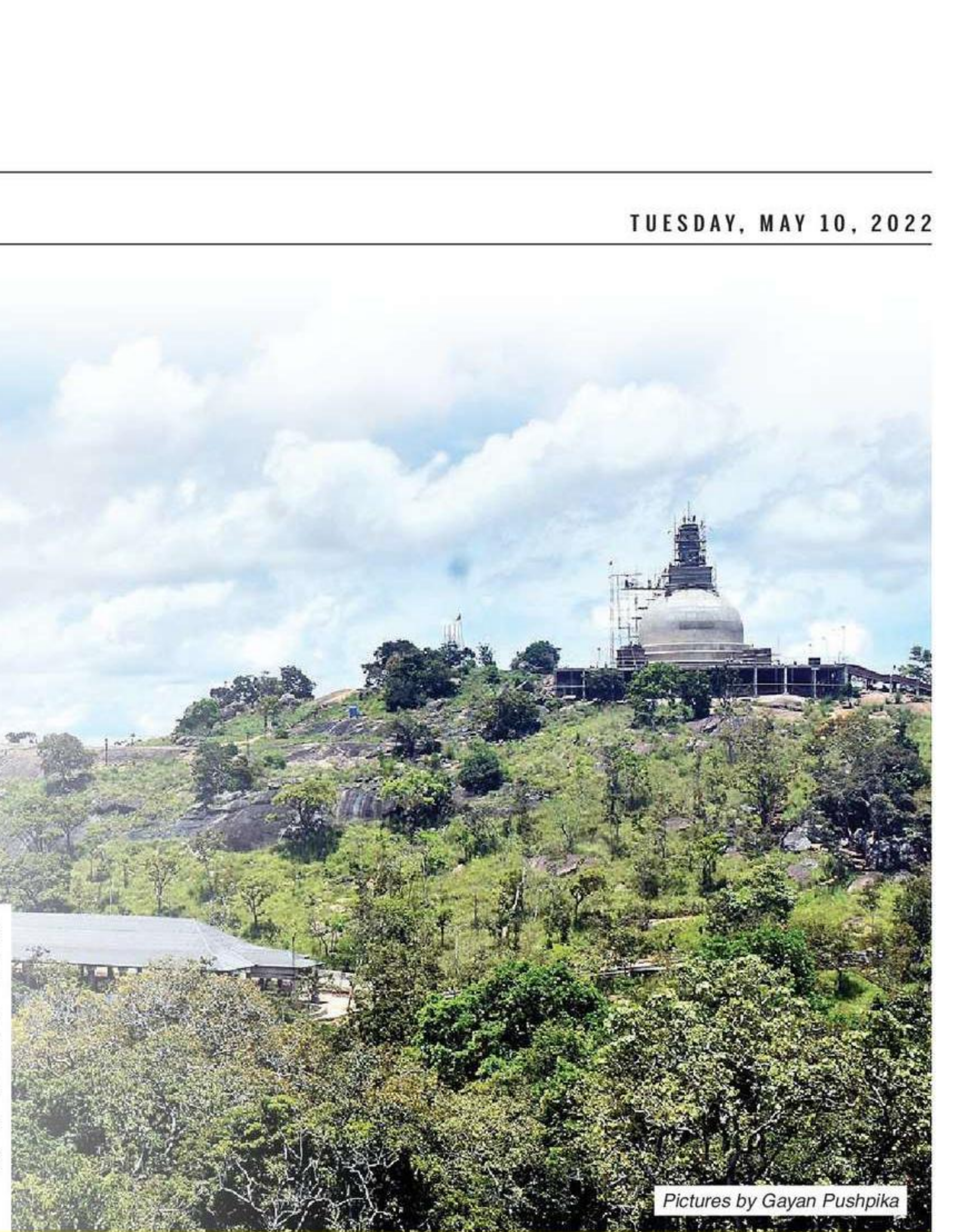


'Revival of Kuragala'

project to coincide with

State Vesak Festival



Pictures by Gayan Pushpika

Sri Lanka's largest Buddhist Temple Complex construction project implemented at the Kuragala historical site, the 'Revival of Kuragala' programme has been completed 13 months after its initiation this year (2022). The founder of the project, Ven. Wathurakumbure Dhammarathana Thera launched this rapid revitalization project in March 2021 with plans to complete it with the dawn of the Vesak Full Moon Poya Day this year. The 'Revival of Kuragala' is the largest such project implemented in the past 1000-year period in the country. The completion of the project will be symbolized by the State Vesak Festival which will be held at the Kuragala sacred site this year.



