

Thousands come together to celebrate Diwali at Trafalgar Square



Anoushka Shankar entertaining the revellers

London's Trafalgar Square once again became a scene of colour and festivity on Sunday, despite warnings of severe storms, as thousands flocked to the Square in the spirit of Diwali. The free Diwali Festival, organized by the Mayor of London in association with the Diwali in London committee, was supported by headline sponsor Lebara and media partner Zee TV.

People gathered to enjoy the festival, including acts performed by local Londoners showcasing their diverse talent, from a vibrant Bhajan band, to a diverse representation of traditional and cultural dances from your latest Bollywood charts to the traditions of local regions.

Thousands of people had lined up outside at 1pm to enter the square and were given the opportunity to participate in London's largest outdoor Garba dance. Members of the public excitedly

queued up for the chance to wear a traditional Indian sari as well whilst others indulged in the vast variety of delicious food stalls had to offer

The official opening peace lamp ceremony was led by Diwali in London (DIL) Chairman - Ameet Aggarwal, from the Art of Living alongside fellow distinguished guests Ray Lewis, Greater London Authority Senior Advisor to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Dr Virander Paul, Acting Indian High Commissioner and Srutidharma das, Temple president of Bhaktivedanta Manor, Watford.

Diwali in London were privileged to have world renowned artist Anoushka Shankar perform some transcendental and powerful compositions on stage this year. Ms Shankar said: "It feels really special to me to be connected to Diwali in London especially as I was born here and recently



Virander Paul, Acting High Commissioner, Ameet Aggarwal, Chairman and others lighting the lamp



Crowds enjoying the Diwali festivities



DIL Committee Members

moved back to the city."

Ameet Aggarwal, Chairman, Diwali in London said: "Trafalgar square once again welcomed the diversity of cosmopolitan London for the Diwali festival; with an over spilling crowd. The Square was beautifully decorated with lamps and the famous fountains were specially lit for the occasion. The spirit of Diwali in the form of celebration and mutual respect was shared by all on the day. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a diverse yet united committee."

Boris Johnson appeared by video link and gave his blessings for Diwali. He said: "London would not be the exciting and dynamic city that it is without the many communities that contribute to its dynamism and prosperity, something that is reflected in festivals like our Diwali celebrations. It has a powerful message, about peace, mutual respect and the victory of light over evil, which is important for Londoners as well as to Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. I wish

Origins of Diwali on the Square

Ranu Mehta-Radia

The idea of resonating the message of Diwali to our youths and the Nation was conceived when 6 prominent Hindu leaders met at Shri Nitin Palan's house in 2002. The discussions round the table revolved around instilling Hindu dharma to our future generations as well as sharing the universal values of love, light and peace with the different communities across the UK.

Their strategy was to target a prominent public place where Diwali could be celebrated inviting Londoners to a Free Festival as well as raise the profile of the Hindu community and our fundamental values to all political parties.

Stepping up to take a lead to celebrate Diwali at a prominent London venue rested on the shoulders of Nitin Palan, an active member of the iconic Swami Narayan Neasden temple.

Ramesh Kallidai of Hindu Forum committed to taking Diwali to the House of Commons which is also a national fixture now in the House of Commons calendar.

The first Diwali on Trafalgar brought a few hundred people to the Square, those who were present on that historic day remember standing under umbrellas as the rains came down. Defiantly, the small team were determined to make a

success the following year, and contacted other prominent Hindu, Sikh and Jain organisations to collectively work together.

The Diwali in London Committee now consists of 12 organisations:

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir
Chinmaya Mission UK
International Society for Krishna Consciousness UK
The Art of Living
National Hindu Students Forum
Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (UK)
Brahmin Society of North London
Oshwal Association of the UK
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
Telugu Association of London
Met Police Hindu Association
Sai School of Harrow.

The Chair is rotated annually to ensure that each Organisation gets the opportunity to host the Festival. Youth Wings of each organisations are mentored to shadow the current Coordinators so the baton can be handed over to our dynamic young people to manage the event in the future.

Diwali in London Committee clearly demonstrates that all Hindus, Sikhs and Jains can work together to strengthen our communities. The annual festival now attracts up to 20,000 visitors.

everyone celebrating in happy and prosperous London and beyond a Diwali. We look forward to the next Diwali in Trafalgar Square!

Havoc and disruption in wake of St Jude's Day Storm

Four people were killed, 625,000 properties without electricity, hundreds of uprooted or ripped apart trees and chaos for commuters as train companies halted nearly all services to and from London and more than 130 flights at Heathrow were cancelled, as 100mph winds battered southern England.

The St Jude's Day storm, named after the patron saint of lost causes, was the worst gale to hit the UK in more than a

decade. The damage is expected to cost over several hundred million pounds to repair and clean up. Victims of the storm include a sporty 17-year-old grammar school girl, who was killed as she slept when a 30ft tree crushed the caravan where she had been living while building work was carried out on her family's home.

One of the worst scenes of devastation was at a home in Hounslow, where two people died



when a tree blown over by the wind caused a suspected gas explosion. The bodies of the man and woman, who have not been named,

were found in the rubble of the property hours after the blast. Three other people were taken to hospital with cuts and burns.

Diwali greetings

Asian Voice will not be publishing the **Saturday 9th November** issue as we shall be on our Diwali break.

In the meantime please enjoy our exclusive Diwali magazine that has a wide range of articles and helpful information on various interesting subjects.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers, supporters, advertisers and well wishers a very **Happy Diwali and a Prosperous New Year** ahead.



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Our new contact no.: +91 02692 - 237511
M: +91 7600037501 • E-mail: sbi.13478@sbi.co.in

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