



20th Diwali Virtual celebrations: E-reception on 3rd November 2021 - 16.00 to 18.00

The Hindu Forum of Britain [HFB] with Parliamentary hosts, Rt Hon Bob Blackman MP and Lord Navnit Dholakia celebrated its 20th Diwali event at the House of Commons virtually on 3rd November.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the celebrations took place in the virtual world with 55 panelists, more than 94 attendees on the webinar platform and many more watched the event on FaceBook Live turning it into a vibrant and colourful virtual space, a wonderful manifestation of the spirit of Diwali.

Ms. Reena Ranger OBE welcomed guests on this great occasion and invited the spiritual commissioners to light the lamps to begin the festival. Swami Surya Prabha Didi, Head of Brahmishi Mission and Visakha Devi ji, President of the Bhakti Vedanta Manor, ISKCON Temple, lit the lamps, chanted prayers to welcome festival devotees and gave their blessings.

The President of HFB and Trustee of the HFB Charity, Mrs Trupti Patel, in her opening address to guests on the virtual platform, warmly welcomed everyone and spoke about the importance and significance of Diwali to the Hindu Community and how the profound principles that reflect this important festival was the basis on which the community responded to the COVID crisis in the UK, with a tremendous amount of sewa being given in all aspects of life in lockdown. She further stated, 'This year we are celebrating Diwali in the midst of the CoP26 UN Summit on Climate Change and it is heartening to see efforts by most countries on the earth in finding solution to Net Zero by 2050. This reminds me of an age old tradition of our Hindu Dharma, Sanatan Vedic traditions of considering everything in the Universe as one unit. Let us start practicing ancient ways of town planning, common land management, plant those trees considered best for the environment, which we call Panchvati. Let us have the sacred plant Tulsi ji in every household, which will bring about not only calming effects but also release more oxygen into the air'.

She invited everyone to observe silence in memory of all departed souls during the year.

Hon Bob Blackman MP, as the Chair of the British Hindus APPG, recipient of Padma Shri award from the Government of Bharat in early 2020, wished everyone a safe, happy and Shubh Diwali. He also thanked the Hindu community of Britain for stepping up to assist people in a typical fashion, not seeking glory and honours but just doing it because it is SEVA. He thanked Lord Krishna for the services given by people who are no longer with us. He stated that the Hindu community is committed to counter climate change and the Hindu way of life can actually make sure that we reduce the impact on our climate.

This year, it was a great privilege to welcome back Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, the Home Secretary, live on the Diwali celebrations platform. Both Mr Bob Blackman and Mrs Trupti Patel introduced her with her accolades in both public and political life.

Rt. Hon Priti Patel wished everyone a very Happy Diwali; she mentioned that virtual celebrations have actually reminded us of what the community have missed. She spoke of the spiritual nature of Diwali and the power of prayers for the Hindu community. She paid tribute to the community with great pride and humility, highlighting how the community has come together at the time of crisis and helped those who are less

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fortunate, including helping vulnerable people, mandirs and gurudwaras doing food deliveries and much more. She said that the Hindu community should work hard to hold on to this spirit of care and compassion along with its spiritual values which are incredible.

The Home Secretary launched the official E-Diwali Brochure.: <http://www.hfb.org.uk/events.html>

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak, the first Hindu Chancellor of the Exchequer, wished people from the Hindu Forum of Britain and people across the country, the very best for their celebrations. He thanked Britain's Hindus, Sikhs and Jains for all the sacrifices they have made and for the part they played in helping those who needed help during the pandemic.

Junior Minister Declan Kearney, on behalf of Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill stated, 'Diwali celebrations inspire us to be the best we can be, to be kind, to be grateful and to have humility. Let us all look forward to brighter days' and wished everyone Shubh Diwali.

Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, Vice Chair of the APPG British Hindus, thanked Hindu Forum of Britain for organising a tremendously inspiring, thought provoking and happy virtual Diwali event. She wished everyone Happy Diwali and reflected on the spiritual nature of Diwali. She also appreciated the contribution made by people of Indian heritage.

Lord Dolar Popat wished Happy Diwali to everyone and appreciated Members of HFB for supporting various initiatives during this pandemic, urging further action for a Green and clean Diwali.

Lord Rami Ranger, discussed Diwali as a very significant festival for Hindus to celebrate due to its profound meaning and wished all health, wealth and prosperity.

Lord Gadia shared warmest greetings for Diwali, mentioning that this year Diwali falls in the middle of COP26 summit to counter climate change, and shared how protection of Mother Earth is a core part of Hindu culture. He also suggested that during Diwali this year, all reflect on the changes necessary for a sustainable future.

Sister Jayanti from Brahmakumaris UK greeted all wishing all a very Happy Diwali and mentioned that things were getting a bit brighter and that people had started looking at the brighter side of the life. She urged people to light the inner light and connect with the Supreme light.

Dr. Harriet Crabtree, Chief Executive of the Interfaith Network UK wished all a very Happy Diwali.