LAHIRU FERNANDO

Located in the Kalthota Divisional Secretariat Division in the Ratnapura District of the Sabaragamuwa Province, Kuragala has been identified as a pre-historic archaeological site which houses the ruins of an ancient Buddhist Cave Temple Complex. The written historical evidence of over 2,300 years has proved that the Arahats Bhikkus have lived in this sacred site. Kuragala is considered as the oldest archaeological site found in the Intermediate Zone. It was known in ancient times as the 'Mahathittaka Wel Yaya' (Mahathittaka Line of Paddy Fields).

The Kuragala Cave inscriptions belonging to the Second Century B.C. are in the early-Brahmin script. According to these inscriptions, in ancient times this cave temple complex was called the 'Cave of Datta and Samudda'.

Archaeological excavations in Kuragala have found stone tools, fossilized bone fragments and remains of a human skeleton which is believed to date back to more than 16,000 years. These evidences showcase that humans have lived in this area in the prehistoric period. Investigations have further revealed that these humans might have had close links with the coastal areas as the excavators had also found the remains of seashells from Kuragala.

The Kuragala Historical Site is located on the Balangoda-Kalthota Road approximately 24 kilometres away from the Balangoda town.

Due to its location, which is situated at an elevation of 360 metres above sea level it is the first mountain to be seen when coming from the Hambantota area. The sailors can see this majestic mountain which rises above the Kalthota Valley from the sea off Hambantota before the shore.

The Sinhala - Buddhist community in the country had lost the right of this Sacred Site, which is a heritage of the Buddhist community for a period of 50 years as it was in the hands of a certain religious extremist group who had forcibly occupied the place since 1971. Numerous attempts made throughout these five decades to rescue this Sacred Site failed until the year 2021.

In 1971, Ven. Wataddara Gnanissara Thera launched the struggle to liberate Kuragala from the pagans. Later, the struggle was continued by Ven. Deltota Dhammajothi Thera and this sacred place was handed over to Ven. Wathurakumbure Dhammarathana Thera, who is the present incumbent of the temple in February, 2021.

'REVIVAL OF KURAGALA'

