

Mumbai Mirror

TEMPERATURE MAX 29 | MIN 19 | HUMIDITY 53% FORECAST CLEAR SKIES, COOL | SUNRISE 0703 HRS | SUNSET 1803 HRS | MOONRISE 11.46 | MOONSET 23.54 | DOLLAR 45.24 | GBP 71.42

PSYCHO DAD DEAD, NEIGHBOURS FIND BODY DAYS LATER

Vasai resident Francis Gomes had kept his wife and three daughters in captivity for seven years; Decomposing corpse was found in Nalla Sopara flat, cause of death unknown



Francis Gomes's (left) wife Theresa (right, centre) died in an old-age a few months after she and her daughters were rescued

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Francis Gomes, the psycho dad who confined his wife and three young daughters to their house for seven years, was found dead at his rented apartment in Oswal Nagari in Nalla Sopara on Sunday. In September 2009, cops and members of an NGO stormed his flat in Vasai to rescue the three women, who suffered not just confinement but also beatings and starvation.

On Sunday, police found Gomes's body, which they said must have been rotting for the past one week, after neighbours, unable to bear the stench, called the control room. Nobody knows when and how he died.

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Mumbai Mirror

MUMBAI IS VOTING FOR MUMBAI
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SEVEN WONDERS OF MUMBAI

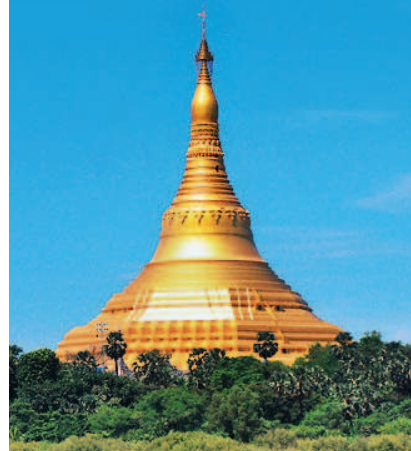
The response to Mumbai's Seven Wonders campaign launched by this paper in association with MTDC on Friday has been unprecedented. Among the entries received were surprises like the Gorai Pagoda and Antilia, billionaire Mukesh Ambani's new residence, and of course the perennials like the Gateway and CST.

It was a tough task for our panel to draw a short-list of 15 from the thousands of preferences you have sent. But they did their job and the verdict is in. Starting today, we begin profiling the 15 sites, one each day. You can start voting right away if you think what appears in the paper today qualifies for being crowned as one of Mumbai's Seven Wonders. But that's only the first phase.

After all fifteen contenders have been featured, we will open the entire field for voting again. And yes, once the votes have been counted and the Seven Wonders consecrated, will begin a celebration of Mumbai's heritage and glory.

Thank you, dear readers, for making this campaign such an overwhelming success.

FOR TODAY'S WONDER NOMINEE, GORAI PAGODA, TURN TO PAGE 10



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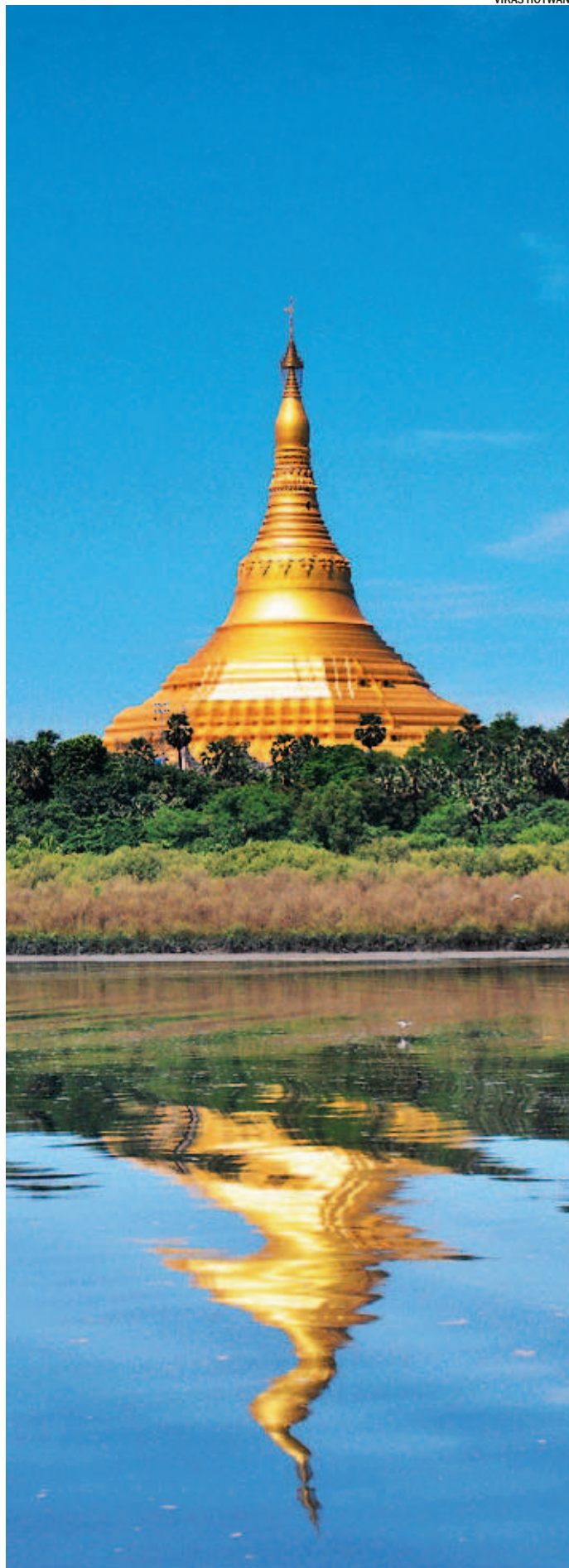


