



BURNING BRIGHT. People light lamps on the banks of river Saryu in Ayodhya, India, last month. The northern Indian city of Ayodhya kept its Guinness World Record for a second straight year by lighting more than 584,572 oil lamps and keeping them burning for at least 45 minutes on the banks of the river Saryu as part of the celebration of Diwali, the annual Hindu festival of lights. (AP Photo/Rajeev Bhatt)

Indian holy city lights record number of oil lamps

By Biswajeet Banerjee
The Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India — The north Indian city of Ayodhya kept its Guinness World Record for a second year by lighting 606,569 oil lamps and keeping them burning for at least 45 minutes as part of the celebration of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.

Thousands of volunteers lit the lamps, called diyas, along the Saryu river's banks, through lanes, and at houses as dusk fell in Ayodhya, where Hindus believe the god Ram was born and where he returned after 14 years in exile.

The city lit 409,000 oil lamps last year.

Uttar Pradesh state government spokesman Shishir Kumar said the lamps were a stunning spectacle for thousands of visitors who thronged the river banks while ignoring coronavirus social-distancing guidance.

Representatives from Guinness World Records handed over a certificate to Yogi Adityanath, the state's top elected official, after monitoring the ceremony with drone-mounted cameras, Kumar said.

This year's festival of lights came after India's top court allowed the construction of a temple to Ram in Ayodhya, ending a long legal battle between Hindus and Muslims over ownership of the land.

Hindus believe that a temple existed on the spot which was demolished by Mughals in the 15th century who built a mosque there. Hindu radicals demolished the mosque in 1992 during the legal battle.

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Drones light up Seoul sky, urge virus vigilance

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — With masked spectators watching from below, hundreds of drones lit up the night sky in South Korea's capital last month in a synchronized display to encourage citizens to remain vigilant against the coronavirus.

More than 300 drones flew in the performance above Olympic Park in southern Seoul, forming images of people wearing masks and spelling out messages thanking people and medical workers for the country's anti-virus gains.

The drones also displayed government slogans proclaiming a post-pandemic rebuilding of the country's economy.

The event was organized by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, which held a similar drone performance in July that was also coronavirus-themed.

The steady spread of the virus in South Korea has alarmed



VIRUS VIGILANCE. More than 300 drones fly over Olympic Park in the shape of the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea. With masked spectators watching from below, the drones lit up the night sky in the capital in a synchronized display to encourage citizens to remain vigilant against the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

government officials, who had eased social-distancing measures to the lowest level since October to soften the pandemic's shock on the economy.

While it allowed high-risk venues

like nightclubs and karaoke bars to reopen, Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said the virus's continued spread could force the government to seriously consider tightening social distancing again.

Beijing noodle restaurant remembers Biden's 2011 visit

BEIJING (AP) — The Yaoji Chaogan noodle restaurant beneath Beijing's 600-year-old Drum Tower knows Joe Biden.

Management has hung up photos of the U.S. president-elect from when, as vice president, he stopped by for a bowl of noodles and dumplings in 2011.

"We are very happy that Biden was elected," manager Yao Yan said. "We have already met each other, and we can say that we are old friends."

Biden was visiting Beijing with his granddaughter Naomi. They were being shown around by then-American ambassador Gary Locke.

In what Chinese newspapers dubbed "noodle diplomacy," Biden ate at a low table before giving onlookers a thumbs-up and a smile.

"Biden was very friendly with Chinese customers," said Yao.

"After that, everyone applauded for Biden. There was the feeling of the joy of laughter, and a cheerful mood," Yao said. "Biden is a very humorous and kind person."

Customer Lan Ziyi expressed surprise Biden sat at the same tables. Lan took it as a promising sign for relations between China and the U.S. that have sunk to their lowest level in decades.



NOODLE DIPLOMACY. A man looks at photos of Joe Biden on display on a wall at a restaurant where he visited in 2011 as U.S. vice president, in Beijing. World leaders congratulated U.S. President-elect Biden on his victory, cheering it as an opportunity to fortify global democracy and celebrate the significance of Americans having their first female vice president. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Yao said Biden is welcome to return.

"We can talk about our old days and friendship while he tastes our snacks and hope that our friendship will last longer," Yao said.



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