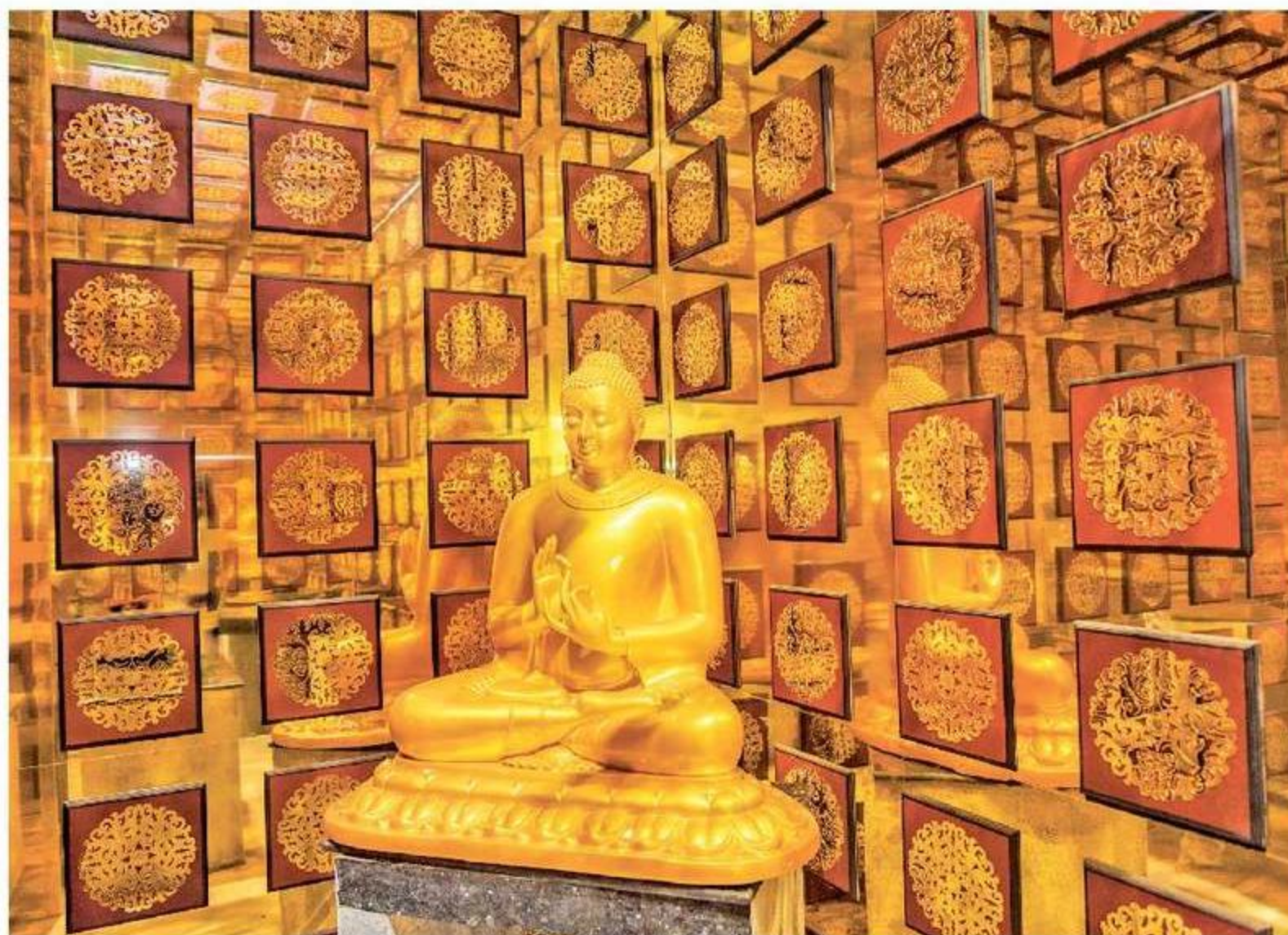
The 'Revival of Kuragala' programme is the result of the five-decade-long continuous struggle by the Maha Sangha and the Sri Lankan Buddhists to rescue the ancient heritage of Kuragala from the pagans. After Kuragala temple was taken over by Ven. Dhammarathana Thera, who is also known as the Nelligala Hamuduruwo in 2021, a well-planned and scheduled programme was launched by him to rebuild the pride of the Sinhala - Buddhist Community in Kuragala. This programme launched on March 28, 2021 was named as the 'Revival of Kuragala'.

At the launching ceremony of the programme, Venerable Dhammarathana Thera assured that Kuragala will be rebuilt by him within a given period of 13 months without dragging it any further. Under this giant rebuilding project, the sacred site has been revived through four separate zones, namely the Amisa Zone, Spiritual Zone, Educational Zone and the Economic Zone. This is the first time in the Sri Lankan history, a sacred site covering all these four areas is constructed.