Revival of the stone age

Beyond the Global Pagoda's spiritual undertone lies the architectural charisma of 700-kilo stones interlocked in a megalithic style. Together, they have put the stone wonder on the world map

VIKAS HOTWANI

• VIKAS HOTWANI



A view of the Global Pagoda and (right) the 13,000-kilo bell at the entrance of the pagoda

One ticket? One?" the man asks in surprise. Dressed in Hawaiian shirt, the EsselWorld employee selling ferry tickets can't fathom the notion of a supposedly solo outing to the amusement park. "But I am going to the pagoda, next to the park!" you struggle to clarify, over the din of the impatient 'family crowd'. And then point to the pagoda, bright and shiny under the morning sun, right across to Gorai.

On the other side, the road forks into two and you can't help but notice the contrast. One, swarming with a hyper-active group anticipating a good time; and the other, a silent one leading up to the pagoda. We make our choice and leave the picnic-ky chatter behind. Closer to the dome, we notice the construction work is still on. "The main dome is complete. What's left is its beautification," says Khandharji, an engineer who has been involved in the construction from the beginning.

Gorai was the chosen spot, says Khandharji. "Our teacher Vipassana Acharya SN Goenka had a few plots in mind. However, Daruchiriya (who attained enlightenment after meeting Lord Buddha) and Punnashravak (a devoted mediator who became a senior monk) share history with Nalasopara, which is very close by. That makes this land pious," he says. Not to forget, its position was ideal as it would be accessible and not too far away from the city either, but far enough from the cacophony. The land valuation, even back then, was in multiple crores, "far from affordable" we are told, but the owner's generosity paved the way and the entire land was donated free of cost!

If the pagoda's sheer size holds you in awe, the statistics behind only amplify the effect. To start with, the 325-foot tall pagoda can accommodate almost 8000 attendees simultaneously. An architectural replica of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda of Myanmar, it stands without any pillar support and uses the ancient stone interlocking system, with each stone weighing almost 700 to 800 kilos! "Earlier, the pagoda was to be built of concrete. But to give it a better

shelf-life, we opted for stone. Now, the pagoda will stand strong for at least 1000 years," informs Anandji, our guide who shows us around.

While the attention-grabbing golden paint has been donated by fellow-wishers from Thailand, the 60,000-kilo statue of Gautam Buddha, carved out of a single piece of marble stone, has been donated by Myanmar. Then, the main entrance to the pagoda is flanked by a bell and a gong — the former weighs 13,000 kilos. The circumambulation path outside is to be laid in marble while the pagoda's hand-carved doors and flooring inside are made of Burmese teak wood. The center of the first dome's ceiling is fixed with a keystone that consists of Buddha's relics, brought from the Maha Buddhist society of Kolkata. Even as we struggle to grasp the enormity of it all, Anandji keeps rattling off figures, each notching up to tones and lakhs.

As the work inches forward, the pagoda is slowly metamorphosing as a mass educational center propagating Buddha's preaching. Already, the first floor houses 117 paintings by Vasudev Kamath and seven other Burmese assistants. On the way are a video gallery and a food court as well. "Plus, the MMRDA is chipping in with good infrastructure to reach the pagoda. This will ensure that the traffic is handled well," informs Khandharji.

Clearly, the pagoda is set to be a spectacle. And it's not just the structure that we are talking about, but the faith that stands behind it.



Did you know?

- * Approximately 2.5 million tons of stone was used in the construction.
- * At 325 feet height, it is almost as tall as a 30 storey building.
- * 3.87 million man-days were required to complete the monument.

Just see



The photo gallery housing 117 paintings



A 60-tonne statue of Buddha at the entrance



The intricate work seen at the entrance



A view inside the Pagoda