Dr Tribhuvan Jotangia's Vishwa Hindu Parishad UK, Mr Dhirajbhai, HSS UK and Mr Rajnish Kashyap General Secretary of the HCUK thanked the HFB for organizing a lively and elegant virtual celebrations and wished all a very healthy, happy peaceful Diwali and Nutan Varsh.

Mr. Velji Vekaria, Chair of the HFB Diwali Committee invited Patrons of HFB, Mr Shashi Vekaria, Mr Rickie Sehgal and Mr C. B. Patel to give their blessings. Mr Puneet Dwivedi, Vice President Scottish Chapter of HFB wished everyone a Shubh Diwali and hoped for the next generation to preserve the eco-friendly practices of the Hindu way of life.

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The virtual celebrations of Diwali, had a significantly different feature this year, in incorporating a keynote speaker who shared their experiences in managing a hugely successful Environmental project impacting future generations.

Mr. Pradeep Sangwan, Founder and first volunteer at Healing Himalayas Foundation (HHF) wished Happy Diwali to everyone. He drew attention to how local communities in the Himalayas were facing a huge problem owing to excessive tourism and discarded waste matter generated by tourists, and how HHF was working to address this. The HHF team have created material recovery centers for waste segregation at various places in Himachal Pradesh to tackle the garbage issues in rural Himalayan regions. He also gave a warning to young adventurers, asking them to adopt sustainable practices in tourism, and to reignite their passion to work for the benefit of the environment or to stay at home.

Mrs. Trupti Patel, President of HFB introduced the Hindu Environmental Task Force which has been created to spread awareness about and undertake action to counter climate change, stating that all major HFB member organisations were a part of it.

Dr. Shorna Pal, Founder-Director of Lancaster Environment Action & Protection (LEAP) spoke about how LEAP was working with HFB to provide support for HETF activities, including developing an Environmental Assessment and Management (EAM) Toolkit for Temples and Samaj Buildings and providing training on EAM to these organisations. The EAM Toolkit can be accessed at <http://www.hfb.org.uk/training-on-environmental-management-plan.html>

Dr. Richa Soni, Director of LEAP also mentioned the Eco-Diwali: Things to Make & Do resource booklet created by the LEAP team. She mentioned that it was a pilot that had been endorsed and supported by HFB, and that the feedback so far had been excellent. Dr Soni mentioned that the booklet was available from a link on the HFB website: <http://www.hfb.org.uk/training-on-environmental-management-plan.html>

We were privileged to listen to a beautiful bhajan “Raghupati Raghav” by Mr. Abhi Yogi from Simply Sanatan, as well as watching a video highlighting the importance of Annakoot by Swami Narayan Mandir, along with a mesmerizing prayer dance by artists from Sarjan Nartan Academy and Shanti Path by Abhinandana Dance Academy.

A Vote of Thanks was rendered by Mr Velji Vekaria, the Chair for the Diwali Committee of HFB and President of SKLP. The Team HFB specially thank Ms Reena Ranger for conducting the event masterfully and the members of the Technical Team of HSS UK, Mr Vishal Shah, Mr Harsh Haria and Mr Ritesh Thakar for flawless broadcasting of the event.

Finally, Mrs Harsha Shukla MBE, Vice President (North) for HFB and President of the Hindu Council of North, recited a beautiful mantra from the Upanishads and the evening concluded where it had begun, with a slide show of tributes to our past presidents Mr Arjan Vekaria and Mr Haribhai Halai.

Watch a recording of the live event on FaceBook: HFB Virtual Diwali 2021

<https://www.facebook.com/HinduForumBritain/videos/638173753872182>

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Diwali is the culmination of a journey – the path to enlightenment and establishing oneself in *Ram Rajya*, the Kingdom of Lord Ram. In a sense it is a metaphorical journey of the triumph over the vicissitudes of life; it is about a variety of relationships both human and divine and how these can be transformed through devotion and dedication; the journey is individual as well as collective, bringing life and joy to both. The destination is one of being established in devotion to and enlightenment of the Supreme.

As we celebrate Diwali in all its meaning and significance, we remember that it is also about a unique form of leader –the Servant Leader. Lord Rama gives the analogy of the symbolism of the chariot where the four wheels represent the four attributes of character, courage, ethics and valor which support and take the vehicle to its true destination. The four reins of the chariot are forgiveness, compassion, consistency and equanimity which represent the mental attributes and the marks of a true and effective servant leader, able to lead society towards light and joy, controlling the four horses symbolizing strength, energy, enthusiasm and passion. This is what the Hindu Forum of Britain has always aspired for and achieved in many areas of its activities as the major umbrella body of Hindu organisations in the four nations of the United Kingdom.

The Hindu Forum of Britain is the largest umbrella body with a broad-based membership of over 320 Hindu organisations from different regions and cultural backgrounds in Britain. At the core of the Forum's activities is a strong belief in the richness and diversity of the Hindu culture, its value system that encompasses respect for all beings and faiths, and a cultural heritage that facilitates community cohesion and coexistence.

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