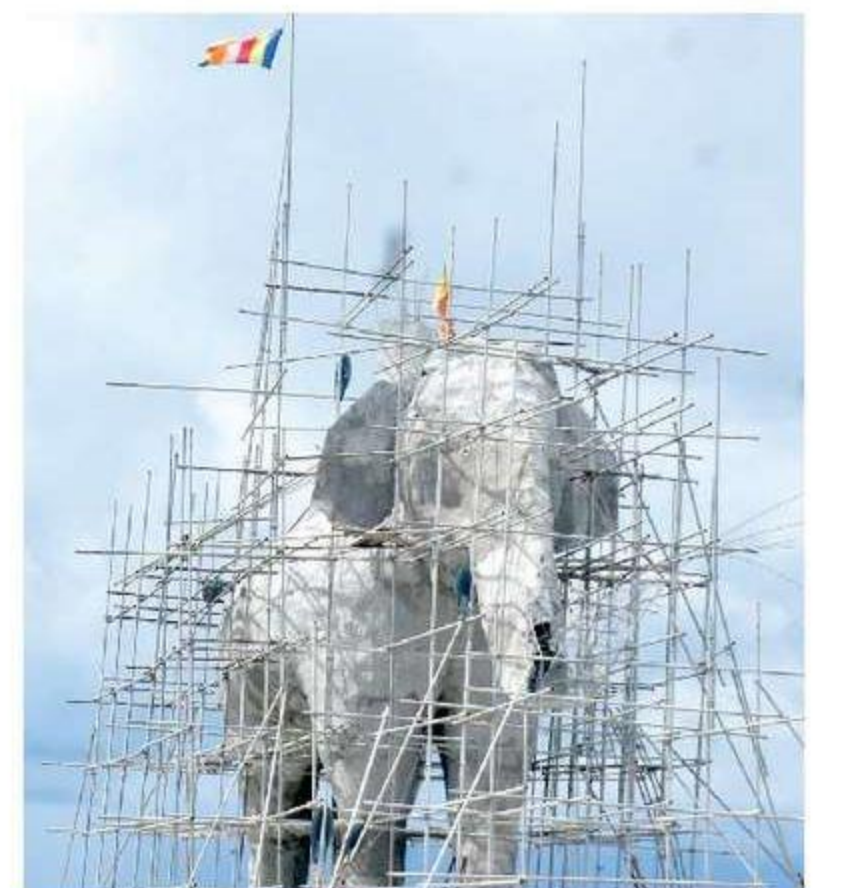
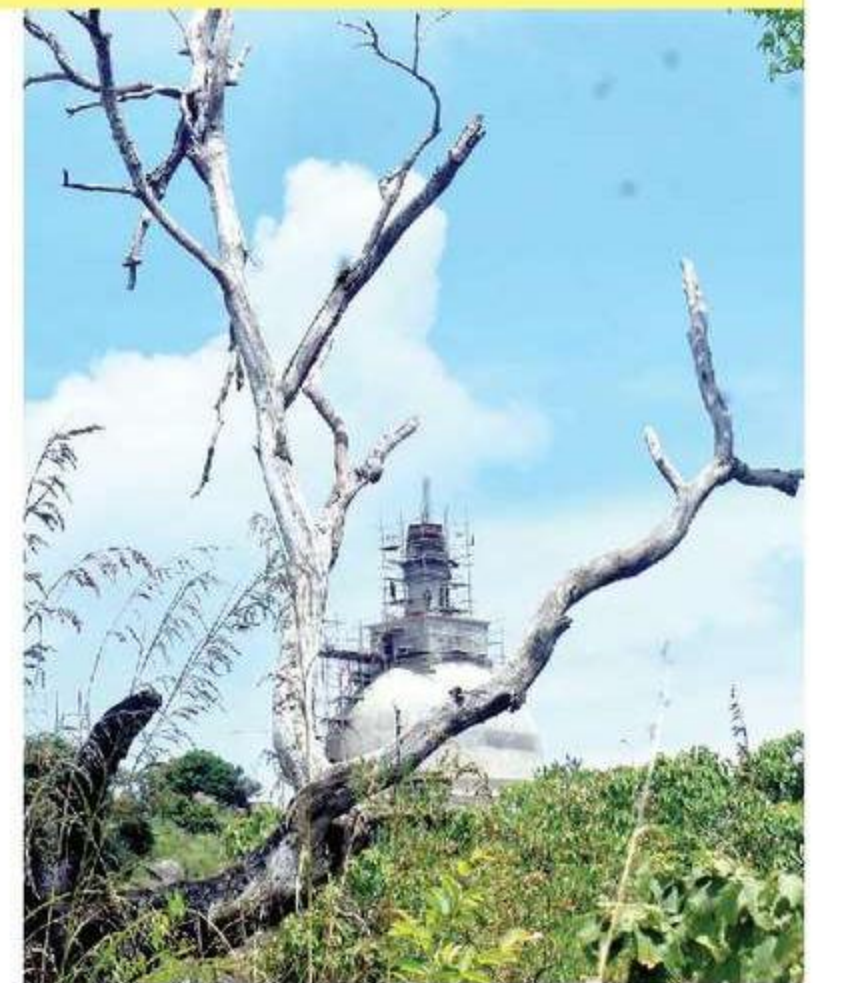
Throughout the entire Kuragala Historical Site, which is 150 acres in extent, a total of over 80 constructions, which are different in structure and the purpose to each other have been constructed. They include the 130-feet high 'Asadisi Shakya Sugatha Maha Seya' (the Stupa), a Dharma Shala (Sermon Hall) 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 four-storied building for Sanghasa and the administrative office, a statue of God Saman which is similar to the statue at Nelligala Temple, a 500-feet high staircase, a Lion statue to pay tribute to all those who fought, dedicated and saved the Kuragala Sacred Area from pagans since



