

Special Cultural Event welcoming new Indian Ambassador to Czech Republic

On Thursday 23 August 2018, Her Excellency Mrs Narinder Chauhan, the new Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Czech Republic, was given a warm welcome by Vishwaguruji, other special guests, including the Slovenian Government Minister responsible for Development, Strategic Projects & Cohesion, Ms Alenka Smerkolj, and hundreds of *Yoga in Daily Life* (YIDL) members and *bhaktas*, at a special cultural event in *Mahaprabhu Dip Ashram*, Strilky.

His Holiness Bharat Gaurav Vishwaguru Mahamandaleshwar Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda Ji organised a beautiful program to congratulate the Ambassador on her new post, with a celebration of the special appreciation Czech people have for the spiritual culture and wisdom of India.

Upon arrival into the Jadan Hall, Her Excellency was received in the traditional Indian way, by being presented with a flower mala (garland), chanting of *arati* (prayers) and a *tilak* (sacred mark) placed on her forehead, then given a symbolic coconut and shawl by Vishwaguruji. And in the traditional Czech way of welcome, she was served an offering of salt and bread.

H.E. was then invited by H.H. Vishwaguruji to light a candle on the altar, marking this special occasion with a symbol of the oneness of Divine Light present within all.

Sugand Puri (Gregor Kos from Slovenia, Secretary General of the *World Yoga Union*) warmly welcomed and introduced the Ambassador and guest speakers to Strilky, in the largest *Yoga in Daily Life Ashram* outside of India. He recalled that Vishwaguruji's master, Holy Guruji Dharmasamrat Paramhans Sri Swami Madhavanandaji's holy feet also walked upon the earth of the *ashram* grounds, leaving his divine blessing for all.

Mahamandaleshwar Swami Vivek Puriji from Croatia remarked that the *ashram* in Strilky has, over the past 24 years since its foundation, become a lighthouse for spiritual seekers and a home for all – inviting Her Excellency to consider it her home too.

Swami Madhuras Puri then captivated the audience with a beautiful raga on the Indian *bansuri* flute.

A video presentation was shown, highlighting the many activities and growth of *Yoga in Daily Life* in the Czech and Slovak Republics over the past 45 years, since Vishwaguruji's first invitation to Czechoslovakia in March 1973.

Head of the Orthopedic Department of the University Hospital Brno, Czech Republic, and President of the Czech Union of Yoga in Daily Life, Dr Martin Repko, gave thanks to India for the great Science of Yoga and informed the Ambassador that there are more than 50 YIDL centers in the Czech Republic with more than 350 certified YIDL teachers, who all volunteer their time, teaching in the spirit of *karma yoga* – selfless service. He also reported that western medicine is moving ever closer to yogic science, in recognising the connection between mind and body (psycho-somatic) when it comes to successfully treating illness and disease.

A group of children led by their teacher Sita, then skillfully recited *Vedic mantras* and displayed the *Bari Khatu Pranam* routine of *asanas*, particular to the *Yoga in Daily Life System*. They then performed the traditional *Raksha Bandhan* ceremony by tying a *raki* – thread of sister/brotherhood – around the wrists of Vishwaguruji and their friends. Her Excellency and Ms Smerkolj also took the opportunity to each tie a *raki* around the wrist of Vishwaguruji.

Sugand Puri announced that Vishwaguruji plans to approach the United Nations with the proposal to mark *Raksha Bandhan* day as the official *UN International Day of Brothers and Sisters* each year, and called for the support of all for this initiative.

The priest from the local *Parish Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary* in Strilky village, Father Jaroslav Štancl, then addressed the audience, expressing his heartfelt joy at being invited to the event and agreeing that the *Ashram* is indeed “a light for all seekers”. He said that the Christian and Yogic spiritual paths are “going together towards the same destination” and he hoped that whenever seminar participants should happen to see him or other locals in the village, they would meet “not as strangers, but always as good friends.”

Another musical item was then presented, with Swami Madhuramji, Bhakti Deviji and Narsingpuriji singing Holy Guruji’s *bhajan*, *Dhanya Dhanya Bharata Bhumi* – proclaiming the the glories of the blessed and holy land of India.

Slovenian Minister, Ms Alenka Smerkolj then rose speak of the importance of the *Global Agenda 2030*, the international agreement to work for sustainable development, which she said, “touches and effects the lives of us all.” She praised the tireless work of Vishwaguruji in promoting these goals through the teachings of Yoga, by constantly reminding that each individual must remain aware of their own actions and make the effort to act responsibly and kindly towards each other, all creatures and the environment around us.

Bhakti Deviji again took to the stage and expertly performed a classical Indian dance to Lord Shiva in the *Bharatnatyam* style.

Guest of honor, H.E. Ambassador Chauhan, spoke briefly, clearly touched by the program and giving her thanks, declaring that “the dedication and love for India here is quite exceptional”. She invited all to stay in touch with her “so that together we can create World Peace.” She then kindly presented official certificates to some newly graduated *Yoga in Daily Life* Teachers.

His Holiness Vishwaguruji then addressed the gathering. He praised the accomplishments and gave his blessings to each of the special guests, including also Sri Gulabji Kothari and Sadhvi Daya Mata from China. He said that very soon the whole world will be practicing Yoga and this will lead to greater peace and harmony within and between people of all countries and religions, pointing out again that Yoga itself is a science and not a religion.

Finally, with a few concluding words, Sri Vivek Ojha, President of the Czech Hindu Society *Vishwa Guru Dip Hindu Mandir* in Prague, presented a collected donation to Her Excellency, on behalf of all present, towards disaster relief efforts following the recent floods in Kerala, south India.

The program ended with everyone standing together for a rendition of the Indian national anthem, ‘*Jana Gana Mana*’.