of this country the entire ownership and the ability to develop it in accordance with the Buddhist culture.

Ven. Wathurukumbure Dhammarathana Thera, who is also known as the Nelligala Hamuduruwo has taken the lead in developing this Sacred Site since March 2021.

A total of 40 constructions including the 'Asadisi Shakya Sugatha Maha Seya', a Sermon Hall, which can accommodate nearly 3,000 devotees at a time for Sil campaigns, a monastery, a Sacred Relics House, a Bodhi Pavilion, a huge Buddha statue, a statue of God Saman which is similar to the statue at Nelligala Temple, a staircase of 500-feet high and a lion statue to pay tribute to all those who saved the Kuragala Sacred Area from pagans from 1971 to 2021 and returned it to the Buddhist community and also a reservoir called 'Kuragala Wewa' will be constructed in this 100-acre Sacred Area under the programme.

All these constructions are being completed within a period of 13 months from March 2021 to May 2022.

The State Vesak Festival 2022 will also be held at the



Ven. Wathurukumbure  
Dhammarathana Thera

Kuragala Sacred Site in May following the completion of these projects.

The 'Revival of Kuragala' programme is the largest project being implemented to build a Buddhist temple complex in Sri Lanka in the past 1,200 years, Ven. Dhammarathana Thera said.

Among the many historical sites located in the Sabaragamuwa Province, the Kuragala Sacred Area has a special place. This Sacred place which is thousands of years old displays the pride of the Sri Lankans of yore through the magnificent facades dating back to the pre-Buddha era. It was known in ancient times as the 'Mahathittaka Wel Yaya' (Mahathittaka Line of Paddy Fields).

The Kuragala Sacred Area is located at an elevation of 515 metres above sea level and is the first mountain to be encountered when coming from the Hambantota area. Known as the 'Hituwangala Rock' in ancient times, this great rock was no doubt a vantage point for sailors to identify Serendib back then.

The historical and Buddha Sasana connection of this place can be clearly understood from the inscriptions belong-

ing to the Second Century BC. There are inscriptions in the pre-Brahmin script and there is a pool of drip-lined caves dating back to the time when the great Arahats lived there.

These historical facts attest to the existence of the Sangha in the forest at that time. It is not difficult to understand that it was a place where the great Arahats lived in the caves, as the inscriptions show. In ancient times this temple complex was also known as 'Dathahasapudahalena'.

The Kuragala Sacred Area is a place of great importance in both religious and archaeological terms. The reason is that a recent excavation at this site revealed the fossilised remains of a human at a depth of about 16 feet. According to archaeological evidence, the Kuragala area had been used by humans in the prehistoric period. From the excavations, archaeologists found stone tools, fossilised bone fragments and remains of a human skeleton which is believed to be aged more than 16,000 years. Investigations further revealed that the humans who lived in Kuragala may have had close links with the coastal areas as excavators found remnants of seashells.

This Sacred place with such a Buddhist Sasana history was later taken over by pagans. Then in 1971, Ven. Wataddara Gnanissara Thera started the struggle to liberate Kuragala and give it back to Buddhists. After Ven. Wataddara Gnanissara Thera, this Sacred Area was handed over to Ven. Deltota Dhammajothi Thera to rebuild it. Both made a positive effort and handed over this Sacred place to the present Chief Incumbent of Kuragala Ancient Buddhist Monastery, Ven. Wimalakirithi Dhammaratana Wataddara Sri Gnanissarabhidhana Nayake Thera on February 4, 2021 (Independence Day).



Sacred relics will be enshrined in this Seya from January 16-18.

Pictures show nearly 5,000 devotees engaging in a shramadana campaign during the weekend to lay concrete to the 'Salapathala Maluwa' of the 'Asadisi Shakya Sugatha Maha Seya'.  
Pictures by Sulochana Gamage.



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