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Monument of peace opens at Gorai

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Mumbai: Thousands of Vipassana practitioners from India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and other parts of the world came together at Gorai where the doors of Global Vipassana Pagoda were thrown open to masses on Sunday.

President Pratibha Patil inaugurated the 325-ft-tall stone structure, which is the world's largest dome without a pillar. It took 11 years, 2.5 million tonnes of stones, 3.87 million man days and widespread research to build the monument of peace and harmony. The structure, which has enough space for 8,000 people to meditate together, may soon turn into a hub for spiritual tourists—enshrined at the top of the pagoda are bone relics of Lord Buddha donated by the Sri Lankan government and the Mahabodhi Society of India.

A vipassana practitioner herself, Patil lauded the efforts of Acharya S N Goenka, founder of Global Vipassana Foundation (GVF), in propagating the ancient meditation technique that was rediscovered by Gautam Buddha. Known to cure universal ills, the technique involves mental purification, which helps people fight stress and live a more balanced life.

Designed by traditional stone structure expert Chandubhai Sompura, the global pagoda stands as a symbol of gratitude to Myanmar as well as its vipassana teachers—the Gorai structure is even modelled on the Shwedagon pagoda at Yangon in Myanmar. Wearing a brown longyi with a Kombong tied around his head, U Shwe, member of the Shwedagon Pagoda of Myan-

DONATIONS FOR PAGODA

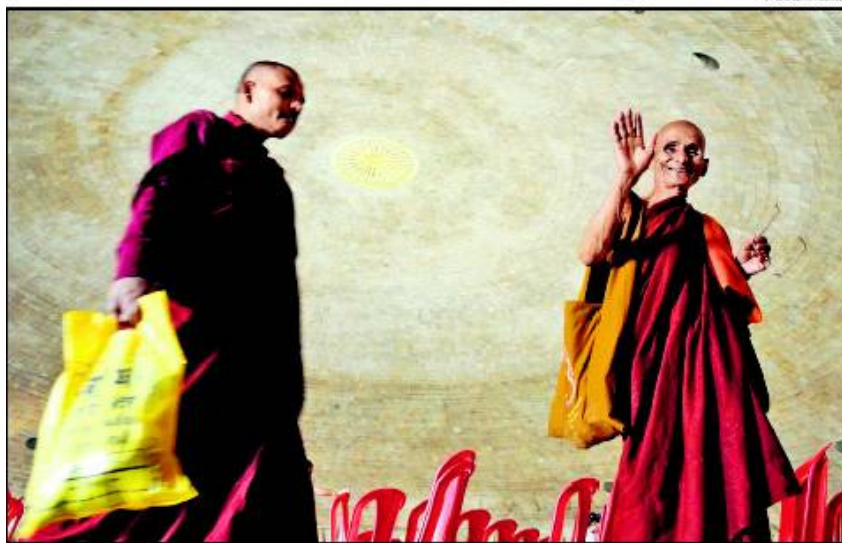
The pagoda is built on the land donated by a student's family. Citizens of Myanmar presented the marble used for the floor as well as the umbrella placed atop the structure, while people from Thailand gave the golden paint used typically at pagodas. This colour is usually not available in India. Former students of vipassana contributed around Rs 80 crore to construct the structure. TNN

mar, said, "This global pagoda has been built a little shorter than our gold-covered one in Myanmar so as to show reverence to the original."

The pagoda will have one-day courses for students who are already well-versed with the meditation technique. Vipassana student Kusum Galanga from Gujarat's Kutch district explained that vipassana involves breathing exercises where practitioners control their minds, avoid talking and abstain from all other distractions.

"It helped me deal with my family and work pressures. Now I am a calmer person," says Galanga who often visits the pagoda at Bada in Kutch.

Among those present at the event were Governor S C Jamir, state deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal, ministers Sharad Pawar, Praful Patel, Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra and her husband Robert Vadra, several foreign dignitaries, members of the diplomatics corps in Mumbai and Global Vipassana Foundation chairman Subhash Chandra.



FOR HARMONY: Global Vipassana Pagoda was inaugurated by President Pratibha Patil on Sunday