Picture by Tharanga Jayawickrama



Picture by Tharanga Jayawickrama



"Kuragala should not be a political topic for any present, past or future politician as the sacred site has not been constructed with public money. I am totally against that. Also, I will not allow anyone to politicize the Kuragala Buddhist Heritage."
- Ven. Wathurakumbure Dhammarathana Thera



1971, access roads, garden area and also a reservoir called 'Kuragala Wewa'.

The Amisa Zone consists of all the constructions belonging to a temple such as the Stupa, the Sermon Hall, the Sacred Relics House, the Bodhi Pavilion, the Buddha statue and the statue of God Saman while the Spiritual Zone consists of the separate place for the Bhikkus to practice meditations. This area (monastery) will provide accommodation to 50 Bhikkus at a time.

In the Educational Zone, the Shakya Sugatha Vocational Training and Cultural Centre will be constructed in order to provide opportunities to the youth and those who need assistance. The Economic Zone aims at setting up an industrial zone in order to uplift the economy of the area residents. Constructions in the spiritual, educational and the economic zones will be completed within this year.

The '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 once the construction is finished. The ceremony to enshrine Sacred Relics in the Stupa was held in January, 2022.

Dr. Helaruwan Pasan Kumara and Ms. Nerajanala Sarojani have extended the contribution to construct the 'Asadisi Shakya Sugatha Maha Seya' while, Ms. Disna Wanigasekara and Chandrasena Wickramaratne have contributed to construct the sermon hall.

According to Ven. Dhammarathana Thera, the total amount of funds spent on the Revival of Kuragala Project is Rs.1.5 billion. All these funds had been received from donors and Buddhist devotees. No public funds of the Government was spent to carry out this giant and unprecedented temple complex project, he said. Also nearly two million people have contributed to this project with labour. Sri Lanka Army personnel who engaged in the construction activities round-the-clock are also among them.

In parallel with the Revival of Kuragala Project, steps have also been taken to develop several Buddhist temples and under-privileged schools in the Kuragala

area as a social service. Also the Government institutions have taken steps to develop infrastructure facilities such as the dilapidated Balangoda - Kalthota Road and electricity supply in the area in order to uplift the living condition of the area residents.

Ven. Dhammarathana Thera and the Project Committee faced numerous challenges when implementing the 'Revival of Kuragala' project. Mainly, the project was launched amidst a global pandemic which had severely affected the country. While the constructions are going on, the project committee also encountered the political and economic crisis, due to which the construction activities were disturbed to some extent. Increased price and the shortage of material severely affected the construction activities. Completion of such a giant project within one year was also another challenge. However, the project has now come to an end as scheduled despite any of these issues.

The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (Lake House) is the print media sponsor of the 'Revival of Kuragala' project.

STATE VESAK FESTIVAL - 2022

The State Vesak Festival of 2022 will be held at the Kuragala Sacred Site from May 14. The Government sponsored event will be held with the participation of the Maha Sangha, political authority, devotees and those who supported the rebuilding of the Kuragala temple complex.

In parallel with the event the Government will declare Kuragala as a sacred area through a gazette notification.

The State Vesak Festival will be followed by a series of religious and traditional Vesak commemorations during the Vesak Week conducted from May 14 - 22. A total of 2.5 million visitors are expected to visit the Kuragala temple during this Vesak Week.

The State Vesak Festival will also symbolize the completion of the 'Revival of Kuragala' project while vesting the Kuragala sacred site with the Sinhala - Buddhist devotees of the country.

